

True Education Reform is Needed, Not Politics as Usual by Steven Westhoff, Superintendent of Schools

The time is ripe for true educational reform. Our politicians are starting to ramp up their campaigns for next fall and lots of promises will be forthcoming. Real change is needed, not empty promises that maintain the status quo.

We're starting to hear out of Lansing all kinds of proposals to cut the expense to provide quality education. These proposals cut salaries, health benefits, retirement benefits, and programs. We've been cutting in education for some time now; however, apparently, we haven't been doing a very good job, because we really need to cut things severely now. Every body in education needs to do more, achieve at a higher level, meet greater requirements, and have data to prove that is the case. Does anything seem wrong with this concept?

In Lansing, the argument in regards to educational reform appears to be Republican versus Democrat or House versus Senate. Republicans are absolutely against any new form of revenue. The word we typically use is "taxes"; this is a very bad word that, if suggested, will prevent you from being elected if you're running for public office. Democrats feel that new revenue is an option, just don't call it a tax, and cuts are okay if they don't affect the folks who support my campaign. All of our leaders in Lansing will tell us how important education is; it's our future – it's what will keep America strong, that which will turn our struggling economy around.

It would seem that we need to use all of our resources in better ways; however, it also appears that we need additional resources to provide quality education for all students of our State. Cuts only won't work. Additional revenue only won't work. We need both, we need our leaders to compromise, to do their jobs.

Teaching is the most important job in our State. Every other job that exists is a result of the foundation provided through teachers. Teachers have never obtained great financial wealth from their profession; they've never lived a life of poverty either. If we don't place a significant degree of value on the teaching profession, we will get what we've paid for. Our kids can tell how we value education by how we support it. Its time for us to support the education of all students in our State! We can't continue to tear it down, to add requirements without resources to meet them, and to drive away the talented people who should be teaching in our classrooms. Now is the time to make real change our kids future depends on it!