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Detroit Rises: Let's find common ground on education

BY REGINALD M. TURNER JR.

What do Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and Govs. Jennifer Granholm and Rick Snyder have in common?

They have all advocated for greater accountability in public education.

Bush and Sen. Edward Kennedy put aside partisan differences to create No Child Left Behind — federal legislation aimed at improving U.S. education in elementary, middle and high schools by requiring standard measurements for student achievement. NCLB mandated special emphasis on tracking and reporting on subgroups, including students of color and students with disabilities, in order for schools to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress under the statute.

Obama built on NCLB with his Race to the Top legislation, challenging school districts to compete for federal grants awarded for innovative programs to improve student achievement. Granholm built a bipartisan coalition in the Michigan House and Senate to pass legislation so Michigan could compete for Race to the Top funds, and Snyder has followed her innovation with his own efforts to promote greater accountability for student achievement.

Education should not be a partisan issue. The leaders above found common ground on the concept that our nation and state will fall farther behind our international competitors if we fail to improve the quality of education in our schools.

We need to establish excellence in education by increasing graduation rates, raising ACT scores and making rigorous STEM and career-technical education available to all. We also need easy-to-understand school quality measurements to help parents choose the best schools for their children.

We must stabilize funding for schools and hold school leaders accountable for managing resources properly. Too many Michigan school districts have budget deficits, and the number grows each year, even as the Great Recession has ended. Detroit Public Schools has been under some form of state control for the majority of the last 15 years, and the district's intractable budget deficits have persisted. Student achievement still lags.

We cannot afford to doom another generation of Detroit's children to substandard education.

Moreover, our statewide level of achievement, as measured by the ACT, is significantly below the national average. There is much work to do.

Now is the time for all education stakeholders — parents, teachers, unions, business organizations and our elected officials — to come together and agree on a five-year plan for educational excellence and fiscal stability.



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The plan should be ambitious and achievable. It should include more measurement and transparency, not less. It should promote longer school days and school years. It should double down on early childhood education programs.

Michigan is a great state with a marvelous history of leading the nation in innovation and productivity. We can regain that leading role if we invest in our young people and hold ourselves accountable for their achievement.

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Reginald M. Turner Jr. is a highly skilled litigator and lobbyist. He is named in the peer review guides The Best Lawyers in America, Super Lawyers®, DBusiness Top Lawyers, and Crain's Detroit Power Lawyers. He has successfully litigated labor, employment, commercial and public policy matters in state and federal courts and administrative tribunals, and in grievance and interest arbitrations. His experience includes successful defense of class action cases in state and federal courts. Reginald is a past president of the National Bar Association and past president of the State Bar of Michigan. He is chair of the American Bar Association Presidential Appointments Committee, chair of the ABA House of Delegates Rules & Calendar Committee, and the ABA State Delegate from Michigan. He is a Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation, an honor reserved to less than 1 percent of lawyers in each state. **Contact him at 313-965-8318 or rturner@clarkhill.com.**

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