

the President—a Republican President be mentioning a Democrat, a Member of the House. But he and I have had discussions already. He understands the importance of strong accountability. And we're going to work together to make sure this is an integral part of a reform package coming through the House and Senate.

Secondly, the agents of reform must be schools and school districts, not bureaucracies. Teachers and principals, local and State leaders must have the responsibility to succeed and the flexibility to innovate. One size does not fit all when it comes to educating the children in America. School districts, school officials, educational entrepreneurs should not be hindered by excessive rules and redtape and regulation.

The principle here is a basic one. If local schools do not have the freedom to change, they cannot be held accountable for failing to change. Authority and accountability must be aligned at the local level, or schools will have a convenient excuse for failure: "I would have done it this way but some central office or Washington, DC, caused me to do it another way."

Flexibility in education spending is a special concern of Members of both parties with whom I've discussed. Today I had a good meeting with the chairman of the Education Committee in the House, John Boehner. I know he shares my passion for flexibility at the local level, as do people like Senator Judd Gregg or Tim Hutchinson.

Third, many of our schools, particularly low-income schools, will need help in the transition to higher standards. When a State sets standards, we must help schools achieve those standards. We must measure. We must know. And if a school or school district falls short, we must understand that help should be applied. Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico brought this up to our attention, about the need to make sure there is a transition period between the moment of consequence and the first indication of failure.

Once failing schools are identified, we will help them improve. We will help them help themselves. Our goal is to improve public education. We want success. And when schools are willing to accept the reality that the accountability system points out and are willing to change, we will help them.

Fourth, American children must not be left in persistently dangerous or failing schools. When schools do not teach and will not change, parents and students must have other meaningful options. And when children and teenagers go to school afraid of being threatened or attacked or worse, our society must make it clear, it's the ultimate betrayal of adult responsibility.

Parents and children who have only bad options must eventually get good options if we're to succeed all across the country. There are differences of opinions about what those options should be. I made my opinion very clear in the course of the campaign and will take my opinion to the Hill and let folks debate it.

Today I was pleased to see that Senator Joe Lieberman brought up his plan that includes different options for parents. It's a great place to begin. He and I understand that an accountability system must have a consequence. Otherwise, it's not much of an accountability system.

These four principles are the guides to our education reform package. Yet today I'm offering more than principles; I'm sending a series of specific proposals to the United States Congress, my own blueprint for reform. I want to begin our discussion in detail with the Members of the House and the Senate because I know we need to act by this summer so that the people at the local level can take our initiatives and plan for the school year beginning next fall.

I'm going to listen to suggestions from folks. If somebody has got a better idea, I hope they bring it forward, because the Secretary and I will listen. We've got one thing in mind: an education system that's