

## Rochester Community PTA Council Legislative Committee Candidate Forum - October 15, 2018

On October 15, 2018, nine candidates vying for legislative office were interviewed regarding some of their positions on public education issues. A link to the video of the forum can be found here: <https://youtu.be/d-LOL7b8OSA>. The candidates were given the questions ahead of time and were given the opportunity to submit their responses in writing. Below are their written responses. Please note that not all candidates chose to submit something in writing. Please see the video for their full comments.

Mike Bishop (R)  
Candidate for U.S. Congress - 8th district

**Q1: What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

As someone who attended public schools growing up here in Michigan's Eighth Congressional District, and as a parent whose children are enrolled in our public schools, I know first-hand that public education is critical to having strong communities and a highly skilled workforce. However, during my time serving in the Michigan State Legislature, I saw how much more effective education could be when decisions are made at the state and local level instead of by agency bureaucrats in Washington. Teachers and parents are best equipped to know how to teach kids and provide a quality education. Every student deserves access to a first-class education so that all Americans have the opportunity to build a brighter future and pursue the American dream. To that end I was pleased to vote in support of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act which ensured that states are able to set their challenging academic standards without interference from Washington. Going forward I am committed to ensuring that state and local governments have the tools and resources they need to ensure all students have access to the highest quality education possible.

**Q2: What, in your view, should the federal government be doing to improve school safety? Discuss your position and any proposed legislation you may put forth.**

As a father of three, I am horrified at the number of senseless tragedies we have seen over the last couple years, especially at our nation's schools. As a member of the Congressional School Safety Caucus, I believe we need to ensure our background-check system is effective, our schools are safe and secure, and that the shortcomings in our mental health system are addressed. I was pleased to support the STOP School Violence

Act, which will enhance security systems at schools and train students, teachers and police on identifying and preventing violence. This bill was signed into law earlier this year. I also supported the FIX NICS Act which was signed into law in March and ensures that federal and state authorities accurately report relevant criminal history records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). This will ensure that dangerous felons aren't able to purchase firearms.

**Q3: What are your positions on whether students in non-public K-12 schools should be receiving federal education funds directly or indirectly? What transparency or accountability measures should be taken?**

First and foremost, I believe that every child should have access to a high-quality education regardless of where they live or their family's economic status. In my first term I supported the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act which focused on policies that lead to improved outcomes for all students while promoting choice for students and parents through the Charter Schools Program. I believe that money for education should prioritize the educational choice of students and parents. I also believe that the same accountability measures should be applied equally to any educational institution receiving federal dollars.

Elissa Slotkin (D)

Candidate for U.S. Congress - 8th district

**Q1: What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

Our public schools play a critical role in educating our next generation, and in serving as anchors in our communities. I'm 42 years old, and in my lifetime Michigan public schools have gone from being in the top 10, to the bottom 10. While education funding is largely up to the state to decide -- making our governor's race this year particularly important -- I will be a strong advocate at the federal level to support education in our state.

I believe we need two things when it comes to public education: A new philosophical approach to educating our kids for the 21st century, and a new approach on funding public education in our state. In recent years, it has somehow become okay to demean the institution of public education and our public school teachers -- the very people who undertake a service of the highest calling to educate our kids. I hear from teachers every day that they feel demeaned in the profession, and that they're telling their kids not to go into teaching. In Congress, I hope to be a voice for supporting and honoring

the work that teachers do, as well as standing up for funding that pays teachers what they are worth with a predictable benefits package they can rely on.

I will always empathize with a parent who rejects idea that their only option is failing school. That said, I believe that private, for profit, shareholding charter schools may have different goals than those of educating our children. At a minimum, these schools should educate students with special needs, ESL students, those who live far from school -- and they have to have transparency in their boards if they are going to receive taxpayer dollars.

I also believe the federal government should do more to support science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) education, as well as promote "earn while you learn" programs that lead to well-paid jobs here in Michigan.

**Q2: What, in your view, should the federal government be doing to improve school safety? Discuss your position and any proposed legislation you may put forth.**

When we talk about school safety, unfortunately we're talking about a lot of different things. We're talking about the issue of mental illness in our schools – making sure that we have the services our kids need, for whatever they're dealing with. We have the issue of gun safety and making sure that our schools are safe from gun violence. And then we have to be honest that we're dealing with issues related to sexual assault. It's not just our college campuses at Michigan State, and at Oakland University. So I think that there are things that the federal government can do on all those scores.

I would say I believe we're near crisis levels when it comes to mental health issues across the district. Whether it's parents worried their kids are addicted to opioids and they don't know what services they can get, whether it's kids who are victims of bullying and they're depressed because of it, there are a whole range of issues I hear about all the time that come down to making sure that we take just as seriously the issues related to above the neck that we do when it comes to a medical issue below the neck; we need to treat the head the same way we treat the rest of the body. I think the federal government could provide more grants for schools for dealing with issues that relate to mental illness.

As it relates to gun safety, I grew up in a gun-owning family, I carried a Glock and an M4 when I was in Iraq with the CIA. My husband, who is an Army, carried a weapon every day he was deployed. So I am a believer in the Second Amendment. But it is because of my experience that I believe we have to have a real conversation about gun safety. I believe there's a couple of things we need to do to make our schools more safe. Number one, I believe in universal background checks for anyone wanting to buy a weapon. The same background check that you go through if you buy at Dunham's, you should go through if you want to buy over the Internet or you want to buy at a gun

show. We also must close the loopholes so that mentally ill people, domestic abusers and terrorists can't get weapons. In addition, I do not believe that we need to sell things that turn any weapon into a fully automatic weapon in our cities, in our towns, in our country – bump stocks, certain trigger mechanisms. One additional measure is physical security of our schools. I was just at a school in Brandon Township, with one-way doors, physical barriers, and more; there's ways to promote security with the architecture of the building. But some of our schools are very outdated. I think the federal government can help provide grants so these schools can update their security so that there's a minimal chance that someone who's an outsider can actually get in.

Lastly, on the issue of sexual assault. We need to make sure that all of our schools have procedures if someone comes forward with an accusation of sexual assault. I do not believe that an accusation equals judge and jury; we need due process, and we need a procedure in place that is taken with the same seriousness as the accusation that is made. But I believe that we owe our young people a procedure and a respectful due process, so our young people know that when they come forward they're going to be taken seriously.

**Q3: What are your positions on whether students in non-public K-12 schools should be receiving federal education funds directly or indirectly? What transparency or accountability measures should be taken?**

If you're a parent and your only option is to send your child to a failing school, that is a terrible position to be in. I understand the need to go to a public, non-profit charter school. Where I have a hard time is in private, for-profit charter schools with shareholders, because I believe the goals of a for-profit company are not always parallel to the goals of educating children. At the very least, if they're going to take taxpayer dollars at these private, for profit charter schools, they should be held to the same standards as our public schools: educating all kids including kids with special needs, kids who live far from school, kids who have English as a second language. And then there must be transparency on the school board and how they make their decisions. If you're going to take taxpayer dollars, you should be held to the same standards of transparency as a public school.

Kyle Cooper

Candidate for Michigan Legislature - 45th district

**Q1. What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

I firmly believe that public education is the foundation that our communities, our families, and our society rests on. Public education gives every single child in this great country an opportunity to learn the values and knowledge that can help guide them through the rest of their lives.

From speaking with experts and going through hundreds of pages of reports, its clear that our current funding model for public education in Michigan is outdated and broken. We have not updated our spending structure in more than 25 years. Our state needs a research based, individualized approach to funding our schools. In January of this year, an independent study was released by a collective of educational experts and business leaders throughout the state. This is the first educational assessment study done in Michigan in decades. Michigan, in fact, was the last state in the US to run this type of study. The school finance research collaborative released their findings, and showed that, on average, each student throughout the state needs \$9,590 to graduate ready for college or trade school. Preschool students who are age 3 or 4 need roughly \$14,155. These estimates do not include transportation, meal costs or capital costs. The study recommends that transportation costs should be funded at \$731 per rider until further study can be carried out. On top of the minimum per-pupil cost of \$9,590, a percentage of the base cost should be provided for special education, English Language Learners, students living in poverty and programs to provide Career and Technical Education.

We need these more equitable funding models to ensure that every student in Michigan is prepared to be a productive and successful member of a 21st Century economy. By giving kids more options and the tools they need, we can bounce back from being one of the fastest declining states in terms of education, to being top 10 in the next 10 years. We need to act fast though, so we do not leave another year of students without the supplies they need to succeed.

According to one expert, we can pay for this funding shift by not raising taxes a dime either. If we end state funding for for-profit charter schools (not all charter schools), then we can fill funding gaps across our state, and take back our children's education from special interests, like the Devos family. I am the only candidate in this race that does not take money from the Devos family, or any corporate interest. As your representative, I will end the for-profit model in education, because a School's only priority, should be giving their children, the best education possible in the safest possible environment.

**Q2. Based upon the recent results of the M-STEP – where in Rochester Community Schools only 69% of third graders were considered proficient or advanced in English Language Arts (ELA) – do you think changes in the Read by Third Grade Law (MCL 380.1280f) will become necessary? If so, what changes would you like to see?**

A system that leaves a third of its students behind is clearly not working and is falling short. I believe that a program that focuses far less on standardized testing, is the better way to go. We need to start from the ground up and ensure all pre-k programs are

properly funded, and make sure that by the time students are reaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, they are already reading at a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. As your representative, I will ensure every student, from pre-k to college and university, receives the funding they need to succeed.

**Q3. There is an alarming trend in the State and in the nation where applications to schools of education have decreased and the ability to retain teachers in the profession has become more difficult for school districts. What role can the state government play in reversing these trends? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?**

It starts with paying teachers what they deserve from the start, it's as simple as that. The fact that teachers have to go through their student teaching without pay, is a huge turn off for a lot of educators. The constant recertification process is also a burden to teachers, who often have to pay these costs out of pocket. By increasing salary's, building incentives for teachers to stay and improve themselves, and giving them a proper retirement program, we can build Michigan back into a top 10 education system in the country once again. That is my #1 goal as a future representative during my tenure in the state house of representatives.

Michael Webber (R)

Candidate for Michigan Legislature - 45th district

**Q1. What is your view of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

As a product of our RCS public schools and a parent of a son who attends RCS public schools, public education is very important to society. It is needed to educate future generations to prepare for the work force, moving our economy, state and country forward. The current funding model for public schools is based on a Per Pupil funding formula. It has been suggested through studies and debate that the Per Pupil funding number should increase. This is a goal that I will continue to work towards, as Per Pupil funding has increased in each of the past four years that I have voted on the state budget. I am open to discussing changes to move away from Per Pupil funding, but that seems to be a fair way to fund it.

**Q2. Based upon the recent results of the M-STEP - where in Rochester Community Schools only 69% of third graders were considered proficient or advanced in English Language Arts (ELA) - do you think changes in the Read by Third Grade Law (MCL 380.1280f) will become necessary? If so, what changes would you like to see?**

The goal of the Read by Third Grade Law is to better prepare students to be successful in higher grades in terms of reading and comprehension skills. Part of the law is to

catch reading concerns early in the students career and intervene with support and help so that the student can be successful. For the law and program to be a success, the legislature and new governor's administration will need to continue to fund it and I am committed to doing that. Compromises were made when the law was debated to include waivers and other considerations. The goal is not to hold students back - I know that is a concern - but at the same time, we should not shuffle students from grade to grade without some mastery of the skills they need to be successful. I hope the law is given a chance to succeed before it is aggressively altered.

**Q3. There is an alarming trend in the State and in the nation where applications to schools of education have decreased and the ability to retain teachers in the profession has become more difficult for school districts. What role can the state government play in reversing these trends? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?**

The role that the state government can play is to provide greater certainty for the future of public education in our state by adequately funding our schools and continuing to pay down our legacy costs. The state is on track to pay down legacy costs by 2038 if we continue to make annual payments. Many other states either do not comprehend their legacy cost problems or do not have a plan to pay it down the way Michigan does now. In terms of Per Pupil funding, we must follow the studies that suggest a target number to adequately fund schools and have a goal to get there similar to what the state is doing with legacy costs. Lastly, it is my hope that with increased funding we can start our incoming teachers at a higher salary so that we can compete with private sector jobs. The state does not mandate that, it is negotiated thru the teacher contracts.

Marty Knollenberg (R)  
Candidate for State Senate - 13th district

**Q1. What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

As a special education student with a 65% hearing loss that wasn't discovered until I was 3 ½ years of age, I am fortunate to have received the attention that I needed. For me, public education was critical in my learning development.

Proposal A has been around almost 25 years. Naturally, times change and improvements can be made. Given that charters take in far fewer special needs students, it seems to me that they shouldn't receive the full foundation allowance if they don't reach a minimum level of those students. This is something that I've been discussing with the Oakland ISD and I expect it will be addressed in the next legislative session.

**Q2. There is an alarming trend in the State and in the nation where applications to schools of education have decreased and the ability to retain teachers in the profession has become more difficult for school districts. What role can the state government play in reversing these trends? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?**

New teacher certifications have been declining since the first term of the Granholm administration, so this isn't a new issue in Michigan. I've received great input and suggestions from my local superintendents, some of which I have introduced as legislation and has become law.

For example, I wrote legislation to eliminate the basic skills test, which often is unrelated to teacher proficiency in their chosen subject area. We shouldn't be keeping science teachers out of the classroom simply because they tested poorly in the language section of the SAT. Similarly, we shouldn't keep French teachers out of the classroom because they tested poorly on the math section of the SAT.

With unemployment at historic lows, it's difficult to fill many positions and we need to find individuals that have a passion for education.

**Q3. What are your positions on whether students in non-public K-12 schools should be receiving state education funds directly or indirectly? What transparency or accountability measures should be taken?**

Public education dollars should be used for public education.

Mallory McMorrow (D)  
Candidate for State Senate - 13th district

**Q1. What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

Public education is essential to a successful society. It's the great equalizer. It should give every child, regardless of background or financial means, an equitable opportunity to grow, develop, and gain the skills to thrive in our communities. In short, public education shapes the future of our kids and communities.

But, our current school funding is fundamentally broken. Recent studies show that overall, our schools are drastically underfunded and continue to be threatened by a Betsy DeVos-backed push to siphon money away from our public schools to for-profit charter and cyber schools. Michigan was the only state in the country to reportedly

“require intervention” on special education according the U.S. Department of Education. And the current per-pupil funding model leaves districts competing with each other for students and the price tag on their heads. I want better for our kids – for your kids.

No two students are the same, and no two schools or school districts are the same. We need school funding levels that address what it costs to truly run each school successfully, to provide transportation, wrap-around services like counselors, school nurses, social workers and paraprofessionals. Parents and students alike should be able to rely on this, and schools are trying; however, we continue to ask public schools to do more with less. That makes these basics a challenge. We need a school funding model that provides adequate resources for special education students, and one that addresses all of the various different ways children learn.

We need a school funding model that closes the gap and ensures Michigan schools are competing as one of the best in the nation, not in the bottom 10.

**Q2. There is an alarming trend in the State and in the nation where applications to schools of education have decreased and the ability to retain teachers in the profession has become more difficult for school districts. What role can the state government play in reversing these trends? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?**

This trend is a huge reason why I got into this race. I have friends and family members who either are teachers and tell me how hard their job has become, or who were teachers, having left the profession they love. Here in Oakland County, we have some of the best school districts in the state – something that has afforded us the ability to attract and retain the best and brightest in the profession. But a statewide teacher shortage is a real threat to our schools, and to the future of our state as a whole.

More than anything else, we need to treat teachers like professionals. The metrics for success change every year, and often without the input of teachers. These educators are not out to do the bare minimum for our kids. They’re not out to cheat the system. These are experts who entered into a profession out of a passion for empowering the next generation with confidence, skills, and life-long learning tools they’ll need for success.

Whenever we’re crafting legislation around education, teachers and parents all need to be at the center of the discussion. My career as an industrial designer is focused on a research and development process that’s all about asking questions, observing, holding focus groups and testing, analyzing and iterating towards real, user-based solutions.

We desperately need that in Lansing, and I look forward to working with teachers and parents to shape the future of education in Michigan.

Another item I'll focus on is our state's effort to recruit and retain the best teachers to the profession, and reverse the teacher shortage crisis facing our state.

**Q3. What are your positions on whether students in non-public K-12 schools should be receiving state education funds directly or indirectly? What transparency or accountability measures should be taken?**

I don't believe that non-public K-12 schools should receive state education funds, either directly or indirectly. Further, we have a charter school experiment in this state that simply doesn't work. Charter schools have the ability to cherry-pick their students, lack the same oversight and transparency as traditional public schools and, simply put, perform no better than their public school equivalents. With our schools already underfunded, we need to ensure that state education dollars remain with public K-12 schools rather than with non-public schools.

Rosemary Bayer (D)  
Candidate for State Senate - 12th district

(Did not provide written responses)

Jeff Pittel (L)  
Candidate for State Senate - 12th district

**Q1. What is your view on the role of public education in society? What is your opinion of the current funding model for public schools? Does it need to be changed and if so, what would you propose to change it?**

Providing for and or validating education are needed functions of Government, as the State has an obligation to assure the youth are educated in order to function and thrive in society. Additionally, private education, in the form of parental or tutorial instruction and mentoring are critical to assure a young person's education.

Unfortunately, some youth are traumatized in their home, permanently separated from their biological parents, or their parents/guardians are not competent in raising them, therefore they are lacking in private instruction. For these youth it is imperative that quality Public education and institutions should be effective and accessible.

So the ultimate role of Public Education is to assure that all youth have effective and accessible education despite home circumstances, and enable all youth the opportunity

to obtain a High School Diploma based on test criteria established by the State. Public Schools should be the first choice for parents as it enables a cohesive and connected community.

The current Public funding model is inadequate in that it does not address large disparities in educational outcomes and does not allow parental choice in education. K-12 Public Funding from the State constitutes the largest part of the State Budget at 40%. This budget has increased 7% since 2011-2012 despite declining enrollment. Yet, education performance at all levels and income demographics are declining.

A recent Public School funding study has concluded that the Public funding model needs to change to allocate more funding to students in high poverty districts, small isolated districts along with non-English speaking and special needs students. As this work was completed by professionals in the field, I would advocate that these recommendations be adopted in Public School Funding.

Additionally, a portion of State Educational funding should be allocated to educational vouchers to allow educational choice both outside and inside the Public School system. The percentage of State Budget allocated to vouchers is the purview of the Legislature but should be based on the percentage of Students enrolled in non-Public Schools.

**Q2. There is an alarming trend in the State and in the nation where applications to schools of education have decreased and the ability to retain teachers in the profession has become more difficult for school districts. What role can the state government play in reversing these trends? Do you have any ideas or suggestions?**

The requirements to be a Public School teacher should not require a Degree in Education especially at the higher grade levels. – i.e., an individual with a Degree in Mathematics can be an effective teacher of mathematics. By reducing this requirement the pool of available teaching candidates will thus be increased.

Additionally, school teachers are not highly compensated and thus young people are not choosing this career path. Given budget constraints, administrative and overhead costs need to be reduced to allocate a higher percentage of the budget to the teachers. This may require District consolidation and elimination of administrative redundancies such as the ISD. It may also require School Districts to make the difficult choice of removing extracurricular options.

In other fields individuals are compensated for their tenure and their performance, so Public Teacher compensation should be per this criteria. Higher performing, long tenured Teachers will be compensated at higher level than low performing , long tenured Teachers, thus providing financial incentive to achieve high levels of teaching excellence.

**Q3. What are your positions on whether students in non-public K-12 schools should be receiving state education funds directly or indirectly? What transparency or accountability measures should be taken?**

Parents who elect to send their children to non-public schools should be provided Educational Vouchers for that purpose. Additionally, all students in high-poverty areas should be provided educational vouchers in order to improve their access to quality education, including access to schools in neighboring districts. These vouchers can be used at the discretion of parents and guardians for private and charter schools, parochial school, home schooling, vocational, and apprenticeship training. Additionally, I would advocate education transportation vouchers to enable true school of choice - i.e., the ability of the Students to easily travel outside of District to attend another Public School.

I would propose these vouchers be directly provided to the student's parent or guardian to allow greatest parental freedom of educational choice. The cash value of the Voucher would be dependent on the type of Voucher requested and parents would have to provide evidence of legitimate Voucher usage. To assure accountability, Students in non-Public schools, whether parochial, home school, or private, will be subject to the same testing Standards at the same intervals as Public School students. The implementation of a voucher system will require rigorous, repeatable, standardized testing to assure the Voucher recipients are performing to State mandated educational objectives.

Mindy Denninger (D)  
Candidate for State House - 46<sup>th</sup> District

(Did not provide written responses)

Key:

(R) = Republican Party

(D) = Democratic Party

(L) = Libertarian Party