



PROLOGUE

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In Washington, D.C., there exists a small, federally-funded school voucher program, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

This program, which provides nearly 2,000 children from Washington's poorest families the opportunity to attend the private schools of their parents' choice, has set off a firestorm of controversy over the past year.

As the five year program nears its sunset, parents, community activists, and school leaders—even D.C.'s own public schools chancellor, Michelle Rhee—have advocated for a continuation of this program. President Obama and some Members of Congress, meanwhile, have remained steadfast in their opposition to continuing the program.

We know that the controversy is not about academics. A federally-funded study—released by Education Secretary Arne Duncan's office—demonstrated that the program is among the most successful federally-funded education initiatives of our time. The controversy is not about parental satisfaction. Participating parents overwhelmingly support the program and want it to continue.

And the controversy is not about public support. More than 75 percent of D.C. residents want the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to be extended.

Instead, the controversy is a fierce battle between special interests—mainly the national teachers unions—and their elected allies, versus local activists of all parties and backgrounds.

Members of Congress, guided perhaps by teachers union directives, have sought to portray the fight over the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program's futures in strictly partisan terms. Democrats oppose the program, they say, while Republicans support it. There is plentiful evidence to the contrary: D.C.'s Democratic City Council backs the program along with D.C.'s Democratic Mayor. Even the D.C. Young Democrats voted to support the program. But when covering the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, the mainstream media won't let the "Democrats vs. Republicans" line die.

At the proverbial center of the storm regarding this fight are some of D.C.'s most prestigious private schools, which set policies supporting the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. These schools, which often open their doors to the news media for flattering profiles detailing their support for D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program recipients, are run by a powerful group of elite D.C. insiders. These school trustees set the policies that permitted the schools to accept OSP students. So, who are these school choice supporters?

Are they, as the media and Members of Congress have us believe, Republican functionaries? Are they right wingers? Or, is the story vastly different from the "Democratic vs. Republican" headline trumpeted by the press and opposition?

The Center for Education Reform decided to dig deeper, looking into the leadership of the ten most prestigious private schools that support the program. As we found in this report, "The Trustees," the argument that Democrats—unelected ones, at least—oppose the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is an expertly-propagated myth.



FINDINGS



Edmund Burke School

Georgetown Day School

Georgetown Visitation

Lowell School

National Cathedral School

National Presbyterian School

Sheridan School

Sidwell Friends School

St. Anselm's Abbey School

Washington Jesuit Academy

FINDINGS

Washington's ten most prestigious private schools support the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, while the trustees that set the pro-OSP policies at these elite schools overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party and its candidates.

This reality weaves a dramatically nuanced and detailed—but tightly knit—quilt of support for the program, which the media and opponents ignores.

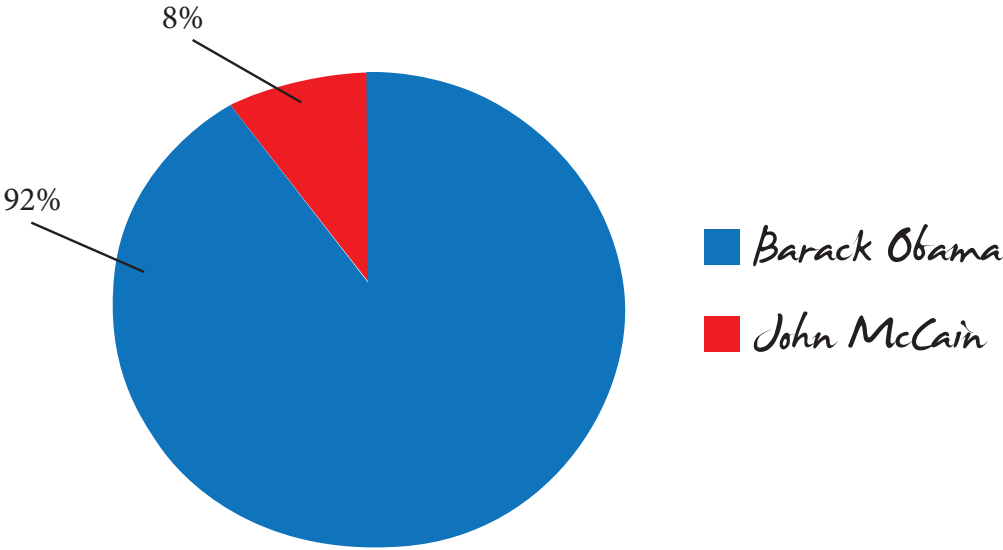
Over the past five months, The Center for Education Reform researched the background and political donations of trustees where public records provided ready evidence of such donations. These trustees serve as the leaders of the District's most prestigious private schools that participate in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and approximately 37 percent (or 89 individuals) have made contributions. Each of these schools accepts students from the OSP and the accompanying federal scholarship funds to support, at least in part, those students' tuitions.

Despite what the public is led to believe, local supporters of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program—even those at the highest levels—are hardly Republican functionaries. In fact, we discovered that the trustees of the ten most prestigious schools in the District are not just Democrats, but strong Democrats. When considering donations to presidential candidates, political parties, and party committees over the past 17 years:

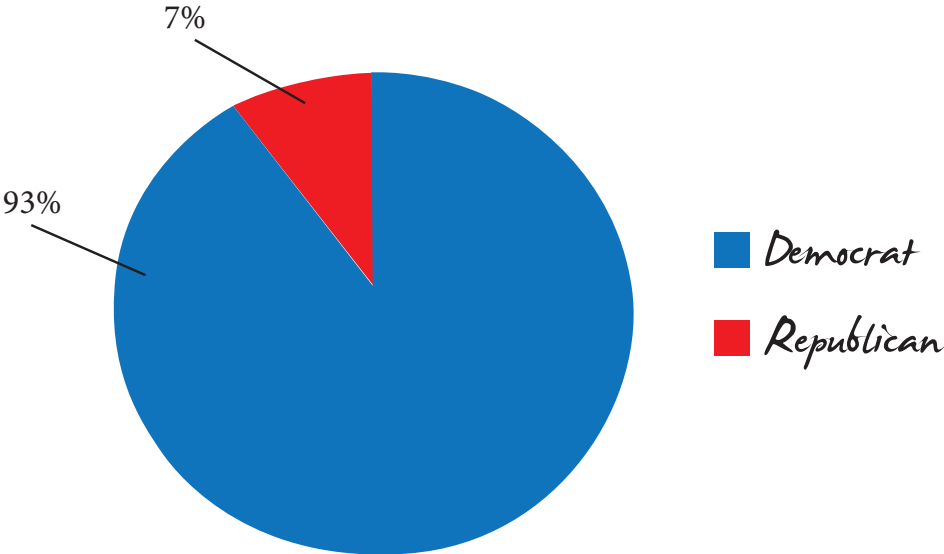
- Trustees donated nearly \$1 million to national Democrats and just over \$75,000 to national Republicans (presidential candidates, party committees, and the parties themselves).*
- Of the school trustees that donated in the 2008 presidential election, about \$140,000 was donated to Democrat Barack Obama, compared with \$12,000 for Republican John McCain.
- Of the donors whose contribution records were readily available, 48 (or 54 percent) made donations to President Barack Obama, compared to 9 (or 10 percent) for Senator John McCain.

*This finding (as demonstrated in the pie charts and graph that follows) does not include the hundreds of thousands of dollars donated to non-presidential-level candidates or other political groups.

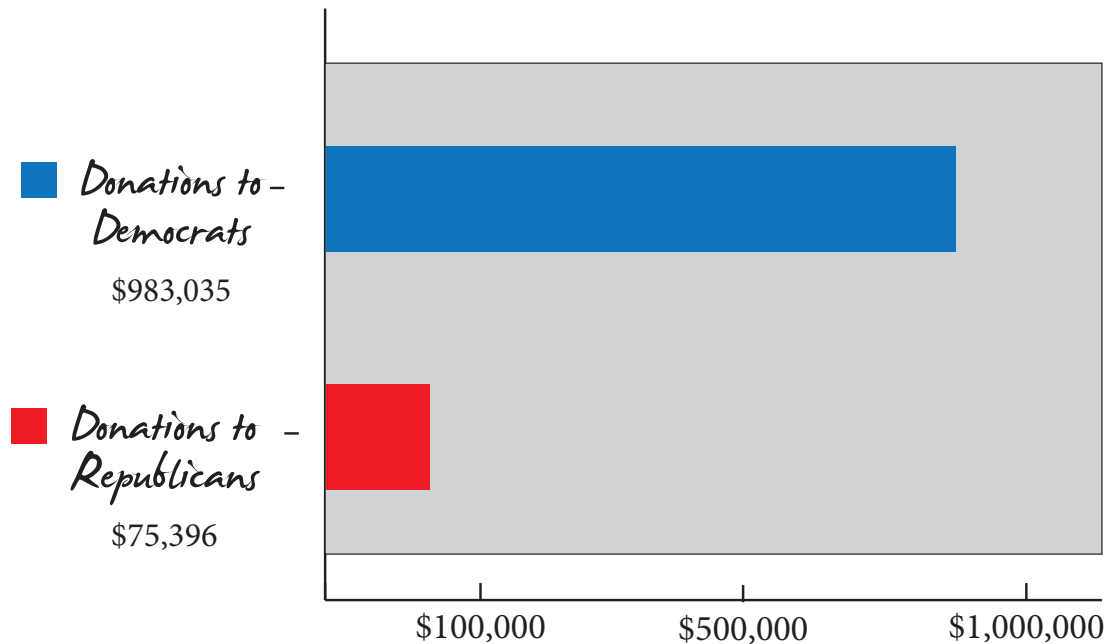
Political Donations of D.C. Private School Trustees



Trustee Donations to National Democrats and National Republicans



Total Donations by Party



The accompanying pages provide information about the schools we researched, as well as an indication of which trustees have taken a personal public stand in support of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Throughout our research, we attempted multiple times to reach each trustee personally to ensure that we did not mischaracterize their support. While some readily provided messages of support for the program, others were unresponsive. Despite this, none of the schools have reversed their support for the OSP.

We have highlighted notable trustees and their support for various political candidates and committees. In the appendix, a directory of trustees is provided, with additional information on each trustee.

This report is not intended to be an exposé. It is intended to educate the public about the broad base of support for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and to shatter the myth—once again—that partisanship dictates support or opposition for this program.

How can this report be utilized? We hope that Democratic Senators and Congressmen seeking positive testimony about the benefits of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship look to their own donor files to find potential witnesses for testimony; the list of options is plentiful. We also hope the media will take note, and realize that support for helping low-income children is not a Republican or Democratic proposition—it is an American proposition. Finally, we call on all trustees of OSP-supporting schools to join us in our fight on behalf of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program's continuation.

EDMUND BURKE SCHOOL

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4101 Connecticut Avenue, NW | Washington, DC 20008 | 202-362-8882 | www.eburke.org

School Facts:

The Edmund Burke School began accepting D.C. Opportunity Scholarship students in 2007. It is a non-sectarian, coeducational school located in Upper NW DC serving approximately 320 students in grades six through 12. The school notes that virtually all of its students go on to college including small liberal arts colleges, large state universities, ivy league schools and schools of design. Tuition for the 2009-2010 school year is \$29,590 and the school notes that 25 percent of its families receive financial assistance from the school.

School's Mission:

Founded in 1968, its co-founders sought to steer an adventurous and difficult course by challenging accepted practice while continuing to stand on pedagogical and democratic principles that they believed were fundamentally important: the power and responsibility of students; the creativity, autonomy, and accessibility of teachers; and the primacy of informed social action.

"As a trustee of the Washington Scholarship, I totally support the effort. As a former head of the Lowell School, I can attest to the difference these scholarships make and the fact that these children would be lost without this."

- Trustee Abigail Wiebenson

Notable Trustees:

- Martha Debebe is manager of the Marriott Hotel Corporation who has personally contributed \$64,000 to the Democratic Party and its candidates since 2000.
- Nancy Golding has contributed \$5,850 to the Democratic Party and its candidates since 1999 including \$1,300 to Barack Obama in 2008.
- Gene Sofer is former Counsel to the House Committee on Education and Labor.

Edmund Burke School Board of Trustees

Andrew Klingenstein, *President* ✓

Joanne Hurt, *Vice President*

Nancy Golding, *Secretary*

Vicki Otten, *Treasurer*

David Shapiro, *Head of School*

Martha Debebe*

David Dulaney

Jerry Edwards*

Jonathan Franks*

Nikki Heidepriem*

Liza Himmelman Huntington

Eve Howard

Maria Lawson

Karen McDaniel

Marilyn Milloy

Wally Mlyniec*

Chi-Chi Nash

Eric Rome

Steve Salky

Amy Saltzman

Larry Schlang

Gene Sofer*

John Villa

Abigail Wiebenson ✓

Nathan Zee

* Tenure on board expired in 2009-2010 school year, but individual was surveyed prior to reaching end of term.

✓ indicates that this trustee has spoken out personally in favor of saving the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.