

## Education and Children

We teach our children that education is the gateway to opportunity and the key to success. Yet, many of our children are falling behind in failing schools and without an adequate support system. Moreover, with the rising cost of college and the current economic downturn, higher education is slipping out of reach for many of our nation's young people. That is why I have made strengthening our country's public school system and making higher education a reality for more Americans a top priority.

Studies have consistently shown that early childhood education is a pathway to success for American children. Head Start, serving pre-schoolers from low-income families, is the cornerstone in efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all Americans with the opportunity to thrive. Unfortunately, funding cuts have strained the program, making it impossible to reach all eligible children. Having helped pass the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, a measure that would reinvigorate the program, I remain committed to fully funding Head Start.

I am also dedicated to ensuring that we fulfill the promise we made to Connecticut's children in 2001 when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law. First and foremost, we must fully fund NCLB. It is grossly unfair to enforce new standards and not provide the resources needed to help make that progress. We must also reform NCLB to focus on the whole student and not just measure growth based on standardized test scores. And school progress needs be holistically assessed, taking into account graduation and attendance rates as well as curriculum measures.

We must also meet our commitment to the hundreds of thousands of children whose opportunity for educational success is enhanced by special help in the classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, which authorizes aid to state and local districts for special education, has been woefully underfunded. IDEA has been an extremely effective law that has helped millions of students get the education they deserve and we owe it to our kids to support this program.

Lastly, we must continue to make progress in making college more widely-accessible. While we have recently experienced a few victories in boosting federal grant funding, cutting interest rates on federal student loans, and simplifying the aid application process, we must continue to ensure opportunities for every student who desires it. Especially in today's economy in which financial barriers pervade and the cultivation of future leaders and innovators is more important than ever, I will continue to champion efforts to help students and families receive the support they need.

Connecticut's children deserve an education system that prepares them to be competitive in the global economy and in Connecticut. To accomplish this goal, we must have a strong federal commitment, coupled with the support of the state government, and the work of thousands of teachers and parents in our communities who make it their daily mission to educate the next generation. Working together, we can help our kids achieve their dreams.

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