



Jim Himes: Educational Opportunity for Every American

Jim Himes believes that every child has a fundamental right to a world-class public school education.

Education is the cornerstone of the American Dream. Great schools create a vibrant economy, promote social mobility, and build an informed electorate. We cannot be the country we hope to be without great public schools.

Overall, our educational system is not good enough. We have failed to keep up with the unprecedented challenges facing young people today. Our high school students have fallen to the bottom third of developed countries in problem solving ability, math proficiency, and graduation rates. Unless we equip every young person with the skills for success in a technologically-based global market, our children and our economy will suffer.

The wide disparity between the academic performance of low-income and minority students on the one hand, and their higher-income white peers on the other is a moral outrage and a public policy catastrophe. In 2007, 45% of African-American fourth graders in Norwalk showed proficiency in reading, compared to 92% of white fourth graders in Wilton. Half of Latino eighth graders in Bridgeport were proficient in math, compared to 96% of white eighth graders in Greenwich. We should be proud of the stellar education that public schools are providing in many of our towns, but we cannot rest until first-rate education is available to every American child.

By improving our schools we can usher in a new era of economic prosperity for the next generation. In fact, just by lifting ourselves to the level of middle-performing European nations, we will add hundreds of billions of dollars to our GDP each year. More importantly, we can ensure that the American Dream remains within reach for every young person.

But our schools won't fix themselves. It will take leadership, energy, and a sustained commitment to delivering on the promise of public education.

Himes vs. Shays: What's the difference?

- **Jim Himes** wants to fundamentally overhaul the No Child Left Behind law (see p. 2). **Chris Shays** voted to punish schools that didn't meet NCLB standards, even if they never received the NCLB funding they were promised.
- **Jim Himes** wants to expand early childhood education (see p. 4). **Chris Shays** has voted to make major cutbacks in funding for Head Start, eliminating 9,500 slots for children nationwide.
- **Jim Himes** wants to create a new, generous college tuition tax credit to help middle-class families send their kids to college (see p. 6). **Chris Shays** cast the deciding vote for the largest cut in student loans ever – \$13 billion.
- **Jim Himes** wants to make major new investments in our public schools (see p. 4). **Chris Shays** supports shifting federal money from public schools to private schools.

In Congress, Jim Himes will:

1. Fix No Child Left Behind so that it is fair, effective, and fully funded

Give struggling schools the intensive assistance they need to succeed, not counterproductive punishments – and employ assessments that fairly measure the progress of individual students.

2. Give every child access to high-quality early childhood education

Make high-quality preschool available to every child who doesn't have it, so that all of our kids enter kindergarten ready to learn.

3. Attract and retain first-rate teachers and principals

Provide incentives to encourage promising young people to become educators; support new teachers through mentoring and peer assistance; and reward experienced and qualified teachers who take on the challenges of our struggling urban schools.

4. Close the achievement gap by bringing new resources to high-poverty schools and empowering educators to implement proven best practices

Equip high-poverty schools with the resources they need to deploy proven strategies for success – including expanded learning time, increased family engagement, and data-driven educational planning.

5. Expand access to higher education

Offer every American student the opportunity to go to college, opening the critical gateway to the middle class and success in today's demanding job market.

6. Restore and modernize school facilities to make them productive learning environments

Ensure that every child attends an inviting, safe school whose physical infrastructure reflects and exhibits the value we place on education as a society.

1. Fix No Child Left Behind so that it is fair, effective, and fully funded

The basic goals of the No Child Left Behind Act – monitoring our educational progress and identifying struggling schools – are critical, but the execution of this program by the federal government has been disastrous. There are three key areas that Jim Himes will prioritize in reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act: reforming assessments and testing requirements; redesigning accountability mechanisms so that they help struggling schools improve, rather than heaping counterproductive penalties on them; and increasing federal resources.

a. Reform assessments

When it comes to an enterprise as critical as our schools, we have to know where we stand and where we should focus our resources to make further gains. Just as plainly, assessments are only valuable when they are smart, holistic, and fair. When they are misleading, ineffective, and burdensome – as has often been the case under NCLB – they only undermine the objectives of tracking our progress and better educating our kids.

In Congress, Jim will prioritize several measures to reform assessments under NCLB. First, assessments of a school's progress should employ growth models that reflect the educational gains individual students make over the course of a year in school. In addition to making the NCLB assessment process more fair, this approach will also create opportunities for targeted educational interventions. For example, using data-driven tracking systems, school districts can implement "early warning systems" that identify future dropouts by ninth grade or earlier – enabling school leaders to intervene and get these students back on track before it's too late. Jim will call for new funding to help school districts invest in these technologies, train personnel in how to use them effectively, and develop data-driven assessment strategies.

Second, our approach to assessments should acknowledge the obvious truth that a great education is about much more than the ability to fill in bubbles on standardized tests. In Congress, Jim will support efforts to encourage the use of multiple measures for judging the effectiveness of our schools under NCLB – including not only traditional test scores, but also graduation and attendance rates, performance or portfolio assessments, and other holistic metrics. In addition, Jim will work to ensure that NCLB assessments treat students with disabilities and students learning English appropriately.

b. Reform accountability measures so that they help schools improve

We should hold schools accountable for results, but we have to do so in a way that helps struggling schools succeed. Under current law, NCLB imposes one-size-fits-all solutions that can actually hamper schools' efforts to improve.

For example, if a school is struggling to achieve "adequate yearly progress" in one subgroup of its student body, the school should be empowered to develop a tailored plan for better meeting the needs of this population. In addition, NCLB's mandated outside tutoring programs should be financed separately, so that underperforming schools are not forced to take money out of the classroom and fall even further behind. Finally, NCLB should not funnel students out of a school before investing in supplemental educational services to help the school get back on track. In Congress, Jim will support efforts to reform the accountability measures of NCLB so that we cultivate and reward success in our schools.

c. Deliver full authorized funding for federal mandates

No Child Left Behind has made enormous requirements of state and local governments, but the federal government has not provided the resources necessary to meet these demands. As Ted Kennedy, the legislation's initial sponsor, remarked, "The tragedy is that these long overdue reforms are finally in place, but the funds are not." As a result, local governments have been forced to raise property taxes to carry out NCLB's unfunded mandates – placing an onerous burden on towns and cities throughout our district.

In total, the annual budget shortfall created by No Child Left Behind in the Fourth District is nearly \$50 million. In Congress, Jim will work to relieve this burden on our towns and cities by fighting for full funding of NCLB.

2. Give every child access to high-quality early childhood education

Early childhood is a critical stage of development with enduring consequences for a person's future life prospects. Connecticut kindergarten teachers consistently report that children who attended a preschool program show greater readiness for learning – from math and reading to emotional development and social skills – than those who did not. This differential plays out over time in the form of the “achievement gap,” the wide disparity between the academic performance of low-income and minority students on the one hand, and their higher-income white peers on the other. Even though this is well known, today less than half of poor children attend preschool.

In Congress, Jim Himes will fight to make sure that every child has access to high-quality early childhood education. In addition to increasing both the availability and the quality of Head Start and Early Head Start, Jim supports providing matching grant funding to state-based programs. To raise the bar for preschool quality, we must invest in professional development and recruit trained professionals who understand that preschool is a critical stage in a child's education. Finally, we should promote transparency in pre-kindergarten education, so that parents know which programs actually work.

These investments are motivated by our best values, but they are also recommended by simple common sense. Research has shown that we get a \$7 return on every dollar spent on high-quality early childhood education. Investing in early childhood education makes sense in the budget and in the classroom. Jim will fight to expand it in Congress.

3. Attract and retain first-rate teachers and principals

Teachers are the single most important factor in a child's education. It takes great teachers to deliver great education. Nevertheless, we face significant obstacles in recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly in our “hard-to-staff” urban schools.

In Congress, Jim Himes will fight for a new human capital strategy for our schools, focused on filling the pipeline with high-quality candidates, cutting down on attrition, drawing teachers to the schools where we need them most, investing in professional development, and equipping principals to serve as effective school leaders.

First, Jim is proposing a substantial federal investment to help school districts augment the salaries of qualified teachers who choose to teach in our “hard-to-staff” schools. Right now the incentives for excellent teachers are upside-down: the school districts where they are most needed are often least able to attract them. Without circumventing collective bargaining agreements, Jim will work to make resources

available to high-poverty school districts to help them attract great teachers through salary supplements, rewarding teachers for going where they are most needed.

Second, Jim will call for an ROTC-style scholarship program for promising young people who commit to teaching in high-need schools after graduation. Similar programs at the state level have brought thousands of young people into the teaching profession. On the national level, we can create tens of thousands of these scholarships each year – helping young people go to college while enlisting top-tier candidates to serve as teachers for the next generation of students.

Third, Jim is proposing to tackle the problem of attrition among new teachers head-on by increasing peer mentorship and induction assistance for novice teachers. Under this model, the federal government will provide states and school districts with dedicated resources to enlist veteran teachers in intensive mentorship programs, providing the support that new entrants to the field need to succeed. Research confirms that new teachers who receive this kind of direct support from experienced colleagues are both more effective as teachers and less likely to leave the profession. The Connecticut General Assembly is in the process of devising a new mentorship-based program for teachers, but it will not succeed without significant financial resources.

Fourth, Jim will invest federal resources in recruiting and training the exceptional principals we will need to lead successful turnarounds in our struggling schools. This means equipping districts with the funds they need to undertake the expensive training programs that have consistently proved most effective, such as residency-style apprenticeships. Jim will work to make federal funding available to school districts to help support this kind of professional development, both in-house and through work with successful university-based programs and non-profits.

Finally, under current law we are actively discouraging professionals in other fields from transitioning into teaching as a second career, because we require them to forfeit the Social Security payouts they have already earned in the private sector. Meanwhile, these same Social Security offset rules unfairly deny the normal Social Security spousal benefit to spouses and widows who are teachers, even if their husbands and wives paid into Social Security for an entire career. To ensure fairness for teachers – and to stop these provisions from deterring people from becoming teachers in the first place – Jim will support repeal of the WEP and GPO rules for Social Security.

4. Close the achievement gap by bringing new resources to high-poverty schools and empowering educators to implement proven best practices

The wide disparity between the academic performance of low-income and minority students on the one hand, and their higher-income white peers on the other, is both a moral outrage and a public policy catastrophe.

Without taking anything away from the better-off schools, we can combat this inequality through increased federal grants for high-poverty schools and districts –

enabling them to attract strong teachers, and providing them with resources to implement strategies with a proven track record of closing the achievement gap. Jim Himes will call for the federal government to invest in studying successful urban schools, analyzing what works, and helping other school districts to take these best practices to scale across our educational system.

For example, schools that have made gains in closing the achievement gap have often found ways to increase instructional time, including by extending the school day or the school year. Expanded learning time gives teachers the chance to explore topics in greater depth, more time to devote to hands-on learning activities, and more opportunities to work intensively with students who need extra help.

In addition, successful urban schools often use sophisticated data collection to monitor the specific needs of individual students, crafting individualized data-driven educational plans. They generally employ innovative approaches to help parents become involved in their children's education, such as hiring a dedicated Family Resource Coordinator as a member of the teaching team. And these schools send their students to engaging, high-quality programs over the summer, when research suggests much of the achievement gap takes root.

In Congress, Jim will call for the federal government to take a leadership role in supporting school districts that want to put best practices like these in place – including making federal resources available to cover a substantial portion of the costs of these and other proven strategies. This initiative would not take the form of a top-down mandate, and it would not undermine the collective bargaining process for teachers. Rather, Jim believes that the federal government should assist the many educators who want to implement these best practices, but can't do so without expert guidance and added resources.

5. Expand access to higher education

A college diploma is a critical first step to achieving the American Dream. Over the course of a career, a college graduate will earn on average \$1 million more than a high school graduate without a college degree. But with tuition costs spiraling out of control, hard-working kids from middle-class families are being priced out of a college education – and the economic opportunity that comes with it. At the same time, many parents who can still afford to send their kids to college are cutting back on other important expenditures to do so. Access to higher education is a pillar of the American Dream that we cannot allow to crumble.

Jim Himes is proposing a generous, refundable Higher Education Tax Credit equal to 50% of the first \$10,000 in college costs per student – effectively \$5,000 per student for most eligible families. This benefit will be available for all four years of college, or for other eligible post-secondary educational costs, and it will be open to joint-filing families with combined incomes up to \$250,000 per year. The Higher Education Tax Credit will offer substantially more assistance than is available under current law, simplify the tax

code, and ensure that America continues to produce the most educated and most prosperous workforce in the world.

In addition to reducing the cost of college, we must ensure that every student receives effective guidance throughout the process of applying to college – and that every high school graduate is well prepared to succeed when he or she arrives on campus. For this reason, Jim will support expanding federal programs such as GEAR UP, which help low-income students gain access to resources for college preparation.

6. Restore and modernize urban school facilities to make them more productive learning environments

Many of our schools, particularly in our cities, are literally falling apart. If we want our kids to value education and succeed in school, we need to invest in creating inviting and productive school environments.

Nationwide, many teachers report working in classrooms with crumbling walls, rodent infestations, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and severe overcrowding. A national study recently confirmed that these poor internal environments take a real toll on the health, performance, and attendance of students.

Our school buildings should reflect the value we place on education as a society. In Congress, Jim Himes will support legislation to extend and increase the availability of school modernization bonds that enable local school districts to undertake needed repairs and renovations. Under this model, the federal government effectively waives the interest on eligible loans for school modernization and expansion projects, substantially reducing the cost of these jobs.