



# EDUCATION



## WHERE I'M COMING FROM: My Record on K-12 Education as Massachusetts Governor

***Elementary and secondary education is primarily a matter for states and localities and accordingly, federal intervention should be minimal.*** That notwithstanding, my experience as Governor of Massachusetts gave to me a unique viewpoint which seems consistent for the entire country.

First, unequal funding of school districts raises a substantial question of economic and racial equality. When I became Governor, I found that annual spending per pupil in our public schools widely ranged from as much as \$25,000 per pupil in wealthy suburbs of Boston to as little as \$6,000 per pupil in inner-city districts with largely black and Hispanic populations. This I found unacceptable.

Second, academic standards varied widely from district to district, and there was very little accountability for performance: underperforming students received “social” promotions from grade to grade, while there were virtually no penalties for poorly performing districts, many of which were located in comparatively low-income minority districts located in inner cities.

This also was unacceptable.

I made a “grand bargain” with the top Democrats in the House and Senate: I put an extra seven billion dollars into state funding of local education, which equalized spending across districts, and the Democrats and the teacher’s unions agreed to certain “management givebacks,” namely high-stakes tests in fourth, eighth and tenth grades, which students had to pass in order to advance to the next grade, and an end to “social” graduation diplomas, the result of which was that high school “graduates” were not able to finish even remedial reading and math at the community college level.

The result was that Massachusetts, which had ranked below the top half in state rankings (26th, 27th or 28th), within two years advanced to the number one position among the states in reading and math, and has held that position ever since, for 25 years.

Furthermore, failing school districts could be and were placed into receivership, with positive results.

In other words: standards and accountability count.

Competition among schools, and parental choice, count too.

I have long been a vocal proponent of charter schools, school choice for parents (including public school vouchers for families stuck in woefully underperforming inner-city schools), and enabling a home schooling option for parents. It should be noted that under our reforms, which included strong backing for charter schools, funding followed the student, so that other public schools would not be hollowed out by charter

schools. Also, charter schools had “freedom to fail,” just like other public schools: if they failed to perform, they could be (and were) closed.

In general, I believe the more streamlined the system, the better. To give an example of my thinking: while it’s mainly a state issue, I think that highly qualified individuals – say, a retired architect or graphic designer who could teach a design course, or a retired mining engineer who could teach a course in geology, or a native Italian speaker who could teach that language with passion – should be able to teach in our public high schools without further “education” credentials.



## HIGHER EDUCATION

***Graduation rates and duration of stay at community colleges are unacceptable.*** They need more support, more discipline, more accountability, and the freedom to fail so that lessons can be learned and competition can lead to good ideas succeeding.

Community colleges have a major role to play, after the aforementioned reforms, when fifteen or twenty percent of existing jobs in the United States disappear with the full advent of artificial intelligence, drones, robots, machine learning, and driverless vehicles. There will be replacement jobs for these positions – indeed, at higher wages – but they will require two or three semester courses teaching technical skills that the workers do not yet possess.

These courses need to be offered either at community colleges or online, as recent research has shown that distance learning is as effective as traditional social

instruction. They should be free to the displaced workers because the cost, for the displaced workers only would be a fraction of a percent of most states’ budget, and easily borne by the states, as a priority or even emergency matter. This investment will reap far more benefits in the long term than simply allowing these displaced workers to be left behind. To govern is to choose, and this will be a legitimate national emergency. Federal funding, in fact, could be the icing on the cake.

There is an assumption that these displaced workers are possible or even likely Trump voters. But what has the Trump Administration done to get out in front of this massive change in the nature of work in our country? Be assured: when I’m considering education policy that will help people find jobs in the information economy, I’m thinking about everyone, no matter who they vote for.



## STUDENT DEBT: A Sad Legacy to Young Voters that Requires Action

*Another major issue in higher education is the crushing burden of student debt.*

My Administration will immediately review the current federal loan process to ensure that students are not being haphazardly lent exorbitant amounts to earn degrees which will never earn enough money to pay off their loans. The existing practice is nothing more than predatory lending, and it is repulsive that we do this to thousands of teenagers every year.

Congress needs to immediately repeal the legislative provision that student debt, unlike all other kinds of debt, cannot be renegotiated. It is despicable that students are being left behind in this regard.

I would expand a public service loan forgiveness program, either deferring or reducing student loan payment obligations for those who teach in public schools for up to five years after graduation.

I would also work to make college more accessible to low income students. This would include two years of community college and the last two years of tuition at a state college or university free. In addition, I would prioritize reducing the interest rate on federal student loans and extend scholarships for vocational training. Another important objective would be to exempt unpaid interest after three years until the borrower is earning 250 percent of the wage at the federal poverty line. I would also forgive the student debt after 240 monthly payments.



## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN EDUCATION

*And one more thing.* Education is ultimately about teaching people to be the kind of person their parents want them to be. As elsewhere, my instinct in education is to keep the government out of your household to the extent possible. Public education should serve parents, not the other way around. And in a country full of competing viewpoints, freedom of conscience is paramount.

This gets to the question of religious liberty, which principally comes up when we talk about judges. While I'm open to competent judges from a variety

of intellectual and political backgrounds, I have said before and will say again here: I favor pro-liberty judges, and will appoint them. I believe the right of parents to opt out of programs that run counter to their religious values is a vital American liberty and a constitutional right under the First Amendment. I have similar views about the freedom of parents to home-school their kids. I believe parents have a right to determine their children's education, and a long list of court precedents backs me up. This will be on my mind when the question of judges inevitably comes up.