



Metro Detroit

Parents ask Michigan candidates: How will they support public education?

SARAH WILLIAMS | THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2022



For decades, parents, educators, and advocates have been debating where, and how many, public dollars should land in the education world. At a recent virtual forum hosted by Champions for Hope and Michigan's Children, metro Detroit parents had the opportunity to ask Michigan House candidates about their commitment to support public education.



Other hard-hitting questions during the forum also revealed the candidate's thoughts on affordable child care and universal preschool, living wages for early education workers, child tax credits, equal access to mental health supports and their thoughts concerning Michigan's three ballot proposals.

Candidates in attendance at the Detroit Champions for Hope event represented eight different House districts, all touching at least a portion of Detroit. Some are seeking re-election, while others are running for the first time. We've listed them here according to the district they hope to represent in Michigan's newly drawn map released earlier this year by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC).

Though not all candidates stayed for the entire forum, in attendance was Rep. Tyrone Carter D- (District 1), Rep. Regina Weiss, D- (District 6), Charles Villerot, R- (District 6), Mike McFall, D- (District 8), Rob Noble, R- (District 8), Natalie Price D- (District 5), Rep. Abraham Aiyash D- (District 9), and Michele Lundgren R- (District 9).

Bonnie Rolle, a retired Detroit Public School teacher as well as a great-grandmother, told candidates that previous policies under the Trump administration were not good for public schools. She put a question out to learn whether they are committed to supporting public education if they get to Lansing, asking:

How would you, as an elected official, advocate for public schools?

Mike McFall said Michigan's school funding should be going to public schools, not private schools, and that the state should be holding its charter schools to the same standards it does public schools.

"We should be properly funding our public school system. I'm not in favor of vouchers at all," he said, "All that does is pull additional funds away. I think they're disastrous to public schools."

Councilwoman Price said she believes every family has the right to send their kids to whatever type of school they choose, but that public funding should never be used to support private education because it hurts public schools, which are "absolutely essential," she says, in making sure all children in Michigan get a quality education.

Price also advocates for an equitable funding model, citing the School Finance Research Collaborative (SFRC) as a roadmap to identify students with different needs



and challenges that require more resources to meet state standards. If Michigan uses an equitable funding model, she said, we'll be able to help every student get the resources they need. She also stated the importance of facility support, and capital improvements that don't rely on property taxes.

"In my district that spans from Birmingham to Detroit. I have some schools with advanced STEM laboratories, and some schools that don't have safe drinking water or air conditioning, and that's not okay," she said. "Every student in Michigan deserves access to a safe, comfortable, and good quality educational experience."

Rob Noble said that Proposal A, adopted by the state in 1994, is the biggest problem when it comes to education in Michigan, and it needs to be "gutted and rebuilt."

"It's not getting equitable funding to schools that need it, and need it the most because it's based on the assessed value of property. The assessed value in Birmingham versus Seven Mile Road is quite different." He says we need more oversight of how bond investments are spent, and that school funding should not be diverted from the public school system to support charter schools.

Michele Lundgren said we should increase people's understanding of school funding gaps by inviting community members to visit schools up close. As an event coordinator, she said, "I would want to encourage people to go visit the school, to have events that bring people in from outside who are not familiar with the children, and the schools. We all need to have this information. We need to have opportunities to look around at those surroundings, look around at play yards, look around at the books, a meet-and-greet for the community, not just for the parents of schools."

Rep. Weiss echoes the need for school finance reform, the top issue she's been working on in Lansing, she said. In 2021, Weiss was part of a budget team that eliminated the funding gap in Michigan for the first time, a goal of Proposal A, passed in 1994. She also introduced legislation to reopen the proposal, she said, because it greatly affects the sustainability of both Michigan's school and municipal funding. Weiss said for the first time, there's also facilities funding in Michigan's budget, something she's worked hard to make happen, and that Michigan has appropriated \$20 million to establish a statewide capital needs study to ensure every child has access to a safe and secure learning environment.



"Now that we've gotten to equal, we're working to get to equitable, by increasing funding

throughout these budgets, and making sure we're putting funding into at-risk, special education, English language learners, and additional sources that students need in order to be successful," she said. "We are still not adequately funding our schools. There's a lot more that needs to be done to reinvest that."

Charles Villerot said he supports public schools, which he said gives children a great dose of reality, as it did his own, and offers assets that private schools don't have. He also supports vouchers. "I think they should go to charter schools. Charter schools are good," he said. "They will grind themselves out if they're not good. People will not attend."

Parents need funding vouchers for charter schools and private schools because people need a choice, he said.

Check out the rest of this series to learn how these candidates responded to more questions from parents around early child care and education. This community conversation has been edited for clarity and brevity.

This entry is part of our Early Education Matters series, exploring the state of early education and childhood care in our region. Through the generous support of the Southeast Michigan Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (SEMI ECFC), we'll be reporting on what parents and providers are experiencing right now, what's working and what's not, and who is uncovering solutions.

SPONSORED BY

REGIONS

SECOND WAVE - MICHIGAN

CAPITAL GAINS - LANSING

CATALYST MIDLAND

CONCENTRATE - ANN ARBOR/YPSI

EPICENTER - MOUNT PLEASANT

ROUTE BAY CITY

RURAL INNOVATION EXCHANGE

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

UPWORD - UP

THE KEEL - PORT HURON

THE LAKESHORE

METROMODE - METRO DETROIT



FOCUS AREAS

ARTS AND CULTURE

DIVERSITY

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

KIDS AND EDUCATION

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

SUSTAINABILITY

TRANSPORTATION

ABOUT METROMODE

CONTACT US

HAVE A TIP FOR US?

PRIVACY POLICY

TERMS OF USE

COPYRIGHT © ISSUE MEDIA GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

