



# Education *IS* Economic Development

*Virg Bernero's Plan for Arming Michiganders to  
Succeed in a Global Economy*

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## **VIRG BERNERO ON EDUCATION**

To say Michigan has fallen on tough economic times is an understatement. Responsible leaders and the public rightly agree that economic development and job creation must be the top priority of Michigan's next governor.

However, Virg believes this emphasis on the economy must not mean losing focus on educating our kids. As Virg says: Education *IS* Economic Development. Excellent schools attract businesses and families to our communities. Investing in our kids arms them with the tools to succeed in a global economy and makes Michigan's workforce more competitive—drawing more businesses here. Our world class universities are creating new cutting edge products which hold tremendous economic potential. And a better-educated Michigan workforce can earn and spend more at Michigan businesses.

A strong public education system is the cornerstone of what academics call upward social mobility -- otherwise known as the American Dream. For many kids on Main Street, a good education is their only hope for a better life. For our state, good education is our only hope to help reverse the erosion of our middle class way of life.

Strengthening education from early-education to higher-education must be a pillar on which Michigan's economic recovery is built. Virg understands: Education *IS* Economic Development!

## **Virg Bernero's Education Plan:**

- **Expand access to Pre-K education with the goal that every 4-year-old in Michigan in the year 2020 will be enrolled in preschool**
- **Full-Day Kindergarten**
- **Increase the number of school days to meet or exceed the national average**
- **An all-out attack on the drop-out rate:**
  - **Hold parents accountable for the attendance of their children in school**
  - **Create “right track academies” where disruptive and truant children can go to get the education and help they need**
  - **Increase the availability of before- and after-school programs for elementary school children**
- **Expand students' graduation options through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma**
- **Provide career and technology training for 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs**
- **For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences**
- ***Pay for it:* Consolidate administrative and purchasing services within the state's 500+ school districts, allowing dollars to filter down to the classroom level to bridge the gap between high-achieving and low-achieving school districts**
- **Provide stable, predictable funding to school districts, colleges, and universities**
- **Restore the Michigan Promise, increase access to higher education, and strengthen partnerships between universities and state government to prevent tuition increases**

### **Expand access to Pre-K education with the goal that every 4 year old in Michigan in the year 2020 will be enrolled in preschool**

It is now a widely accepted fact that preschool education is vital for the enhancement of the cognitive development of children. Michigan needs a strong Pre-K program that has uniform benchmarks and quality standards in place to ensure that all our children are getting a jumpstart at becoming competitive in the global economy.

The two major Pre-K programs in Michigan are the federally funded Head Start program and the state-funded Michigan Great Start School Readiness Program (GSRP). The GSRP is a 30-week program for 4-year-olds, with the majority of programs existing as half-day options that are offered through local school districts, with the cost often subsidized at the local level.<sup>i</sup> The GSRP program should be expanded, with uniform achievement standards in place.

Virg has always said that education *is* economic development. High quality Pre-K certainly illustrates this point. High quality Pre-K for disadvantaged students, according to Timothy Bartik, Senior Economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute, results in a \$59,625 increase in earnings per individual in Michigan.<sup>ii</sup> (For a complete list of the Economic Development Benefits of Educational Improvements, please see Appendix A).

### **Full-Day Kindergarten**

Everyone wins with full-day kindergarten. Students participating in full-day kindergarten develop better social and emotional skills along with higher academic achievement. According to a policy briefing from the National Education Association, data that tracks students over time shows that children in full-day kindergarten show greater reading and math achievement gains than those in half-day kindergarten – especially for low-income children.<sup>iii</sup>

Giving 5-year-olds the ability to transition from one activity to another and allowing them to explore activities in-depth enhances their ability to learn. Half-days provide less time for students to fully engage in the curriculum and develop interests. Half-days also provide less time to cover academic issues in-depth. Moreover, children with special needs, developmental delays, unstable family environments, or who are otherwise “at risk” benefit greatly from increased social time with other children and with their teachers. Keeping children engaged in school means less time for children to participate in harmful social settings outside of school and can break the cycle of children underachieving in school and then entering the juvenile justice system.

### **Increase the number of school days to meet or exceed the national average**

We must find a way to help our school districts that are strapped for cash. Slashing the number of school days is not conducive to increasing the academic performance of students. The national standard for school days in the United States is 180 days, and 98% of public schools in Michigan offer fewer than 180 days. Sixteen public school districts and charter schools, in fact, offer fewer than 158 days of schooling. We are competing in a global economy where Japanese students attend school for 220 days and Korean students attend school for 225 days per year.<sup>iv</sup> Our children are falling behind. Repetition of ideas drives learning. Some schools have added time to the length of their school day to make up for lost days. However, an extra ten-minutes added to the school day is not the same as repeating tasks day after day until they are adequately learned. As the length of the school day increases to make up for lost time, each absence from school hurts more academically. Moreover, the limited attention span of children decreases their productivity as the school day increases. Short-term economic gains result from lengthening the school day and decreasing the number of school days, but children ultimately pay the price with decreased learning and decreased preparedness for success in the global marketplace. That’s one more reason Virg says education *is* economic development.

### **An all-out attack on the drop-out rate**

Students most likely to drop out of school are those who are not present in class during school. Studies indicate that students who are missing class in high school often were missing class in middle school and in elementary school. While skipping class in high school is a conscious decision made by

the student, missing class in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade is a conscious decision made by the parent or guardian. Students who are missing school and who ultimately drop out have a clear and documented pipeline to prison. Keeping kids in school means preventing future crimes and saving the state money. To attack the drop-out rate, the first place to begin is by addressing issues within families while children are in elementary school. We must hold parents accountable for the school attendance of their children, particularly elementary school-aged children.

For students with behavioral problems, students who are truant, and students who are disruptive in class and prevent other students from being able to learn in a comfortable environment, Virg will create “Right Track Academies” where these students can go to receive the special attention and care that they need. Behavioral issues with children can be the result of a wide variety of factors, and getting to the root of the problem in a structured program for these children can help rescue them from a downward spiral that would limit their future productivity.

All students, but particularly those in impoverished areas, would benefit from before- and after-school programs that keep them out of the streets and away from trouble. Elementary school children, especially, stand to gain the most from quality programs that can help students who are behind in their curriculum get caught up to their peers. Identifying and confronting obstacles to learning while children are still young gives them the best chance to succeed in a global economy.

**Expand students' graduation options through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma<sup>v</sup>**

For young people who excel in certain areas, such as music, art, or technical fields, avenues ought to exist to help those children identify opportunities to succeed and find good employment. The state must do more to help students build on their strengths instead of allowing students to continue to fail.

**Provide career and technology training for 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs**

While the importance of higher education cannot be overstated, we must also equip our citizens who don't go to college with the skills they need to lead productive lives. Quality vocational education is crucial in order for young people to gain marketable skills they can use to get good-paying, stable, and secure jobs.

**For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences<sup>vi</sup>**

The “Corrections” system is the biggest misnomer in state government. As a state, we are “correcting” very little. People who come to prison with drug addictions leave with drug addictions. People who come to prison in need of mental health treatment leave prison in need of mental health treatment. People who come to prison uneducated too often leave prison uneducated. We must do more to ensure that prisoners are getting access to education so that when they leave prison and re-enter society, they have an increased likelihood of becoming productive members of society and not returning to a life of crime. Making a high school diploma or GED a requirement for young people to leave prison can only help reduce recidivism rates in the future.

### **Consolidate administrative and purchasing services within the state's 500+ school districts, allowing dollars to filter down to the classroom level**

At least \$300 million can be saved immediately with increased cooperation between school districts on things like transportation, computer and textbook purchasing, administration, and facilities management.<sup>vii</sup> The duplication of services that are found between neighboring school districts must be put to an end and will provide real relief to our budgetary problems. Increased purchasing power can help **bridge the technology gap** between school districts and can help provide **quality, up-to-date instructional materials** for all of Michigan's students.

### **Provide stable, predictable funding to school districts, colleges, and universities**

The legislature must stop playing games with education dollars. In order to cover up for their ineffective leadership and mismanagement of the budget, the legislature has robbed our children and young adults of money that should be allocated for education. Plugging holes in the state budget is a short-term approach and lacks any foresight. We cannot continue the policy of cutting education funding, as well as revenue sharing for our cities – often mid-year – in order to balance the budget. School districts, colleges, universities, and municipalities must have a stable, predictable funding source that they can rely on to plan accordingly. A Bernero Administration will not engage in mid-year cuts to schools and cities.

### **Restore the Michigan Promise, increase access to higher education, and strengthen partnerships between universities and state government to prevent tuition increases**

Access to higher education is a huge concern. Our economy is becoming increasingly knowledge-based, and in order for young people to succeed, access to quality higher education is becoming more important. Michigan has some of the best universities in the world. But not all of our young people have access to these universities. And our state does far too little to leverage these great assets. In this tough economy, we must not allow the financial situation of Michigan's families to dictate who gets ahead and who falls behind. The Michigan Promise scholarship was guaranteed to our young people to help them cope with the ever-increasing cost of higher education, and it must be restored. The Bernero Administration will do that.

Moreover, Virg will work with our universities and community colleges to increase collaboration to prevent tuition increases. On the one hand, it's true that state government is responsible for tuition increases, as overall Michigan university tuition increases equal inflation plus the amount state higher education funding has been cut.<sup>vi</sup> At the same time, the fact that universities have increased tuition to maintain pre-national recession revenue levels while Michigan businesses, families and state and local governments are doing more with less means that universities are not finding ways to tighten their belts and become more efficient. Governor Bernero's pledge to universities will be this: the Administration will work to provide a fair, stable, and predictable revenue stream, if universities can demonstrate they are aggressively pursuing operational efficiencies and *freeze their tuition rates*.

Increasing partnerships between universities and the state government can also be a boon to our economy. We must do more to assist and expedite the technology transfer between university research labs and the marketplace. We must help students and faculty identify business and

commercialization opportunities in Michigan while the research is taking place so that we can keep the products of that innovation and ingenuity right here in Michigan. As mayor of Lansing, Virg has had success in partnering with Michigan State University and Lansing Community College to retain young people through programs such as “Linking Lansing and U.” Virg has leveraged the great higher education assets that exist in Lansing to diversify the economy in mid-Michigan. But much more can be done to build on this success statewide to make sure we are fully taking advantage of our world-leading institutions of higher learning.

## Conclusion

Michigan is facing the most difficult economic challenges we’ve seen in generations. We must invest in strengthening education in Michigan from early-ed to higher-ed now more than ever before. For kids on Main Street, for our middle class, for our shared economic prosperity, we must act now to ensure that Michigan’s public schools and state university systems are among the greatest in the world.

Our state’s future depends on high quality education—because Education *IS* Economic Development!

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<sup>i</sup> The Center for Michigan. Michigan’s Defining Moment Issue Guide, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> The Center for Michigan. Michigan’s Defining Moment Issue Guide, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Full-Day Kindergarten Helps Close Achievement Gaps. National Education Association Policy Briefs. <http://www.nea.org/home/36073.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> School Daze: Michigan’s Shrinking School Year. The Center for Michigan Special Report, 2009.

<sup>v</sup> National Education Association. NEA’s 12-Point Action Plan for Reducing the School Dropout Rate <http://www.nea.org/home/18106.htm>

<sup>vi</sup> National Education Association. NEA’s 12-Point Action Plan for Reducing the School Dropout Rate <http://www.nea.org/home/18106.htm>

<sup>vii</sup> The Center for Michigan. Michigan’s Defining Moment Issue Guide, 2009.

<sup>viii</sup> Booth Newspapers, Students Take Hit on State Cuts to Higher Education by Peter Luke, August 23, 2010

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**APPENDIX A – Economic Development Benefits of Educational Improvements in Michigan**

<b>For one Michigan resident attaining the below educational improvement:</b>	<b>The resulting increase in the present value earnings in Michigan will be:</b>
High quality pre-K for disadvantaged kids	\$59,625
High quality universal pre-K	\$13,714
Increase in early elementary school test scores equivalent to one-half school year	\$41,560
High quality summer school during elementary school for students who are behind	\$16,624
Being taught by a top quartile teacher rather than a bottom quartile teacher for one grade of elementary school	\$39,185
Increase in secondary school test scores equivalent to one-half school year	\$7,050
High school graduation	\$175,234
High school career academy	\$24,134
Community college graduation	\$126,995
4-year college graduation	\$375,912

*Source: The Center for Michigan's summary of Timothy Bartik's Testimony to House Education, 12/14/2009*