



EDUCATION & THE TRADES

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Education is the engine of the American economy. When it works, it lifts families and powers the country. When it fails, the cost shows up everywhere – in lost wages, lost talent, and a weaker nation. We were a nation where a kid born on the harder side of the economic divide could end up at NASA. When it fails, the old line about predicting a child's future by their zip code stops being a line and starts being a fact. Right now there are real efforts in Washington to dismantle the federal floor under public education — and to divert public school dollars to private schools. Here is the line I will hold, and the policy behind it.

Why I'm Here

My mother came up in a different time. She had no college degree when she went to work at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and none when she moved east to NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. It was an era when ability was the currency and the credential came later – she did the work first, and the degree — in biology — came long after she had left government service.

That world is gone. Today the credential is the gate, and you don't get through it on ability alone. I am the first in my family to attend college — the University of Virginia, on a Navy ROTC scholarship. I am also the parent of three young children: two daughters and a son. The question I care about is whether the door my mother walked through on talent is still open for kids who have talent but not the means.

The Federal Role Is to Guarantee a Floor

I have lived in Mississippi, Florida, California, and Virginia. The education a child receives in each is dramatically different. National average per-pupil spending in FY 2024 was about \$17,600. Mississippi's was roughly \$12,300 — among the five lowest in the nation. A child in Meridian receives a fraction of the resources a child in a higher-spending state receives. Title I narrows that gap. It does not close it.

The saying that you can predict a child's future by their zip code is not a cynical joke. It is a documented pattern — researchers at Opportunity Insights tracked roughly 20 million Americans and found that a child's adult earnings vary sharply from one neighborhood to the next. The purpose of the federal government here is the same as in much of what it does: to guarantee a floor, so that no child's future is decided entirely by where they happened to be born. There are people working to pull that floor out — to break up the Department of Education,

to hollow out Title I. A child in an underfunded district does not get a vote on that. I do, and I will use it to hold the floor and raise the bar.

Teachers and Librarians Are Not Political Targets

The job of a public school teacher is hard enough without being treated as a suspect by their own government. Virginia families lived through a state-run tip line aimed at teachers, and through fights in Loudoun and elsewhere over what books a child is allowed to check out from a school library. I will not vote for any federal version of that. Curriculum decisions belong with educators, parents, and local school boards — not federal bureaucrats and not partisan activists. Librarians are not the threat.

Mental Health Belongs in Schools

The kids who came up through the pandemic carry something the kids before them did not. Anxiety, depression, and isolation are showing up in classrooms at rates that overwhelm the people trying to help. The American School Counselor Association recommends one counselor for every 250 students. The national average is closer to one per 372. In Virginia, school-based mental health funding has been a yearly fight. The federal government can help — through Title IV grants, Medicaid reimbursement for school-based services, and counselor training pipelines. I will push for all of it.

Rural Schools Deserve a Real Federal Partner

Public schools in the Northern Neck, the Middle Peninsula, and the rural counties of the Historic Triangle face a different math problem than schools in Henrico or Chesterfield. Smaller tax bases, longer bus routes, harder teacher recruitment, and broadband that still does not reach every student's home. Rob Wittman has been promising to close this district's digital divide for the better part of two decades — he has said so himself. After all that time in Congress, families in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula still have children who cannot get online to do their homework. The promise keeps getting made. The connection still is not there. The Rural Education Achievement Program is a tool that works, and it is consistently underfunded. I will fight to fully fund REAP, finish the job on rural broadband for learning, and build a federal teacher-recruitment pipeline that actually shows up in small districts.

The Trades Built This Country

The country has a real problem. A majority of American high school graduates do not go on to earn a four-year degree, and for too long the system has been built around the ones who do. At the same time, the work that holds the physical country together — electrical, plumbing, HVAC, welding, machining, construction, manufacturing — is running out of people. The Department of Education has reported that for every five workers who retire from the skilled trades, only two enter to replace them. JLL projects 2.1 million unfilled trades positions by 2030, with potential economic losses approaching \$1 trillion a year. Associated Builders and Contractors says the construction industry alone needs roughly 349,000 new workers this year.

This is not a coming problem. It is here.

There has been one real step forward, and I believe in giving credit where credit is due, despite political differences. The 2025 federal budget law, referred to as the OBBB, created "Workforce Pell" — extending Pell Grants, set to take effect July 1, 2026, to short-term job-training programs as short as eight weeks, in fields like the skilled trades, healthcare, and IT. Despite my strong opposition to the vast majority of what that legislation did to harm working families, the Workforce Pell provision is a genuinely good policy, and I will defend it and work to strengthen it. It is worth noting the provision itself was bipartisan all down the line, even though the larger bill was not.

But the deeper problems remain. Students get almost no good information about non-degree paths. High school counseling still steers everyone toward four-year college by default. And the country badly underinvests in registered apprenticeships — the United States has roughly 600,000 in a workforce of 165 million, while Germany, with a much smaller workforce, has well over a million. A skilled electrician earning a real middle-class wage with no debt is not one rung below the four-year graduate, they are an American success story. We should applaud their decisions to go directly into the trades, support them along their educational path starting in high school, and stop building a system that quietly tells them they are anything less than the core of our nation's economic success and capability.

The FAFSA Parental-Income Problem

A 19-year-old whose parents could pay but simply refuse to has almost no recourse in the federal aid system. That can leave a young person locked out of college for a choice that was never theirs. The floor has to hold for them, too. The system needs a real pathway for students whose parents will not contribute.

Help for College Students — Without Hurting the Ones Who Didn't Go

About 38 percent of American adults hold a bachelor's degree. The other 62 percent do not. Broad, across-the-board student loan forgiveness directs resources toward a group that, on average, will out-earn the people who never attended college at all. Good education policy lifts the floor. So I support the targeted tools — Public Service Loan Forgiveness, income-driven forgiveness, real accountability for predatory institutions that leave students with debt and no degree. I do not support broad across-the-board forgiveness, because it asks the 62 percent to subsidize the 38.

Vouchers — Full Stop

Public taxes pay for public schools. Period. If you want to send your child to a private school, that is your right — and that choice comes with its cost. It does not come with a claim on the public school budget. I will vote against every federal voucher program and every tax-credit scholarship that routes public money to private schools, including the federal tax-credit scholarship program enacted in 2025 and set to take effect in 2027. I will work to repeal it before a single public dollar flows through it.

What I Will Do in Congress

Defend the Department of Education as a functioning agency. Fully fund IDEA (the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*) at the 40 percent of special-education costs Congress promised in 1975 and has never delivered. Defend and expand Title I. Make a major federal investment in career and technical education, registered apprenticeships, and rural schools through REAP. Tuition-free community college for in-demand fields. Pay teachers like the professionals they are. Defend Virginia's pre-K investment — the Virginia Preschool Initiative has been cut when it should be growing — and build the federal partnership that gets us to universal pre-K. Reform federal student aid so it actually works for vocational training, and create a real "parental refusal" pathway in the FAFSA. Pursue targeted student-debt relief — not broad, across-the-board forgiveness.

The federal government has one essential job in education: to make sure no American child's future is determined entirely by the zip code they were born into. That is what I am running to do — and whether it gets done comes down to who the people we send to Congress decide to show up for.