

Where He Stands: *Educational Reform*



Every child in our state deserves access to a quality education today – not 20 years from now. *That's why I've worked hard during my two terms in the state House of Representatives to drive education reform in our area.*

For example, I helped provide millions of dollars in funds, and strong leadership, to support the merger of the Albion and Marshall schools, an effort that has been highly successful and hailed as a model for other districts in the state.

At the same time, we must put more power in the hands of parents and teachers.

Increased bureaucracy is not the answer. What we need to achieve lasting improvement in our schools is a strong commitment to innovation, community input and action. *Simply flooding our classrooms with standardized tests is not going to get the job done.* Let's learn from our successes, such as the growing trend toward "co-enrollment" in both high school and community college for many students. Internships and work-study experiences are another part of the solution. Sharing resources across school districts is also critical, as we've seen with the Math & Science Center in Battle Creek, which serves hundreds of eager STEM students from many different districts.

Some of our schoolchildren face serious challenges at home, such as incarcerated parents, drug abuse, domestic violence and even homelessness. I support new efforts currently underway to help at-risk kids get the help and counseling they often need to continue learning while the crises at home are being addressed. We cannot afford to lose another generation of disadvantaged students. They deserve our compassion, our concern and attention.

Early childhood education is another key to helping our children succeed in school – and in life. I'm proud of our state's successful "Great Start to Learning" program, which has made early childhood education available to thousands more children, in addition to the federal government's Head Start program. Let's continue to build on that

success and reach even more kids. Our goal is to see every student in Michigan graduate from high school and then go on to college, trade school, military service or gainful employment.



Our outdated pension system is a major drag on school budgets **today.** In fact, the Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System is underfunded by \$29.1 billion, meaning only 60 percent of the money needed to pay its costs has been set aside. This school retirement system now gobbles up 36 percent of school payroll costs, often limiting teacher wage increases and requiring cuts to other school services. And things are just as

bad in many local governments. If we don't fix the pension problem in a fair and equitable way for everyone involved, we're in for big trouble in the future.

Working together with all stakeholders, we can redesign the educational retirement system to give teachers greater control over their retirement accounts and reduce the enormous underfunded liability that has been growing for decades. That sort of bargain would provide relief to taxpayers, give confidence to existing teachers and retirees that their benefits are safe, and put all new workers on a path to a secure retirement." Other states are moving in this direction – we should, too.

For day-to-day instruction, I strongly believe that politics should be kept out of classroom. Partisan ideology has no place in public education. Finally, I believe in school choice for parents. This creates competition between districts, which often leads to innovation and continuous improvement. Most importantly, it puts parents in the driver's seat when it comes to picking public education options for their kids.

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