

Mike Honda's Focus on Education

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Mike Honda first and foremost is an educator. He has spent over thirty years in education as a teacher, vice-principal, principal, and school board member. In 2000, Mike brought his commitment to an excellent and equitable education for each and every child to Congress. His has continued to fight to improve each and every child's education through the implementation of equitable school funding models, rigorous clinical preparation sites for teacher training, and a focus on early childhood education.

In 1965, Mike answered President Kennedy's call for volunteer service, by spending two years building schools in El Salvador as a Peace Corps volunteer, which sparked Mike's lifelong passion for teaching and learning.

When he returned, he earned a Master of Education degree from San Jose State University. Mike taught science in Sunnyvale, CA, conducted research on education at Stanford University, and served as a principal in San Jose, CA .

In 1981, Mike was elected to the San Jose Unified School Board and served for 9 years. He was subsequently elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, where he served from 1990 through 1996. He also served on the California Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission for four years.

In 1996, Mike was elected to the California State Assembly, where he was posted to the Committee on Education and helped to draft legislation to reduce class size and increase teachers' overall benefits. In the Assembly, Mike secured funding to bring Plugged-In, a national award-winning program using technology to enhance education, to the underserved area of East Palo Alto.

Mike was elected to Congress in 2000, and from 2001-2006 served on the House Science Committee, which has jurisdiction over science education efforts at the National Science Foundation, NASA, NOAA, and other federal science agencies.

In 2007, he earned a seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee, where he is a member of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science.

Mike's legislative record is broad and diverse, reflecting his passion to improve education in all facets and his commitment to bringing equity to the educational system.

Mike's Educational Philosophy

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Mike's educational philosophy, priorities and policies have always been shaped by looking through the lens of equity: the notion that each and every child in the American public school system deserves the same set of opportunities by attending their neighborhood public school. One of his primary driving passions is to bring educational equity to the American public schools. It has been one of the great fights for justice in his life, and a major focus of his work in Congress. As President Obama has acknowledged, education is the single greatest civil rights issue of our time. Mike believes that our nation will only attain educational excellence once we implement educational equity.

Lack of equity in the American public school system has historical roots. At the very beginning of our country's origin, the federal government lacked the capacity and authority to take charge over an American public school system. Before the Constitution was drafted, the thirteen colonies operated under the Articles of Confederation, created by the Second Continental Congress. The Articles of Confederation could only be amended by unanimous vote of the states; the states had effective veto power over any proposed changes. Additionally, the Articles gave the weak federal government no taxing power. As a result, the federal government had no power to force delinquent states to pay. Rhode Island boycotted the Constitutional Convention in hopes of preventing any changes to the Articles. When the Constitution was presented to the state representatives, Rhode Island again showed obstinacy and refused to ratify the document. In order to placate this state, the Tenth Amendment was drafted in order to cede broad authority to the state government, in this case to operate public schools.

As states developed their own public education systems, disparities within those systems also developed based on race, socio-economic standing and other factors. Exacerbating the problem for some communities was the use of local property taxes to finance local schools. Simply put, schools with students living in wealthier neighborhoods received more tax dollars by virtue of the revenues generated by local property taxes. Schools serving students in poorer neighborhoods received less funding based on lower property tax revenues.

Mike believes that this inequity should be covered by the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which gives citizens the right to due process and equal protection under the law. If states don't protect their citizens, then the federal government has the responsibility to ensure that due process and equal protection under the law is given to each and every citizen

Mike believes that there are three major themes around which the policy discussions regarding

education reform should focus: restricting our school funding for public schools; increased opportunity for quality pre-kindergarten programs; and greater emphasis on clinical teacher preparation programs.

The federal government provides only about ten percent of public education funding. The *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez* decision of 1973 effectively removed federal courts from school finance discussions. Because of this decreased role of the federal government, state governments have remained mostly immune to federal efforts to reform education policy.

As a means of leveling the playing field with educational opportunity, the Federal government became involved in financing education and ensuring civil rights through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 took the principle of equity a step further with the hope of providing educational equity and excellence through this federal mandate.

In order to address the gaps in funding, the American public must understand and distinguish between parity and equity. Parity is built on the premise that all schools will receive the same funding despite the needs of the individual learner. Equity is built on the premise that school funding will fund the child based on their individual needs. Only by addressing the individual needs of the child, regardless of cost per public, can true equity in the American public school system be created. In order to accomplish this all-important task, we must address the way we finance public education and direct resources to strengthen student learning. Mike sees this more than just an achievement gap within public schools; he sees it as an opportunity gap.

Currently, the United States is confronting two opportunity gaps that threaten the future of our communities. The first gap separates our communities by class and ethnicity. This attacks the very principle our great Democracy was founded upon: a promise of equal opportunity for all no matter the origins of birth, race or social class. Public school education was to be the tool through which our society strove to deliver on the promise of the American Dream.

The second opportunity gap that is being created in the United States is now found between the US and other nations. The United States spends more per pupil money on each child its public schools, yet our achievement in reading, science and math has declined over the past thirty years compared to our international colleagues. Our economic competitiveness and viability diminishes as a result. The only way for the United States to remain a leader on the global stage is to build the most competitive economy that is supported by a highly skilled and agile workforce. Unfortunately, the United States ranks among the highest compared to other developed countries in childhood poverty rates. This undoubtedly has an impact on health and wellness of our society.

Mike sees that the opportunity gaps threaten the very authenticity of the American Dream by not allowing a child equal access to reach their fullest potential. It's an actual attack on the purity of the American Dream itself because it threatens the viability of achieving social mobility and entrance into a strong middle-class lifestyle.

The very foundation of American Democracy is built on the premise of having strong public schools in order to safeguard civic engagement and civic knowledge. Mike holds these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal. He will continue his quest to create equity in our public schools there by ensuring the protection of our democracy of our great United States of America.

