



## **The Great Equalizers: Public Education as a Pathway to Opportunity**

Equal access to quality education and training opportunities are the keys to achieving the American Dream in the 21st century. Unfortunately, systemic inequalities prevent too many Americans from having a fair shot at a good education. Steve's plan makes public education stronger by ensuring it's more fair and accessible for every student, and that every adult who wants to add to their professional development can do so without losing years out of the workforce.

Steve will appoint a Secretary of Education who has experience as an educator. And just as we'd never design healthcare policies without the input of doctors, Steve believes that teachers and other education professionals should be front and center when we craft education policies.

### **Equipping Our Schools for Success**

Too many students begin their education by walking into a school that is under-resourced.<sup>1</sup> As a result, students fall behind before they ever have the opportunity for a fair shot. To correct this glaring inequity, Steve will:

- Work with Congress to **ensure every family who wants to participate has access to a quality pre-K program**. Early childhood education and preschool improve a child's educational achievement throughout their school years while preparing them for success as an adult.
  - Work with Congress to pass legislation funding universal pre-k.
- **Double federal investment in K-12 education** to regain America's competitive education advantage. This will include helping local districts with wage and loan repayment incentives to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, education professionals, and principals to teach in low-performing or high-poverty school, Title I, principal training, and afterschool programs.
  - This will require legislation, with Steve including it in his annual budget proposal and working with Congress for its passage.
- **Fulfill the federal government's promise of full funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during his first term**. Meeting the promised funding level of 40% is an important part of making sure every child has a fair shot at success.
  - Steve will work with Congress to allocate additional funds.
- **Ensuring funding flows to schools with the highest concentrations of low-income or minority students** by re-evaluating Title I formulas.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aft.org/press-release/education-underfunding-tops-19-billion-over-decade-neglect>

- Steve will direct the Department of Education to re-evaluate the formula to make Title I funding as effective as possible.
- **Invest in strengthening rural schools.** For years, small and rural schools have been banding together in co-ops to pool resources to hire teachers in shortage areas like special education, or support professionals like speech-language pathologists.
  - Steve will work with Congress to fund initiatives that continue to develop these innovative tools for providing needed services in rural places.
- **Oppose vouchers, for-profit charter schools, and the privatization** of America's public schools.
- **Boost funding for afterschool and summer programs** that help close the achievement gap.
  - Initially, Steve will ask the Department of Education to repurpose funds towards 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Long term, he will seek Congressional funding for additional programs.
- Increase funding for **school-based mental health.**
  - Steve will seek Congressional funding for additional programs.
- Ensure the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) will **aggressively protect the rights of all students to a public education free of discrimination or harassment.**
  - Steve will direct the OCR to prioritize protection of all public school students.
- Increase funding for **restorative justice and trauma-informed practices** in schools.
  - Steve will work with Congress to approve additional funds.
- An estimated one in five children go hungry in America.<sup>2</sup> That is not right. That's why Steve will **boost funding for breakfast and after-school meal programs** to ensure every child is well nourished at school, over the summer, and during vacations. As proposed in his [rural plan](#), Steve will help schools purchase more of that food from local sources.
  - Steve will work with Congress to pass additional funding and work with schools and nonprofits to boost funding for food programs.
- Push back against policies and practices that **erode our nation's commitment to *Brown v. Board of Education*.**
  - Steve will direct the DOJ to prioritize this.

### **Innovating in Public Education**

Innovation is a key part of the American spirit and it must be a part of our public education system. Steve will:

- **Create an Accomplished Teacher Initiative.** Steve will create a state-of-the-art, free, post-secondary institution that trains a best-in-class set of accomplished teachers and sends them to teach in under-served areas. This institution would rely on the latest research and its graduates would train other teachers in the schools where they are placed.
- **Invest in strategies to ensure under-served and low-performing schools can attract, support, and retain more effective teachers, education support**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mashable.com/2016/07/14/child-hunger-united-states/>

**professionals, specialized staff, and principals to low-performing and under-served schools.** These could include providing grants and loan forgiveness programs to people who commit to teach in high-need areas and create better incentives for universities and schools of education to attract and educate high quality candidates in their schools of education and other professional development programs.

- Steve will direct the Department of Education to prioritize grants and loan forgiveness programs for these communities.
- **Improve and expand training for principals** because quality school leadership matters for a quality education.
  - Steve will direct the Department of Education to provide more funding for training opportunities under the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program which has been authorized by Congress, but has not yet been funded.
- **Cut back the amount of testing to increase school flexibility to broaden students' educations.** While accountability is important in education, the U.S. is the only country that requires math and reading testing in each of grades 3-8. Over-testing crowds-out the arts, physical education, and even recess.
  - Steve will direct the Department of Education to convene experts to improve testing policies to better suit education environments.

### **Supporting All Types of Careers**

A strong start in our public schools can give students everywhere a fair shot. But we also need a comprehensive approach to reinvigorate our workforce so that Americans can compete and succeed in the global economy. Steve believes that parents, government, schools, and businesses can work together to provide educational pathways in all types of careers to support a strong middle class.

**Not every path to success requires a college degree.** Many good careers start with a workforce-relevant credential or a 2- or 4-year degree. These additional options can provide pathways to good jobs at family-sustaining wages—in less time and at a lower cost to the student and future worker. Steve will ensure the federal government supports pathways to good jobs by enacting several policies:

- **Increase Pell Grant eligibility to serve more families.**
  - Direct the Secretary of Education to modify the rules administratively in the short term. Long term, work with Congress to modify rules for Pell Grants to further increase eligibility.
- Provide financial support, including allowing the use of Pell Grants, for **students to obtain employer-recognized certificates** needed to secure jobs that can sustain a family.
  - Direct the Secretary of Education to modify the rules administratively.
- Offer **tax credits for employers who bring on apprentices** or offer work-based learning opportunities.
  - Steve will work with Congress on approval, much like he did in Montana to pass a similar tax credit through bipartisan interest in increasing apprenticeships.

- Direct the Securities and Exchange Commission to **require companies to disclose investments in workers and workforce training**.
  - Steve will work with the SEC include this disclosure on companies' 10-K reports.

### **Making College Affordable**

While America's college and university system is the envy of the world, we must ensure it remains open and accessible to all Americans. For those attending college to get an employer-recognized credential or a 2- or 4-year degree, Steve believes we must address rising costs and ensure that college loan programs serve the students using them—not the loan companies. Steve will work to:

- Provide **free tuition for community college attendance**.
  - This would require Congressional funding.
- Allow **employers to contribute up to \$5,250 per year to an employee's student loan repayments tax-free** -- and allow employees to receive these contributions without having to pay income tax on this benefit.
- Reclaim **federal management over student loan initiation**, lower interest rates, and allow for refinancing if interest rates drop.
  - Steve will direct the Federal Student Aid (FSA) office of the Department of Education to reclaim federal management over student loan initiation.
- Direct the FSA office to offer improved repayment programs.
- Provide **tax credits to employers who help their employees pay off educational debt** and eliminate the treatment of student loan payments by employers as income.
  - This would require Congressional approval.
- **Treat workforce investments in employees as an asset rather than an expense** to incentivize companies to develop their employee's skills.
  - This would require Congressional approval.
- **Expand and improve public service student loan repayment programs** so young people can afford to go to college and give back to their country.

### **Investing in Minority Serving Institutions (MSI)**

Steve knows that the promise of educational opportunity for all Americans has gone unmet for far too long. He believes that MSIs must continue to be a key part of America's education future.

- **Invest in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**. Steve will invest in the vital educational role of HBCUs with an increase in both direct spending and bonding authority for these colleges and universities. Responding to the GAO recommendation on this topic, he will convene HBCU leadership and private financial institutions to find ways to facilitate more access to capital financing.
  - Steve will do this by using the bully pulpit of the Presidency and convening these groups -- and including these initiatives in his budget proposal.
- Steve will do the same for **Hispanic Serving Institutions and Tribal Colleges and Universities** to boost the flow of federal dollars to these institutions.

- Steve will do this by using the bully pulpit of the presidency and convening these groups. It is possible additional funds would need to be allocated from Congress.
- Support Representative Alma Adams' **HBCU PARTNERS Act to get the federal government to strategically engage with HBCUs** and codify the President's Board of Advisors on HBCUs.
  - This would require Congressional approval.

### Steve's Accomplishments

Steve has made public education a top priority in his time as Governor. As chair of the National Governors Association, he led the Good Jobs for All Americans initiative to guide our nation's governors in addressing changes in technology, skills requirements, work relationships, and demographics that threaten to leave many Americans behind.

As Governor, he:

- Secured the state's **first-ever investment in high-quality publicly funded** early childhood education (2017).
- **Froze in-state tuition for four years** in a row, resulting in Montana being named one of the **most affordable states for college tuition** from 2013-2016.
- **Doubled dual enrollment** (5,000 in 2017 alone), saving Montana students and families \$4 million in tuition through the Governor's One, Two, Free Initiative (2018).
- Doubled the state's investment in the Montana Digital Academy since taking office.
- Created Montana's **apprenticeship tax credit** to incentivize businesses to create more good-paying jobs and doubled that **incentive for businesses to hire veterans**. Expanded those initiatives by over 50%, connecting businesses with skilled workers and creating more good-paying jobs.
- Created the **first-in-the-nation tribal college apprenticeship program**(DLI).
- Started the STEM Mentors Initiative and **STEM Scholarships** to incentivize Montana students to pursue post-secondary education in a STEM or healthcare field.
- **Improved local school broadband** by working with EducationSuperHighway and providing funding to match E-rate funds for school broadband.
- 98% of Montana public schools are now meeting the FCC's minimum connectivity goals of 100 Kpbs per student, up from 78% in 2015. Bandwidth speeds at Montana public schools have increased by 5 times since 2015. The median price of bandwidth has decreased by 76% since 2015, from \$10.00 per Mbps down to \$2.40 per Mbps.
- Empowered local school districts to adopt **competency-based education models**, awarding credit to students based on demonstrated proficiency rather than the number of minutes and hours the student spends in a classroom (2017).