



Michigan
Parents
for Schools

What Our Schools Need What Our Kids Deserve

Parents' vision for Michigan schools

We propose a better direction for education policy in Michigan: one that focuses on improving schools for all children. Our first duty is to ensure that our local, community-governed public schools can perform their Constitutional mission by providing them with the support and resources they need to serve their students.

① We must use our educational goals to determine funding requirements, rather than allow funding levels to entirely determine the shape of education.

Our state needs to focus on practices, here and elsewhere, that are proven to have the greatest long-term benefits for students, and determine what funding would be required.

② We must create a funding system that places resources where they are most needed—that is, a funding system that is equitable even when it is not strictly equal.

We need to: fully fund special education; supplement Federal funding for at-risk students to provide adequate services; expand funding for early childhood programs offered by local districts to low-income families.

③ We must give communities the tools to meet their own local needs by ensuring public community governance of public schools.

Community-governed public schools should be the foundation of our public education system. Ensuring the quality of those schools is our first priority.

Interventions, where necessary, must involve working with and through the local district authorities, democratically elected boards, and members of the community.

Principles:

- ❖ We the people have a common commitment to ensure an excellent education for all children
- ❖ There is a public purpose to public education that grows out of that common commitment. We join together to educate the children of our community so that they may individually fulfill their own potential and so that our community will continue to have the thoughtful, productive citizens necessary to our long-term prosperity.
- ❖ An excellent education is more than the sum of its parts. Quality education is both rich and broad, and prepares our children for a changing and uncertain world.

We cannot fulfill our common commitment to our children without adequate investments in education. We cannot ensure that education serves its wider public purpose without public governance of education.

What we can do right away:

☛ *Ensure that local district special education expenses are fully reimbursed with earmarked Federal, State and local funds. [Sec. 51a] Right now, local districts are reimbursed for about 60% of their special education expenses. The rest must be covered out of per-pupil funding.*

☛ *Increase targeted funding to at-risk pupils by, at a minimum, fully funding the existing commitment to supplement the foundation allowance for each pupil eligible for Title I assistance. [Sec. 31a] This promise has not been fully funded.*

☛ *Foundation allowances should be adjusted for inflation, at a minimum, using the index described in Sec. 20 (11) of the school aid act or a similar formula. The aim would be to maintain the purchasing power of the foundation allowance.*

☛ *Establish the true funding needs of our schools. Michigan should perform a "costing-out" study to establish the real cost of providing the kind of education we demand for our children. Our responsibility is to make sure that available funding is adequate to the task.*

Keep the Public in Public Education

A long-term plan for excellent schools for all children

Focus on the classroom – a high quality education for all students

- Curriculum standards should be designed to encourage an education that is both rich and broad, designed to prepare students to navigate a changing world and to participate as thoughtful citizens. A quality education is much more than job training.
- Class size matters, especially for children facing the largest obstacles. Creative classroom methods and individualized instruction become more difficult to implement as class sizes get larger. We need investments aimed at lowering the effective class size at all grades in P-12, but especially in preschool and elementary school.
- Student progress should be evaluated along multiple dimensions and take into account the science of child development (which shows that development occurs at different paces for different children, and is usually marked by large leaps rather than steady, regular progress).
- Testing should be used sparingly, and should be carefully designed to gauge the development of thinking skills and problem solving, not simply memorization or speed. Curriculum and teaching should not be driven by what is easily tested. Tests should be used for diagnostic purposes and not as a full indicator of the educational quality.
- Technology needs to be available to all schools equally, as an aid to teaching rather than a replacement for it.

Attract, develop and retain excellent teachers and administrators

- Our schools need meaningful evaluation and support systems for all educators, which provide
 - Objective standards based on practices that encourage student achievement
 - Expert observation, feedback and mentoring at every career stage
 - Extended training and mentorship for early-career educators (for example: Peer Assistance and Review programs in Montgomery Co., MD, Toledo, and elsewhere)
 - Measures of student growth that reflect multiple measures covering a range of desired outcomes (not simply, or even primarily, test scores).
- Our schools need sufficient resources for pay and benefit packages that attract and retain high quality educators.

Provide extra supports where children need them

- Special additional services for children in need (special education, Title I services, etc.) must be fully funded in addition to basic education costs so that we can adequately help students facing challenges without undermining the overall educational mission.
- Investments need to be made and maintained in school support systems—both for children at risk (social workers, psychologists, classroom aides) and for those who would benefit from enrichment (added opportunities for study; investments in libraries and technology).
- Investments need to be made in early childhood education and wrap-around services—for instance: high quality preschool programs, maternal and child health services in hard-hit communities; outreach and parent education programs.

Support and extend accountable governance by elected officials at the local and state level

- Community governance via locally elected school boards
- Real and effective oversight by the elected State Board of Education fulfilling its constitutional role
- Local school councils such as those used in a number of cities where parents directly participate in governance of an individual school building
- Models to encourage citizen participation in local school matters, including funding to support these systems.

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