



The Daily Dish

2.8 Percent is Too Little

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Eakinomics: 2.8 Percent is Too Little

Educational attainment is a core contributor to labor market success, economic and social mobility, and the quality of life. At present, the K-12 school system is [failing](#) too many young Americans while colleges and universities continue to deliver a product of uneven quality at ever-higher prices. These two facts guarantee that education reform is a focus of presidential candidates, right? Wrong. As [noted](#) by Isabel Soto and Tom Lee, of the 659 minutes that made up the first five Democratic presidential debates, only 18.5 of those minutes have been about education – 2.8 percent! That might be a good economic growth rate, but it's a sad reflection on the focus of the candidates.

Moreover, most of those minutes have been devoted to schemes that simply involve having the taxpayer foot [ever-more on the education bill](#). Too little has been focused on reducing the cost of college, or having a K-12 system that better prepares the young for the labor market and college. In their [review](#) of the education proposals of the presidential candidates, however, Soto and Lee identify proposed reforms in two key areas.

First, a number of candidates have proposals focused on apprenticeships, in order to provide students with the skills they need to compete in the workforce. Programs that provide students with job experience have been gaining attention and support, including on the platforms of Senator Klobuchar, Vice President Biden, Senator Warren, Senator Sanders, and Senator Bennet. Unfortunately, rather than lowering barriers to innovation and providing greater options to students, most plans focus simply on increasing federal spending.

Second, at the K-12 level, the most polarizing issue is school choice. At one end of the spectrum, Senator Sanders has vowed to ban for-profit charter schools and to halt federal dollars to charters until a national audit is conducted. Senator Warren has vowed to end federal funding for the expansion of charter schools as well

In the middle, Vice President Biden has reversed course and now states that he does “not support any federal money for for-profit charter schools. Period.”

At the other end of the spectrum are Senator Booker, who has a history of supporting charter schools, and newly minted candidate and former mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg, under whose tenure the number of charters in New York City grew from 22 to 159.

It's a start. But 2.8 percent is still too little.