

# Talking Points

## West Virginia's public schools are succeeding

- Our public schools are succeeding but everyone would like to see them improve and all our students achieving at a high level. Our public schools are far more academically challenging than in the past and the expectations for our students are high. We recognize that all students progress at different levels. They come into our public schools with different levels of preparedness and they will not all be at subject mastery at the same time. Standardized tests scores are not valid indicators of student success.
- When you look at the top tier of states in terms of student achievement they have several items in common. Two of the most significant are the percent of students in poverty and the educational attainment levels of adults. States with the lowest percentages of student poverty and the highest percentage of adults with college degrees tend to score higher in student achievement.
- WV has one of the highest incidences of children living in poverty in the nation. While that does not prevent a child from achieving, it often means that students start more slowly and need additional services to reach their full potential.
- Society's problems do not stop at the doors of our schools and our children's focus is disrupted by what is going on in their family and surroundings. Our students are facing the highest numbers ever for those living in foster homes and living with someone other than a parent.
- Our highest achieving students are quite competitive when compared with their peers in student achievement. And when you compare the student achievement of WV's kids living in poverty against students in other states living in poverty, our students score exceptionally well.
- Poverty and generations of low levels of educational attainment cannot be overcome quickly. WV is making progress but without the proper supports it has taken more time than any of us would like.

## What can help our public schools improve?

- Not only are the items not proven to improve student achievement, but many are proven to be divisive and will actually do harm to existing public schools and students by taking much needed funding away from our public schools.
- Charters, ESAs and vouchers take funding away from our public schools and give it to other entities. We should focus on investing in schools where 90% of our children go and not diverting money to other education/privatization schemes.
- We must provide a great public school for every student in the state regardless of their zip code. Improving public schools requires more resources, not less. Every student deserves a quality, well-equipped school where they can learn, be inspired and thrive.

- If we are serious about improving our public schools then let's look at proven reforms. This means creating schools with inviting classrooms, a well-rounded curriculum, class sizes that are small enough for one-on-one attention and support services such as health care, nutrition and after-school programs for students who need them.
- Our students need extended day and summer programs; alternative education facilities; expanded vocational education options; additional specialists, including special education teachers, school counselors, nurses and psychologists; and resources to help parents and guardians.
- Everyone wants to improve our public schools and there are many proven ways to increase student achievement. Many of the items introduced as reform measures by our legislators are not designed to improve our schools or the schools of any state.
- We should invest in the things that are proven to make schools great and help every student achieve to their peak potential regardless of their zip code.

## Funding for Public Education

- Funding for public education continues to fall. During the 1990s education was 57% of the state budget; it has dropped to less than 46% today. If the legislature had maintained funding levels, then money would be available to maintain competitive pay, provide adequate classroom supplies, lower class sizes, hire support services in our schools and offer more programs to our students.
- The funding formula for our public schools has not been significantly changed in the past 40 years. Yet, the issues that our schools deal with mirror the changes in society. We need to be able to add nurses, counselors, social workers, safety officers and others without subtracting from the number of teachers and service professionals allowed in the formula.
- West Virginia has significantly reduced the number of school buildings in the state through consolidation. But regardless of the number of buildings, they must be adequately maintained. Leaking roofs and antiquated HVAC systems desperately need to be replaced but there is no money provided in the formula for many of those costly repairs. Our public school cannot continue to limp along without proper funding. Our students suffer from the poor upkeep/air quality.
- Many of the changes to public education introduced in recent years actually take money away from our schools. Charter schools, vouchers and education savings accounts all take money from our already strapped local school systems in order to assist a small number of students.
- Legislators continue to talk about giving tax breaks to businesses. Those tax breaks harm our students and our public schools by taking money from the school systems. This session legislators actually reduced the coal severance tax taking over \$60 million out of the state's budget. This is money that can be used to meet the needs of our students and our schools.

## Charters, Vouchers & Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

- We need to improve our public schools and make quality education opportunities available to all students, not just a select few. To provide the opportunities for charters, vouchers and ESAs to a few select students, all public-school students will suffer as a result of decreased funding. Those programs will operate by taking much needed funds away from the county in order to fund the newly created program.
- We should focus on investing in public schools where 90% of children go, not diverting money from them for the 10% who go to private or home schools.
- After charters or vouchers or ESAs are created, and the funding is gone, our public schools are left without the state money but still have the same bills to pay. With systems struggling to make ends meet any additional loss of revenue would be devastating for the students and the programs offered.
- Based on Census data, West Virginia ranks 50th in the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degrees and 50th in the percentage of adults with an advanced degree. If we are to attract industry, we must provide a highly skilled and quality workforce. Hampering our already struggling schools by taking away funding will harm our ability to attract businesses and further weaken our state's economy.
- Vouchers, charters and ESAs do not reduce public education costs. Actually, they increase costs by requiring taxpayers to fund two school systems and their bureaucracies – one public and one public charter.
- The term “education savings accounts – ESAs” is intended to deceive. It is not the type of account that parents can contribute their own money into (think of the Smart529 accounts). Instead, the money that goes into an ESA is money that has been reallocated from the public school budget.
- Even with vouchers, most parents will not find it enough money for needed services or tuition at private schools for their children.