

## What We've Done

Since the organization's launch on the Oprah Winfrey Show December 2010, StudentsFirst has made steady strides in growing a national movement and influencing education reform legislation that truly places kids in the forefront of policy making. Today, seven states - Florida, Nevada, Michigan, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana and Maine - have systematically changed their policies in effort to implement meaningful education reforms that:

- Eliminate "Last in First Out Policies" seniority-based layoff policies;
- Reform outdated tenure laws;
- Implement fair and robust teacher evaluations;
- Incorporate merit pay for effective teachers; and
- Eliminate barriers to expand quality charters.

In each of these states, StudentsFirst played an active role in the writing, introduction and passage of this legislation. The chart below shows the areas in which each state made policy changes.

	Florida	Nevada	Michigan	Tennessee	Ohio	Indiana	Maine
Last In First Out	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	
Tenure	▲	▲	▲	▲			▲
Forced Placement	▲						
Evaluation	▲	▲	▲		▲	▲	
Merit Pay	▲	▲			▲	▲	
Charters	▲				▲		▲
Parent Notification	▲		▲				
Data	▲					▲	
Private Scholarships	▲						
Certification	▲	▲					

For more a more detailed summary of StudentsFirst's involvement a number of case studies are provided in Appendix A.

## How We Did It (By the Numbers)

Central to StudentsFirst strategy is the creation of a national movement that advocates for change from at the grassroots level. With a growing membership of more than 550,000 members, StudentsFirst is well on its way to building a powerful coalition of teachers, students, parents and citizens ready to challenge the status quo and fight on behalf of students. Over the last year, StudentsFirst has educated members on key education reform issues through blogs, infographics and research; engaged members by offering regular communication, dialogue on key issues and building of geographic and interest groups; and mobilized members to email public officials, testify at hearings and attend events.

Below is a sampling of how these members have been activated to provide the support and political cover necessary to move forward a students first agenda:

- StudentsFirst has a highly active membership of 560,000 members to date, which sent more than 57,000 emails to legislators over the last six months urging them eliminate seniority based layoffs;
- 3700 members gathered to testify at 27 public hearings across the country;

- Nearly 4,000 members came out to 29 community meetings and events around the country; and
- Over 15,000 members donated made online donations totaling \$1,694,664.

In addition, StudentsFirst has an incredibly active virtual community with more than 10,000 followers on Twitter and 50,000 Facebook supporters that provide daily insightful Internet discussions about education reform and our work around it.

## StudentsFirst in Action: Withstanding Attacks

From the onset, StudentsFirst has attracted under fire from special interest groups who see the organization as a challenge. Below is a sampling of the articles that illustrate how the organization has withstood these attacks.

**Teachers' union behind anti-Rhee site.** [Rheefirst.com](http://www.rheefirst.com), the anonymous website bashing former D.C. schools chancellor Michelle Rhee, was created by a computer registered to the American Federation of Teachers. The site, which refers to Rhee as “the Sarah Palin of education” among other things and is the main online source of attacks on Rhee, was launched in February. An tracking tool traces the IP address back to the AFT’s offices in D.C. The site has since jumped to several other IP addresses. It’s not a huge surprise that the AFT doesn’t like Rhee, but both Rhee and the teachers’ unions have **avoided** appearing to personalize what is, in fact, a very personal policy conflict. The site is the latest in a series of seemingly grass-roots education movements that are actually backed by unions and union members. Last month, **we reported** that the Save Our Schools March presented itself as a grass-roots event but failed to publicly list the union members involved in its executive committee. A spokesman for AFT has not yet responded to POLITICO’s request for comment.

[http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0811/Teachers\\_union\\_behind\\_antiRhee\\_site.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0811/Teachers_union_behind_antiRhee_site.html)

**AFT Political Operative Attacked Rhee For Speaking At Conference in August Without Disclosing Their Association With AFT.** Reported the Huffington Post, “Rhee, former chancellor of D.C. public schools and founder of the PAC StudentsFirst, remains on the docket and is scheduled to address the conference late Friday morning. Her presence at the church is shocking, and far more inappropriate than Schultz’s, says Asher Huey, a gay rights advocate and blogger whose [Change.org](http://www.change.org) petition calling on Schultz to denounce the church’s position or avoid the summit has gathered nearly 800 signatures...Hari Sevugan, a spokesperson for Rhee’s political action committee, told the Huffington Post that Huey, who works for New Partners consulting, has been trying to tie Rhee to the far right for months. New Partners has worked with the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, organizations that have opposed many of Rhee’s reform initiatives over the years, and accused her of union busting.”

[Huffington Post, [8/11/11](#)]

**Reporters Identified “Dirty Tricks” Played by AFT Operative Attacking Rhee.** Reported blogger Alexander Russo, “Advocacy: Dirty Tricks -- Or Lazy Journalism? The Huffington Post recently reported that “gay rights advocate and blogger” [@asherhuey](#) was calling for Michelle Rhee not to speak at a leadership summit at a suburban Chicago megachurch this morning -- Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz had already backed out -- because of its anti-gay reputation. Rhee’s organization defended her attendance at the event, pointing out that President Clinton and Bono have appeared at the event and that President Obama had invited the church’s pastor to an immigration event. Left out of the original version of the story -- since corrected -- was that the person making the protest against Rhee’s presence works for New Partners, which is affiliated with the AFT and other labor groups critical of Rhee’s work. Here’s the current / corrected version.”

[This Week in Education, [8/12/11](#)]

**AFT Political Operatives Pushed Negative Stories on Rhee in June.** In an email pushed to various reporters and list-serv groups, AFT political operative Asher Huey attacked Rhee without disclosing his association with AFT, writing to reporters and others, "If you haven't already seen this today, Michelle Rhee played a role in passing an anti-union bill in Tennessee. She co-authored an op-ed with Former Republican Senate Leader Bill Frist. The bill is pretty broad and eliminates collective bargaining for teachers. Rhee's ex-husband, whom she is close to, was recently appointed by the Governor as the state commissioner of education. This is her bill and should be seen/exposed as such. This is a good chance to review Rhee's record on the national stage for the last six months."

[Asher Huey Email, [6/6/11](#)]

### **StudentsFirst in Action: Igniting Action**

StudentsFirst impact since its founding only ten months ago is demonstrated not only through the enactment of new legislation and the mobilization of tens of thousands of teachers, parents, students and citizens cross the country, but also through national, state and local media coverage of these actions. Below is a listing of some of the numerous articles and news reports:

#### **US World News 8/8/11**

<http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2011/08/08/states-are-suddenly-redefining-expectations-for-their-teachers>

#### **New York Times 5/20/10**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/21/education/21rhee.html?scp=13&sq=michelle rhee&st=cse>

### **StudentsFirst in Action: *Speaking the Truth In Pursuit of Needed Change***

StudentsFirst has also sought to bring the need for dramatic improvements to our country's education system to the forefront of the American consciousness and create an urgency and demand from much needed changes. The articles below illustrate the organization's progress towards this goal.

#### **Detroit Free Press: 3/9/11**

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110309/COL10/103090389/Rochelle-Riley-Michelle-Rhee-voice-Michigan-needs-hear>

#### **Detroit Free Press 5/26/11**

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110526/OPINION05/105260424/Opposing-points-view-students-sake-schools-should-retain-best-teachers-no-matter-years-experience> **SGT**

#### **Detroit News 6/30/11**

<http://detnews.com/article/20110630/OPINION01/106300335/Today's-shout-out-goes-to-...>

#### **The Commercial Appeal 3/4/11**

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/mar/04/ex-dc-schools-chief-on-anti-union-offensive/>

#### **The Las Vegas Review Journal 5/29/11**

<http://www.lvrj.com/opinion/former-d-c-chancellor-michelle-rhee-pushing-for-big-changes-to-schools-122793333.html>

**Newsweek 12/06/2010**

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/12/06/why-michelle-rhee-isn-t-done-with-school-reform.html>

**Newsweek 10/13/2010**

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/10/13/michelle-rhee-talks-about-education-reform.html>

Wall Street Journal

**WSJ 1/1/11**

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704739504576068142896954626.html?mod=](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704739504576068142896954626.html?mod=WSJ_Opinion_LEADTop)

[WSJ Opinion LEADTop](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704739504576068142896954626.html?mod=WSJ_Opinion_LEADTop) (Policy Agenda)

**WSJ 3/11/11**

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704132204576190753164940240.html>

(SGT/NJ)

**New York Times 1/22/11**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23rhee.html?\\_r=1&scp=6&sq=michelle%20rhee&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23rhee.html?_r=1&scp=6&sq=michelle%20rhee&st=cse)

**New York Post 3/1/11**

[http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/how\\_last\\_in\\_first\\_out\\_harms\\_our\\_RflwBpT2pe74IURQbTXZNK](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/how_last_in_first_out_harms_our_RflwBpT2pe74IURQbTXZNK)

**New York Times 1/22/11**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23presidentsspeech.html?scp=7&sq=michelle\\_rhee&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23presidentsspeech.html?scp=7&sq=michelle_rhee&st=cse)

[http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/26/grading-the-education-president/change-the-teaching-profession?scp=6&sq=michelle\\_rhee&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/26/grading-the-education-president/change-the-teaching-profession?scp=6&sq=michelle_rhee&st=cse)

**The Commercial Appeal 5/13/11**

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/may/13/guest-column-keep-teachers-for-quality-not/>

**The Flint Journal 3/9/11**

[http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/03/michelle\\_rhee\\_michigan\\_lawmake.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/03/michelle_rhee_michigan_lawmake.html)

**Las Vegas Review Journal 4/8/11**

<http://www.lvrj.com/opinion/seniority-system-costs-us-our-best-teachers-119462059.html>