

ISSUES

A Thurgood Marshall Plan for Public Education

“Every human being has the fundamental **right** to a good education. On this 65th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, we are committed to creating an education system that works for all people, not just the wealthy and powerful.”



Details

The United States, as the wealthiest country in history, should have the best education system in the world. Today, in a highly competitive global economy, if we are going to have the kind of standard of living that the people of this country deserve, we need to have the best educated workforce. But let me be very honest with you, and tell you that, sadly, that is not the case today.

Our nation used to lead the world in the percentage of young Americans with college degrees. We were number one. Today, we are number 11, behind countries like South Korea, Japan, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Australia — and that is not acceptable. And here is the simple truth: 40 or 50 years ago, in California and Vermont, virtually any place in America, if you received a high school degree, the odds were pretty good that you would be able to get a decent paying job, raise a family, buy a house, buy a car, all on one income.

That was the world 40 or 50 years ago. But that is not the world we live in today. The world has changed, the global economy has changed, technology has changed, and education has changed.

Over the past decade, states all over America have made savage cuts to education, while, at the same time, providing massive tax breaks to the wealthiest people and largest corporations in America. Our kids and our students are too important to cut back on education, especially when those cuts reduce educational opportunities for underserved students, students of color, low income students, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities.

Among the 35 countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, [the U.S. ranked 30th in math and 19th in science](#). Reading scores for our students are not much better. The U.S. ranked 24th when compared to other highly industrialized countries such as Singapore, Canada and Germany.

And, due to re-segregation of our K-12 schools, if you are a [student of color, chances are your math, science and reading scores are even lower](#). Persistent disparities in achievement among underserved students means that we must do more to make sure that every student in the country gets a high-quality education regardless of how much income his or her family makes. If our public schools are struggling, then we cannot possibly expect our students to be prepared for success in postsecondary education.

In the twenty-first century, a free public education system that goes from kindergarten through high school is no longer good enough. If we are to succeed as a nation, public colleges and universities must be tuition free. Higher education should be a right for all, not a privilege for the few. That means we have got to make public colleges and universities tuition free and we must substantially reduce

student debt. Each and every year, hundreds of thousands of bright and qualified young people do not get a higher education for one reason and one reason alone: their family lacks the income. That is unfair to those families; and it is it is unfair to the future of this country.

Instead of pursuing their dreams of being an environmentalist, a teacher, a social worker, or an artist, too many Americans end up taking higher-paying jobs on Wall Street or as accountants or as corporate managers simply to pay back their student loans. We need environmentalists. We need people to take care of the poor. We need health care providers to choose to work in community health centers. We need good teachers. Each and every American must be able to get the education they need to match their skills and fulfill their dreams.

In fulfilling those dreams, we must make teaching a highly attractive profession again. Teachers have one of the toughest and most demanding jobs in America. Teachers have been the leaders in the fight to improve public schools, reduce class sizes, and provide every student with books, computers and safe, high quality schools. What encourages me and gives me so much hope about the future is that teachers across the country are standing up and saying enough is enough! The wealthiest people in America cannot have it all, while public schools all over America are falling apart.

Over the past year, tens of thousands of teachers across the country have gone on strike to demand greater investment in public education. The wave of teacher strikes throughout the country provides an historic opportunity to make the investments we desperately need to make our public education system the best in the industrialized world, not one of the poorest.

Bernie's education plan addresses the serious crisis in our education system by reducing racial and economic segregation in our public school system, attracting the best and the brightest educational professionals to teach in our classrooms, and reestablishing a positive learning environment for students in our K-12 schools. This plan calls for a transformative investment in our children, our teachers and our schools and a fundamental re-thinking of the unjust and inequitable funding of our public education system.

1. Combating Racial Discrimination and School Segregation

65 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, [many U.S. schools](#) remain unacceptably segregated. Some 300 school districts are currently under desegregation orders and the [Supreme Court](#) has curtailed the government's power to address them. Under Betsy DeVos, the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights has outrageously "[scaled back](#)" civil rights investigations and [dismissed](#) hundreds of them in short order.

In America today, only [20 percent](#) of public school teachers are nonwhite, and with minority students comprising a majority in our public schools, the gap is growing. [Research](#) shows that students of color who have at least one teacher of color by third grade are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college. Nationwide, about 7 percent of public school teachers are black.

Due to [implicit racial bias](#), Black students, even in preschool, are nearly [four times](#) as likely to be suspended as Whites, putting them at greater risk of falling behind and getting caught up in the juvenile justice system. Black students and students with disabilities are more likely to be subjected to exclusionary discipline measures than their same age peers. When a child is pushed out of school they lose instructional time and are more likely to become involved with the juvenile and adult justice systems. We must [end the school-to-prison pipeline](#).

As president, Bernie Sanders will:

- Build on the *Strength in Diversity Act* to increase, not cut, federal funding for community-driven strategies to desegregate schools.
- Triple Title I funding to ensure at-risk schools get the funding they need and end funding penalties for schools that attempt to desegregate.
- Execute and enforce desegregation orders and appoint federal judges who will enforce the *1964 Civil Rights Act* in school systems.
- Address disciplinary practices in schools that disproportionately affect Black and Brown children.
- Establish a dedicated fund to create and expand teacher-training programs at HBCUs, minority-serving institutions (MSIs) and tribal colleges and universities to increase educator diversity.
- Fully fund the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and remove current protocols that allow for arbitrary dismissal of complaints.
- Fund school transportation to help integration, ending the absurd prohibitions in place.
- Increase funding for public magnet schools to \$1 billion annually to help integrate our schools.
- Increase access to English as a Second Language instruction.

2. End the Unaccountable Profit-Motive of Charter Schools

Recognizing the problems in a one-size-fits-all model of education, teachers' unions and parent activists established alternative, experimental "charter" schools to better serve kids struggling within the traditional system. But few charter schools have lived up to their promise. Instead, billionaires like DeVos and the [Waltons](#), together with private equity and hedge fund executives, have bankrolled their expansion and poured [tens of millions](#) into school board and other local elections with the hope of privatizing public schools. Charter schools are led by unaccountable, private bodies, and their growth has drained funding from the public school system.

Moreover, the proliferation of charter schools has disproportionately affected communities of color – [17 percent](#) of charter schools are 99 percent minority, compared to 4 percent of traditional public schools. This has led the [NAACP](#), the [NEA](#), [AFT](#) and others to criticize the charter movement for intensifying racial segregation.

The damage to communities caused by unregulated charter school growth must be stopped and reversed.

As president, Bernie Sanders will fight to:

- Ban [for-profit](#) charter schools and support the NAACP's moratorium on public funds for charter school expansion until a national audit has been completed to determine the impact of charter growth in each state. That means halting the use of public funds to underwrite new charter schools.
- We do not need two schools systems; we need to invest in our public schools system. That said, existing charter schools must be made accountable by:
 - Mandating that charter schools comply with the same oversight requirements as public schools.
 - Mandating that at least half of all charter school boards are teachers and parents.
 - Disclosing student attrition rates, non-public funding sources, financial interests and other relevant data.
 - Matching employment practices at charters with neighboring district schools, including standards set by collective bargaining agreements and restrictions on exorbitant CEO pay.
 - Supporting the efforts of charter school teachers to unionize and bringing charter schools to the negotiating table.

3. Equitable Funding for Public Schools

In America today, most school districts are funded out of local property tax revenue, resulting in unconscionable inequalities. The federal government, by conditioning funding on standardized test scores, has worsened the disparities between school districts and among states. Since school districts are funded out of local property taxes, less is invested in the education of children from low-income families compared with their more affluent peers. In America, the quality of a child's education should not and cannot depend on their zip code.

As president, Bernie Sanders will fight to equitably fund our schools. He will:

- Rethink the link between property taxes and education funding.
- Establish a national per-pupil spending floor.
- Eliminate barriers to college-readiness exams by ensuring states cover fees for the ACT, SAT and other college preparatory exams for all students.
- Triple Title I funding to ensure at-risk schools get the funding they need and end funding penalties for schools that attempt to desegregate.
- Provide schools with the resources needed to shrink class sizes.
- Provide \$5 billion annually for career and technical education to give our students the skills they need to thrive once they graduate.
- Ensure schools in rural communities, indigenous communities, Puerto Rico and other U.S. Territories receive equitable funding.
- Give schools the funding needed to support arts, foreign language and music education to provide all students with important learning opportunities.

4. Strengthen the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Over 40 years ago, the federal government made a promise to school districts around the country to fund 40 percent of the cost of special education. It is an understatement to point out that the federal government has not come close to keeping this promise.

Special Education is an expensive proposition and because of inadequate federal funding, property taxes around the country are increasing while kids with disabilities are not getting the attention they deserve. The IDEA helps about [6.5 million](#) children with disabilities, but because of a chronic lack of funding there is a shortage of special education teachers and physical and speech therapists, and the turnover rate among them is incredibly high.

As president, Bernie Sanders will:

- Provide mandatory funding to ensure that the federal government provides at least 50 percent of the funding for special education.
- Guarantee children with disabilities an equal right to high-quality education by enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Increase educational opportunities for persons with disabilities, including an expansion in career and technical education opportunities to prepare students for good-paying community employment.
- Address the shortage in special education teacher recruitment, training opportunities, workload and pay for special education teachers.
- Triple Title I funding to ensure students with disabilities are able to get quality education regardless of the zip code they live in.

5. Give Teachers a Much-Deserved Raise and Empower them to Teach

The historic teacher strikes of the past few years has brought national attention to the fact that teachers are paid totally inadequate wages. As a result of low pay and other inequities, [20 percent](#) of teachers now leave the profession within five years – a 40 percent increase from the historical average. This high rate of turnover is more pronounced in low-income communities of color.

As president, Bernie Sanders will fight to:

- Significantly increase teacher pay by working with states to set a starting salary for teachers at no less than \$60,000 tied to cost of living, years of service, and other qualifications; and allowing states to go beyond that floor based on geographic cost of living.
- End racial and [gender disparities](#) in teacher pay.
- Ensure professional development for all teachers, including continuing education and mentorship programs.
- Protect and expand collective bargaining rights and teacher tenure.
- Triple the above-the-line tax deduction for educator expenses and index it to inflation to reimburse teachers for the nearly \$500 on average they spend on out of pocket classroom expenses each year.
- Create a grant program to provide teachers with funds explicitly meant for classroom materials.
- Empower teachers to provide a teacher-supported curriculum that gives students the best possible education.

6. Expand After-School/Summer Education Programs

It is well known that summer and afterschool programs prevent “summer slide” and help kids learn, grow, and avoid risky behaviors. Research shows that quality afterschool/summer programs give students the academic, social, and professional skills they need to succeed. Students who regularly attend after-school programs have better attendance, grades, and behavior in school; better peer relations and emotional adjustment; and lower incidence of drug-use, violence, and unintended pregnancy. Numerous studies have shown that these benefits make afterschool programs a positive return on investment, saving taxpayer dollars over time.

After-school/summer programs also alleviate a major burden on working families. These programs work for children, families and communities. Disgracefully, the Trump Administration has proposed eliminating \$2 billion in funding for after-school and summer learning programs, which would devastate some [1.7 million](#) children and families. We should expand the number of programs in order to meet the need. [For every child now in an after-school program, two more are waiting to get in.](#)

Bernie has a better idea. As president, he will:

- Spend \$5 billion annually to substantially expand access to summer and after-school programs, teen centers and tutoring.

7. Universal School Meals

In America today, [one in every six](#) kids goes hungry. Instead of addressing this crisis, students with lunch debt are sometimes denied meals, have debt collectors sent after their families, and are even denied their diplomas. Unacceptable. It is not a radical idea that no child in this country should go hungry. We must ensure that all students have access to healthy school meals.

As president, Bernie Sanders will fight to:

- Provide year-round, free universal school meals; breakfast, lunch and snacks through our school meals programs, and offer incentives for sourcing food from local sources.
- Expand Summer EBT across the country to ensure no student goes hungry during the summer.

8. Sustainable Community Schools

Our public schools can and should be more than just places where children learn – they can be community centers that build the health and well-being of students. We must act to transform our education system into a high-quality public good that connects education, health, and social-services to young people. A strong investment in sustainable community school programs can help us achieve that. President Trump has proposed eliminating funding for community school programs. We have a better idea.

As president, Bernie Sanders will fight to:

- Provide \$5 billion in annual funding for sustainable community schools to provide a holistic, full-service approach to learning and the wellbeing of our young people.
- Our schools are a public good. By transforming them into sustainable community schools, we can provide:
 - Health and support services including dental care, mental health care, and substance abuse prevention.
 - Community and youth organizing.
 - Community goods and services such as job training classes, art spaces, GED, and ESL classes.

9. School Infrastructure

Schools across urban and rural America are crumbling. A [2014 study](#) found that at least 53 percent of the nation’s schools need immediate repair. At least [2.3 million](#) students, mostly in rural communities, attend schools without high-speed internet access. Teachers are paid starvation wages and schools across underserved urban and rural parts of our country are crumbling. Stories abound about heating systems giving out in the winter, ceilings leaking during storms and mold accumulating in plain sight. That is unacceptable and has got to change.

Sanders will:

- Fully close the gap in school infrastructure funding to renovate, modernize, and green the nation’s schools.

10. Make Schools a Safe and Inclusive Place for All

Our schools must be safe for all students. Period. It is disgusting that our children must face the terrifying reality of being at risk of being killed in their own schools, and that school districts must resort to measures like this to try to keep kids safe. We must ensure LGBTQ students can attend school without fear of bullying, and work to substantially reduce suicides.

- Pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Student Non-Discrimination Act into law to protect the rights of LGBTQ students.
- Protect students from harassment, discrimination, and violence in educational institutions by protecting and enforcing Title IX.
- Enact comprehensive gun violence prevention laws to end the epidemic of gun violence in this country and in our schools.
- Ensure that immigrant children and their parents are free from harassment and surveillance at school, regardless of their immigration status.

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