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Trump surrogate: GOP candidate would dismantle ‘corrupted, incompetent urban school systems’

By [Emma Brown](#) October 22

A surrogate for Republican presidential candidate Donald J. Trump told a group of urban school superintendents on Friday that Trump would seek to do away with “corrupted, incompetent” public school systems in America’s cities, replacing them with charter schools and vouchers for private schools.

Such an approach would “encourage competition in the marketplace and eventually dismantle the corrupted, incompetent urban school districts that we have in America today,” said Carl Paladino, Trump’s New York State co-chairman, drawing audible boos from an audience composed largely of people who run the school districts Paladino criticized.

Paladino was unfazed: “A monopoly will not continue to work, it will not solve the problem,” he said, decrying what he described as school districts’ dysfunction and their “incestuous relationships with teachers unions.”

The remarks came at an education town hall in Miami on Friday in conjunction with the 60th annual conference of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of urban school systems. Moderated by journalist Dan Rather, it featured Paladino — who is also a school board member in Buffalo, N.Y. — and Mildred Otero, a surrogate for and former senior adviser to Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, as well as three leaders of school systems in swing states.

Friday’s event represented a rare opportunity to hear in-depth discussion of education issues from the two major-party campaigns. The candidates themselves received no direct questions about their education policies during the three presidential debates, and the subject has received little attention on the campaign trail.

Otero, responding to Paladino’s broad criticisms of urban school systems, said it was wrongheaded to believe that there are no examples of success or improvement in urban education. Then she pivoted to Clinton’s plans to expand public preschool and address skyrocketing student debt.

Alberto Carvalho, superintendent of the nation’s fourth-largest school system in Miami-Dade County, took exception to Paladino’s premise that there’s something particularly wrong with urban schools. “Poor kids in non-urban districts often perform exactly like poor kids in urban districts,” Carvalho said. “The difference is there are a lot more poor kids in urban districts.”

Math and reading performance in urban districts trails the national average, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the “Nation’s Report Card.” But urban districts have been gaining ground, slowly closing the gap with the rest of the country.

Paladino has been a controversial figure on the national political scene. In August, he told the [New York Observer](#) that there is “no doubt” that President Obama is a Muslim, a rumor many times debunked. More recently, he defended Trump’s vulgar statements about women on the now-infamous Access Hollywood videotape revealed by The Washington Post.

Trump’s “gutter talk” was something “all men do, at least all normal men,” he told The Post.

Paladino also is a developer and school board member in Buffalo, N.Y. who has a financial interest in several Buffalo charter schools, according to the [Buffalo News](#). He repeatedly criticized his own school system as a dysfunctional failure, saying that it spends approximately \$27,000 per student for exceedingly poor results in terms of student achievement.

He said that Trump’s first action on education, if elected president, would be to shift control over education “away from Washington, away from Common Core, away from the academics who want to control every aspect of people’s lives, and shift it back to the states and the locals to determine their solutions in their cultural atmosphere.”

Trump would also “downsize” the Education Department “to an entity that will allocate monies,” Paladino said.

Otero pointed out that the Common Core State Standards, national academic standards for math and reading, were initiated by governors, not by the federal government. “State standards have always been owned by states,” she said.

And she said that control over education already has been shifted back to the states via the new Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law last year, and said that Clinton’s Education Department would seek to support states as they craft their own plans for the future.

“I believe she’ll pick a cabinet and a leadership that will be able to do this to understand that what works in one part of the country may not work in another part of the country,” Otero said.

Both surrogates declined to guess who their candidate would choose as Education Secretary, though Paladino said Trump would not necessarily pick someone from the “education world.”

Paladino lambasted the Obama administration’s Education Department, and former Secretary Arne Duncan in particular, for kowtowing to teachers unions, saying Obama had been a proponent of school choice until he entered the White House. In fact, Duncan’s support for expanding charter schools and for tying teacher evaluations to test scores made him a frequent target of the nation’s major teachers unions.

Obama “wouldn’t allow Duncan to do anything that would get the teachers unions upset,” Paladino said.

In July 2014, the National Education Association passed a resolution calling for Duncan's resignation. That same month, the American Federation of Teachers said that Duncan had to improve or leave office.

Paladino said Trump believes that the federal government has an important role to play in ensuring equitable opportunities for students around the country. But he suggested that the Office for Civil Rights, which investigates discrimination complaints, is unnecessary, calling it "self-perpetuating absolute nonsense." Complaints should be turned over to U.S. attorneys, he said, who would bring more objectivity to schools-related investigations.

Otero demurred, saying that the Office for Civil Rights is essential to ensuring equity and fairness in the nation's schools: "The OCR is the watchdog in many ways to remind us, are we having the conversations we need to have around equity? And are we serving our most vulnerable children?"