



Livonia PTSA Council - 15125 Farmington Rd, Livonia, MI 48154 - advocacy@livoniaptscouncil.org
 [10/4/2020]

The Livonia PTSA Council sent eight (8) questions to the candidates running for the Michigan State House of Representatives District #19 (Livonia). Incumbent, Laurie Pohutsky (Democrat) and Challenger, Martha Ptashnik (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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

What I found encouraging about the state's Return to Learn Roadmap, as well as subsequent legislation around heading back to school, was that it provided flexibility for districts to determine what setting (in person, virtual, etc.) worked best for them. Different communities have faced different challenges throughout the pandemic, and it is important that everyone involved recognizes there is no one-size-fits-all approach. That being said, the state needs to ensure that it is providing the resources and funding districts need to ensure students, teachers, and parents can feel safe and prepared for this school year. School districts are working with the county health departments to ensure they are operating safely and able to effectively and efficiently contact trace should there be COVID-19 cases in any of their schools. In my opinion, it is most important that each of these entities listen to educators and parents so they can best anticipate and solve the issues that will undoubtedly come up during this unprecedented time.

Martha Ptashnik:

Children undoubtedly have better learning outcomes when they receive in-person instruction. However, we must ensure that that we can provide our children with a healthy and safe environment before they return to school. As a teacher, department chair and a member of the leadership team for my school, I have worked closely with district administration and my colleagues to develop our back to school plan. As our next State Representative, I will work collaboratively with leaders from both sides of the aisle to ensure our schools have the resources and support in order for our students to succeed.

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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

Michigan is facing a budget deficit due to costs associated with the pandemic response. Resolving this deficit will mean we have to examine the budget carefully to determine where costs can be recouped from. However, it is pivotal that we ensure our school districts are fully funded in a way that will account for increased costs that will be incurred due to COVID-19. While it is important to especially focus on schools that have fewer resources to begin with, I'm committed to making sure that districts such as ours also remain a priority. Livonia has roughly 30% of its students who receive free or reduced lunch. While that figure falls below the benchmark that is required to often receive additional funds, it's important to keep in mind the additional resources required to ensure all students here in Livonia receive a quality education and have all of their needs met.

Martha Ptashnik:

When COVID-19 reached our state, it was clear that our schools were not prepared to educate our children during a pandemic. Since that time, local business and state leaders have taken steps to address some of the short comings. However, more needs to be done. As a teacher and a leader in my school, I have seen firsthand some of the roadblocks our district is facing and as our State Representative I will work to ensure that our public schools have all the resources that they need.

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

Reply:

Laurie Pohutsky:

I believe that CARES money should be used for costs associated with the changes the pandemic brought to this school year, such as IT costs and mental health resources. However, I also think it's tremendously important to allow districts a level of flexibility to use the funds in a way that will be most helpful. Each district faces a unique challenge and these funds should be used to help them face these challenges. Guidelines regarding how CARES dollars should be spent should provide enough latitude to accomplish this.

Martha Ptashnik:

The pandemic completely upended the way most schools operate, and the loss of tax revenue could also greatly impact education funding. Recognizing this potential funding loss Congress earmarked \$13.2 billion for k-12 schools through the CARES ACT. Each district will have varying and individualized needs. This is where local control is more important than ever. CARES money should be used to ensure that all students have access to a quality education and to control the number of students in a classroom.

- 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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

Holding the School Aid Fund harmless is the minimum we must do when it comes to the budget deficit we will be facing. Additional costs will best be covered by federal dollars granted to the state.

Martha Ptashnik:

I will work collaboratively with our federal and state partners to ensure funding is allocated on metrics that are based in realities that teachers and school administrators experience, not political ideology. Funding for education should not be a partisan issue, unfortunately to the detriment of our district, our current state representative has engaged in hyper partisanship around issues of education funding to the disadvantage of our Livonia students.

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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

I support equitable education funding. Every child deserves access to a world class public education, but that requires the understanding that not every child has at the same starting point. I support additional funds for at-risk students and struggling communities.

Martha Ptashnik:

Education is not a one-size fits all endeavor. As a professional educator I have the experience and I know what needs to be done to ensure that all our kids receive a quality education. Every child should have full access to an education that best prepares them to reach their full potential. We do need comprehensive independent studies that can properly document the costs to educate students with different needs. We also need to address how we are educating those students with special needs to ensure that we are providing them with the best education possible while being cost effective.

- 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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

While Proposal A has been beneficial to areas with lower property values, it has created issues with overall funding for public schools. The School Finance Research Collaborative studied how much it actually costs to educate students in Michigan. Based on the conclusions from the SFRC, I support raising the foundation allowance to \$9590 per student.

Martha Ptashnik:

The legislature has been working to address the inequities in funding. While it may not have been as fast as some of us would have liked, they are addressing the issue.

- 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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

I do support the millage because I support funding our schools. However, charter schools do not have to meet the same standards and accountability as our public schools. I do not support charter schools receiving public funds unless they face the same requirements as public schools.

Martha Ptashnik:

I believe our Livonia tax dollars are best spent on our Livonia schools. Livonia is a donor district, receiving just 0.40¢ on every dollar we send to Wayne RESA. Livonia students are not having their best interests considered when we take away funds that could be spent on them.

- 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:

Laurie Pohutsky:

I fully support any measures to fund our schools, including the ones outlined here.

Martha Ptashnik:

The voters of the Livonia public schools district have wisely voted to invest in our children's future by passing greatly needed bond issues and by renewing our operating millage and sinking fund. I voted yes on these critically needed sources of revenue to keep our Livonia public schools one of the most attractive districts for young families.