



Livonia PTSA Council - 15125 Farmington Rd, Livonia, MI 48154 - advocacy@livoniaptscouncil.org
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The Livonia PTSA Council sent eight (8) questions to the candidates running for the Michigan State House of Representatives District #11 (Livonia – part & Westland – part). Incumbent, Jewell Jones (Democrat) and Challenger, James Townsend (Republican), replied as follows (4 pages)...

Questions Regarding the Impact of the Coronavirus on Public Schools:

- 1) **Livonia Public Schools decided to start the school year with remote learning and will transition to in-person learning later (details are being worked out) based on the State's Return to Learn Roadmap. Since it is understood this is a fluid situation what is your position on how the state, county, and school district should work together going forward?**

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

Each School district should be allowed to operate independently based on local conditions and needs. It is difficult if not impossible to impose a "one size fit all solution" on all districts. Whether districts require students to physically attend school or use remote learning should be a local decision.

James Townsend:

The state should proceed the way it has: it is important for the children to be in school.

- 2) **Remote learning has highlighted inequities throughout the state and within school districts, what is the State Legislature's role in providing resources to address access to computers, WiFi, food, special education services, and other student supports?**

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on the state's budget but I firmly believe that the state should allocate funds to support remote learning as a priority.

James Townsend:

The State should be helpful and responsive to the needs of education, and the school should be prepared to demonstrate that these resources are in fact advancing of the students.

3) How do you feel CARES money and any other future relief packages should be allowed to be used for education?

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

CARES funds should definitely be used to provide PPE and safety for educators and students. These special funds should also be used to facilitate effective delivery of educational curriculum whether in the classroom or through remote learning. We need to make every effort to provide districts with sufficient resources to continue providing a quality education to all students.

James Townsend:

All money and relief packages should be used to improve education of students, with a high level of accountability.

4) As the state resolves budget gaps, how can education funding be protected? Especially considering it is predicted that school districts need additional funds to cover costs associated with our current health crisis.

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

It will be difficult to provide additional funding for education given the budgetary constraints. However, I am fully committed to fighting to not only protect current programs but seek additional funding for critical areas of need like Special Needs Education.

James Townsend:

School districts need to demonstrate results (measurable outcomes) and the money will be forthcoming.

Questions Relative to Educational Funding in Michigan:

- 5) In the last few years there have been studies that show Michigan's public K-12 education is underfunded. These studies also demonstrate that students with different needs require different monetary amounts to be educated. What is your position on these studies? As a state representative, how would you approach making sure school districts have proper funding to educate each child?

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

I agree that the education budget should prioritize the educational needs of students who fit in categories that require accommodations and specialized instruction. As a state representative, how would you approach making sure school districts have proper funding to educate each child? I believe we need or more equitable approach to funding schools, particularly schools in poorer communities. Public school funding is limited by an imperfect formula that does not equitably provide resources for all student education needs. I support re-thinking the way education is financed so that we are not funding by zip code but by the needs of unique instructional needs of the students who comprise the district.

James Townsend:

I believe a strong emphasis should be placed on reading and math skills, whatever it takes. Demonstrate that teachers have these competencies and the students are learning; otherwise we are just throwing money at the problems.

- 6) It has been more than 25 years since Proposal A was passed by the voters. How do you feel about how Michigan allocates funding for K-12 education recognizing the impact hold harmless districts have on educational inequities? What changes would you propose to address some of the challenges Proposal A has possibly created?

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

I believe school funding should be tied to the actual students in the district rather than where the district is located. Additionally, I do not believe spending by other school districts is a relevant factor to consider in establishing funding levels. It is clearly more expensive to educate special education students or students from impoverished communities.

James Townsend:

Schools statewide have experienced declining enrollment and therefore declining state funding under the per-pupil funding formula. The reason for the enrollment decline, is that anyone who can abandons the public school. Experimental teaching methods, and progressive agenda driven materials do not teach fundamentals. Students do not need classes on gender identity and social justice; and we don't need a math method that parents can't help their children with.

- 7) **In November the Wayne RESA Enhancement Millage will be back on the ballot for renewal. If the renewal passes, for the first time, Charter Schools will receive a share of the funding. Do you support renewal of this millage? How do you feel about Charter Schools benefiting from this tax?**

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

I support the millage renewal. I am concerned with Charter Schools benefiting from the tax if they are not held accountable to the same standards and requirements of public schools. We also need to ensure funding Charter Schools does not further limit resources and negatively affect public school finances.

James Townsend:

I support schools that can demonstrate results, so yes, charter schools should benefit.

- 8) **In recent years, Livonia Public Schools had a bond, sinking fund, and operating millages approved by the voters. How do you feel about these ballot initiatives and did you support them?**

Reply:

Jewell Jones:

I am a firm believer in "Home Rule" and believe local communities should determine how they vote on local funding issues. I believe Livonia residents are in the best position to determine whether to support or oppose these issues.

James Townsend:

Yes, I support the millages.