

Fully Funding and Supporting K-12 Public Education

Introduction

I believe the most important investments we make as a society are in education. We have an obligation as a nation to ensure that every single child — regardless of race, class, zip code, or disability — receives the highest-quality education possible. Our future literally depends on it.

Public education has always been a deeply personal issue to me and my family. My grandfather was a teacher in Dhaka, but fled his home due to mob violence during the British partition of India. He landed in North Calcutta in an abandoned house and eventually received a grant to open a public school there. Like so many teachers, he understood that the success of any nation depended on an educated populace. He educated countless children who had lost everything and provided hope to so many who needed to find their footing in a new place.

Growing up, I went to public schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade and am a proud graduate of Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Fort Worth, Texas, a Title I school that relies on federal funding. It is not an exaggeration to say that I would not be here today without the dedication and generosity of my public school teachers, who worked under incredibly difficult conditions to ensure I got the best education possible and instilled in me a genuine love for learning.

I want every child in America to have the same opportunity I had — which is why it upsets me to see how our political leaders have failed to properly support our public education system. Our educators are so overworked and underpaid that many can't even afford to live in the communities in which they teach. Educational outcomes in math and reading are at their lowest point in years. Public schools across the nation, [including 13 here in San Francisco](#), are at risk of closure due to declining enrollment and shrinking budgets.

In Congress, I promise to be a fierce advocate for our public schools, students, and educators. To support our public schools, I will introduce and support legislation to:

- Increase federal funding for public schools.
- Improve educator salaries and reduce the cost-of-living so educators can live in the districts they teach in.
- Guarantee that every student has a chance to succeed regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or language.

Increasing federal funding for public schools

Across the country, public schools are chronically underfunded, forcing districts to make impossible choices between hiring educators, updating crumbling infrastructure, and providing students with basic resources. Here in San Francisco, 13 public schools are at risk of closure because of declining enrollment and budget shortfalls. Schools in low-income communities face the steepest challenges: leaky roofs go unrepaired, outdated heating and cooling systems fail, and overcrowded classrooms lack the technology and materials students need to succeed.

The federal government currently provides less than 10% of total K-12 education funding, yet it mandates expensive programs and services without fully covering the costs. This leaves states and local districts to fill the gap. While wealthier communities can raise revenue through property taxes, poor and working-class districts cannot. The result is systemic inequality where your zip code determines the bounds of your educational attainment.

The insufficient federal funding for public education has real consequences for San Francisco students. [This year alone, SFUSD laid off 34 counselors, 134 teacher aides, and 278 administrators, while also reducing the overall number of teachers through early retirements.](#) As a result, our students will have access to fewer resources and our remaining teachers will only be more overworked. The burden of these budget cuts will inevitably fall the hardest on the schools serving vulnerable students.

My policies below address this crisis by substantially increasing federal investment in public schools, keeping our broken promises to students with disabilities, and ensuring that every school has the resources to provide an excellent education.

In Congress, I will fight to:

- **Double funding for Title 1 Schools:** Title I provides federal funding to schools serving high percentages of low-income students, amounting to over 26 million children. Despite existing funding, Title 1 schools still face significant resource gaps and need substantially more support to provide equitable education. [San Francisco is home to 17 Title 1 schools, most of which are in the Tenderloin, Mid-Market, and Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhoods.](#) Doubling Title I funding would allow these schools to hire more educators and support staff, reduce class sizes, provide targeted tutoring for struggling students, update outdated textbooks and technology, and expand enrichment programs like arts and athletics that are often cut first when budgets are tight.
- **Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it promised to cover 40% of the additional costs of educating students with disabilities. However, the federal government has never come close to fulfilling that promise. Today, the federal government covers only about 13% of these costs. This broken promise forces schools to divert money from general education budgets to cover federally mandated special education services. Fully funding IDEA would free up millions of dollars for San Francisco schools while ensuring that the [7.5 million students with disabilities across America](#) receive the support and services they

deserve by law. I will support legislation such as the [IDEA Full Funding Act \(H.R.4519\)](#) that increases federal funding to the promised 40% level.

- **Substantially increase federal funding for community schools:** Community schools take a holistic approach to student wellbeing by connecting families with wraparound services such as food pantries, health clinics, mental health counseling, and after-school programs. The community school model has been shown to improve attendance, academic performance, and overall student health. [Currently, the federal government provides only about \\$150 million annually in grants to community schools.](#) I will introduce legislation to increase community school funding fivefold to \$750 million per year, allowing existing community schools to expand their services and helping launch new community schools across the country.
- **Upgrade our public school facilities to replace outdated equipment, improve heating and cooling systems, and reduce emissions:** Too many students attend schools with inadequate heating and cooling systems, poor ventilation, outdated equipment, and crumbling facilities that make learning difficult and uncomfortable. I support massive infrastructure investments to upgrade public school buildings nationwide, improving HVAC systems, replacing aging infrastructure, enhancing energy efficiency, and creating healthier learning environments. Not only would these upgrades improve the learning environment, they would also reduce emissions and lower energy costs for school districts. [I will support the Green New Deal for Public Schools Act \(H.R. 5784\)](#) that provides federal funding for these upgrades.
- **Introduce new grant funding for reversing learning loss:** Recent years have seen declines in student performance, particularly in math and reading, with the sharpest drops among students from low-income families. This new grant program would provide funding for school districts to identify students who are struggling academically and deliver intensive, evidence-based interventions. Funding could be used to hire full-time, intensive literacy and math tutors, establish or expand high-quality summer learning programs, create after-school tutoring opportunities, and provide professional development to educators to help struggling students catch up.
- **Use my position to protect Proposition 98, which has guaranteed a baseline of investment in our children's education for decades:** Recently, California has discussed potentially cutting Proposition 98 funding as a result of budget deficits. California's public schools cannot be treated as the first casualty of poorly managed state budgets. Our kids, our teachers, and our classrooms deserve stability, not broken promises. Although the future of Proposition 98 will be decided by the state government, I believe that I can and should use my position in Congress to advocate forcefully on issues like this.

Improving Educator Pay and Quality of Life

Nearly one in eight classrooms in America lacks a fully certified teacher. This shortage isn't a mystery or an inevitability — it's the predictable result of decades of undervaluing educators. Instead of valuing teaching as the essential profession it is, we underpay and overwork our educators. We ask more and more from them every year, yet their salaries are barely enough to get by. Many talented educators are forced to leave the profession they love simply because they cannot make ends meet.

The problem is especially acute here in San Francisco. The starting salary for a new teacher in the San Francisco Unified School District is around \$80,000, whereas the average rent for a one bedroom in San Francisco is about \$3300. Therefore, a teacher at the beginning of their career can expect to spend more than half their monthly income on rent. Educators with children or other dependents face even more barriers, often spending thousands per month on childcare and healthcare expenses.

For too long, our political leaders have offered only piecemeal, technocratic solutions instead of treating the educator shortage as the crisis it is. Educators are tired of small programs that don't match the scale of the problem. What we need is a comprehensive plan that addresses both educator compensation directly and the broader affordability crisis that makes teaching unsustainable.

The policies below provide that comprehensive plan. My plan not only provides real investments in educator salaries and benefits, but also addresses the high costs of essentials such as housing and student loan payments that push educators out of the classroom.

In Congress, I will fight to:

- **Raise educator salaries:** I support the [American Teacher Act \(H.R. 2021\)](#) which would establish a national minimum teacher salary and provide annual cost-of-living adjustments. The American Teachers Act would provide federal grants to help school districts meet this salary floor, ensuring that every educator in America earns a livable wage that reflects the importance of their work.
- **Cancel student debt for educators after five years of service:** Many educators come into the profession carrying huge amounts of debt from college and high monthly payments that make it difficult to make ends meet. While the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program allows educators to cancel their student debt after ten years of qualifying payments, the long timeline keeps educators in debt for far too long. I will support legislation allowing educators to have their federal student loans forgiven after just five years of classroom service. This change would provide meaningful financial relief to educators, help retain them, and incentivize new educators to enter the profession.
- **Provide rental and mortgage assistance to educators in high cost of living communities:** Teaching and living in expensive cities like San Francisco is a struggle for so many educators. Many are forced into long commutes or end up leaving the profession entirely. I will work to create a new federal Teacher Housing Assistance

Program with two components. The first is a rental voucher program for educators in areas where fair market rent exceeds 30% of the local median teacher salary, and will help cover the difference between what educators can afford and actual market rents. The second is a down payment assistance program for educators purchasing their first home in the high cost-of-living districts where they teach, similar to existing federal first-time homebuyer programs.

Promoting Equity

Even in the highest-performing school districts in the country, children will struggle to succeed if they are dealing with hunger, housing insecurity, language barriers, or systemic discrimination. These barriers to learning have nothing to do with a student's ability or potential. Rather, they are failures of policy that we have the power and obligation to address as policymakers. We need a policy agenda that ensures that every child, regardless of their background or circumstances, has what they need to thrive in school.

The policies outlined below tackle these challenges head-on. I'll ensure that every child has access to free, nutritional meals at school. I'll support students who are learning English or arriving from other countries. And I'll protect students' access to diverse books and honest education by fighting back against politically motivated censorship campaigns.

In Congress, I will fight to:

- **Provide universal free school breakfast and lunch:** No child should ever go hungry in America, and schools should be a safe space where every child knows they will have a filling, nutritional meal. Research consistently shows that universal free meals improve attendance, academic performance, and reduce food insecurity. Here in California, we've shown what's possible with our statewide free meal program, but the state shouldn't have to shoulder this cost alone —the federal government should be providing funding to school districts to implement free school meal programs across the country. In Congress, I promise to support the [Universal School Meals Program Act \(H.R. 3204\)](#) which provides year-round free school breakfasts and lunches to every student regardless of their family's income.
- **Invest in on-site assembly kitchens so every child has a fresh and nutritious meal:** Providing free meals is essential, but we must also ensure those meals are healthy and high-quality. Too many schools rely on heavily processed, low-nutrition food from third-party vendors because they lack the facilities to prepare fresh meals on-site. I will fight for federal grants that provide funding for schools to create new assembly kitchens in schools that prepare fresh food daily. [The new assembly kitchen at San Francisco's own Marina Middle School has been a great success and a model for what school meals should look like across the country.](#)
- **Support language immersion, biliteracy, and ELD education programs:** English Language Development (ELD) programs help non-native English speakers develop English language skills while still receiving high-quality education in core subjects. I will fight to increase federal funding for ELD programs and ensure that schools have the

resources to hire qualified ELD educators, provide appropriate instructional materials, and support multilingual students' academic success. I promise to support the [World LEAP Act \(H.R. 5603\)](#) which provides grant funding for world language or dual language programs.

- **Create new federal grants for newcomer education programs:** Arriving in a new country is a challenging time for young kids, many of whom have fled violence, persecution, or instability and need specialized support to prepare them for their new life. Newcomer programs serve recently-arrived immigrant students, helping them learn English and adapt to their new environment while they transition into full classroom settings. I want our newest Americans to succeed, which is why I will work to create a new federal grant program that helps schools start or expand newcomer education programs. These grants will provide funding to hire new educators, classroom resources, and provide additional wraparound services for parents to ease their transition to America.
- **Stop politically motivated book bans:** Book bans disproportionately target books by and about LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color and are part of a hateful campaign of censorship sweeping the country. Well-funded and connected political organizations dedicate millions of dollars to instigating book challenges in public schools every year. These challenges often make it to court and drain schools of time and money. I support the [Fight Book Bans Act \(H.R. 6592\)](#) that gives public schools essential financial resources to fight back against politically motivated book ban campaigns.
- **Stand against politically motivated censorship in education:** We've seen a worrying increase in politicians targeting ethnic studies, gender studies, and other courses that help students understand America's complex history and diverse population. In Congress, I will be an active and vocal opponent of any legislation that attempts to censor what students can learn or what educators can teach for political purposes. I will also use my position to oppose AB 715 — a California bill that censors how schools teach about Israel, Palestine and the conflict there — and any other bill that attempts to censor classrooms. Although AB 715 is a state law, I believe the representative from San Francisco can have significant influence and sway on the bill's future.
- **Create grants for safe, car-free routes to schools:** I will introduce legislation to provide federal grants for communities to create safe, car-free routes to schools through protected bike lanes, improved crosswalks, traffic calming measures, dedicated walking paths, and improved access to public transit. These investments would make it safer and easier for students to get to school under their own power, improve air quality around schools, reduce traffic congestion during drop-off and pick-up times, and promote active lifestyles for students.