

# A World-Class Education for Every Child

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**Education is at the heart of America's promise of opportunity for all.** Tom's mother was a teacher in New York Public Schools and he understands the importance of public education to a just, democratic, and prosperous society. He will fight against decades of underinvestment and inequities to ensure that every child has access to a world-class education that provides them with the skills to thrive — as participants in our democracy, society, and economy.

Education has never been more important to an individual's career prospects or our country's economic growth than it is today. [Almost all new jobs](#) require some postsecondary education or training, making a high school diploma an absolute essential. And yet [15 percent](#) of our students — and significantly [higher rates](#) among students of color — are not graduating from high school on time, or ever. These kids are being left behind in our modern economy, consigned to a life of low wages and unrealized potential.

Our collective prosperity is also at stake. The only way for the U.S. to maintain its global economic position is to continue to out-innovate the rest of the world with the best-educated and best-trained workforce. Currently, American students perform poorly in key subjects compared to other students from advanced industrial economies. In math, for example, the typical American student is a [full year behind](#) the average in peer nations. And by the time American students reach fourth grade, [two out of three](#) are not reading proficiently.

Decades of underinvestment in our K-12 schools and our teachers, along with unequal distribution of public resources, have eroded the promise of public education. **The lottery of birth should never determine a child's fate. But in this country today, [a child's zip code and color of their skin](#) do predict the quality of education and opportunities they will receive.** Rather than serving as the great equalizer of fates, America's public education system further widens inequality because K-12 school funding formulas are largely based on the local property tax base. Students attending schools with the highest rates of poverty are receiving, on average, about [\\$1,000 less in funding](#) for their education than their peers in districts with the lowest rates of poverty.

Despite the rhetoric from Washington politicians, our country has never prioritized education in the way we need to. Tom believes a budget is a statement of values and priorities. Since taking office, Donald Trump has dramatically ramped up defense spending while calling for deeper cuts to education funding. Our nation now spends [\\$100 billion more](#) per year on the defense budget than it did in 2015, an astronomical and nonsensical amount for a nation that already had been spending more than the [next seven countries combined](#). **The security of our country depends not only on its military might but also on its economic competitiveness, and the skills and readiness of its people.**

**Tom will roll back Trump’s unnecessary increases to defense spending and use this money to double federal investment in preK-12 education, targeting it to equalize educational resources and learning opportunities.** Tom will use this investment to help every student graduate from high school on time — and with a clear pathway to a career or college. He will also revitalize civic education so that high school graduates become informed and engaged voters. Tom’s plan will not only improve the quality of education every student receives regardless of their zip code, but it will also address the significant barriers outside of school that hinder academic performance. Tom’s investments in our education system will be made in tandem with other [major social investments and policy reforms](#) to address child poverty, homelessness, access to health care, and the system of mass incarceration that keeps parents away from their children.

Tom believes that the smartest investment a society can make is in its people. Every dollar put into our education system is an investment in our country’s future economic growth and prosperity. But this is about more than just the economy — it’s also about the kind of society we want to live in. A thriving economy, a robust democracy, and a fair society all demand that we act with urgency to fulfill the lost promise of our schools.

## **Tom will invest in attracting and retaining excellent educators.**

Raising the bar on educational outcomes starts with investing in our educators — and giving them the respect and support they deserve. Tom recognizes that teachers have one of the most important jobs in America — they are responsible for preparing the workforce of tomorrow, contributing to our young people’s moral and ethical development, and inspiring our children to invent new technologies that will drive our future economy. Great teachers can change the course of a child’s life. [Research](#) shows that teachers influence student learning outcomes more than any other factor within a school setting. Recruiting, developing, and retaining the best and brightest educators should be one of our country’s top priorities.

And yet teachers today feel overburdened by large class sizes and increasing responsibilities, and undervalued for their service. Too many teachers struggle to get by and are [forced to work multiple jobs](#). Burnout from mounting responsibilities, lack of support, and poor pay have resulted in a [teacher shortage](#) that is especially acute in high-poverty schools.

Tom stands with the teachers unions that went on strike in 2018 and 2019 to fight for more school resources, better learning conditions and higher pay. In the White House, he will continue the fight to elevate the teaching profession and our entire educator workforce. Tom will:

- **Compensate educators as highly-skilled professionals.** Teachers earn [21 percent less](#) than other professions requiring a similar level of education and skill set, and [13 percent less](#) when looking at total compensation including benefits. Our teachers and other school staff deserve a salary commensurate with the training, skill and importance of the job. The Steyer administration will match every additional dollar states and districts spend on raising teacher pay at a 2-to-1 ratio until the compensation gap is closed. And for teacher's assistants and other support staff, the federal government will match pay increases on a 1-to-1 basis.
- **Immediately forgive student loans for teachers after 10 years of service.** Tom will make sure our teachers are not drowning in debt by upholding and reforming the [Public Service Loan Forgiveness program](#). He will instruct his Secretary of Education to use executive action to make good on the federal government's promise of debt forgiveness for public servants who worked for 10 years and made 120 loan payments.
- **Support teaching excellence through ongoing professional development.** Good teachers grow into great teachers with the right mentoring and training. Many teachers today, however, are not equipped to deal with the classroom challenges they face and do not have access or time to receive appropriate training. All teachers should have access to high-quality professional development activities, including training in cultural competency, positive behavior techniques, teaching students with disabilities, and best practices for students who have experienced trauma. Tom will increase Title II spending on both direct professional development programs and research to identify the most effective activities.
- **Fill the teacher shortage with qualified and diverse educators.** [Too few people are choosing to go into the teaching profession](#), and this is especially true for [people of color](#). High-poverty districts, in particular, struggle to attract and retain great teachers. In addition to addressing the poor learning conditions and compensation issues that deter potential candidates, the Steyer administration will also tackle the financial barriers associated with teacher training programs by increasing [TEACH grants](#). He will promote alternative credentialing pathways — such as Teacher Residencies and Grow-Your-Own Teacher programs — that cultivate greater educator diversity and effectiveness. To further build a more diverse teacher pipeline, he will launch a grant program to establish teacher preparation centers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

- **Double the number of school nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists and community resource coordinators.** Teachers are leaving the profession because they are [burnt out and frustrated by the lack of support and by challenging school conditions](#). To allow teachers to focus on teaching, we must fully staff our schools to meet the full range of student needs.

## Tom will work to close the school readiness gap.

Restoring equality of opportunity in this country and closing the achievement gap must start with investments early in a child's life during peak brain development. Close to [90 percent of brain growth](#) occurs before age six. By the time a child from a low-income family enters kindergarten, they are already at a [significant learning disadvantage](#), lagging behind their more affluent peers in both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. When a child starts off with an educational deficit, it is hard to overcome through subsequent schooling.

Tom understands that investing in the early years can transform a child's life, and benefit society overall by strengthening the economy and saving taxpayer dollars. To support early childhood development and learning, Tom will:

- **Guarantee free, universal access to high-quality preschool.** Tom will ensure all families can enroll their 3- and 4-year-olds in a high-quality preschool, staffed with teachers with similar qualifications and compensation to their K-12 counterparts. [Research](#) has shown that attending a preschool with diverse socio-economic and racial groups enhances low-income children's language development and school readiness.
- **Expand Early Head Start program for children under 3.** The first 1,000 days of life are critical to a child's brain development and lay a foundation for later learning and success. The health, nutrition, and environment of young children shape their brain development. The Early Head Start program provides vital services to low-income pregnant women and families with kids under age three to ensure healthy child development. Currently, Early Head Start only enrolls [11 percent](#) of eligible families. Tom will expand eligibility to 150 percent of the poverty line and increase funding to guarantee services for every eligible family who wants to participate.

## Tom will guarantee that every child has access to a world-class education.

Every American should have the right to a quality public education — no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or their family's income. But today our schools are [resegregating](#), creating an unequal public education system that favors white, more affluent students.

None of this is inevitable — if the U.S. had continued to make similar progress toward school integration and equity in the 1970s and early 1980s, we would have [closed the achievement gap](#) long ago. The Steyer administration will renew the fight for educational equity in terms of access to resources, excellent teachers, rigorous academics, and learning opportunities. As president, Tom will:

- **Equalize investment in our public schools.** To tackle the resourcing gap, Tom will triple Title I funding to low-income students and better target those funds to ensure they reach students most in need. Because the vast majority of school funding comes from local and state sources, his administration also will incentivize states to adopt more equitable school funding formulas.
- **Support locally-led desegregation efforts.** Separate is never equal. And yet our schools remain deeply segregated along racial and socio-economic lines more than 65 years after the [Brown v Board of Education](#) case. Tom will recommit our country toward one integrated public school system by funding locally-led efforts to tackle the issue of segregation. And he will allow states and districts to use federal funding for busing if that is part of their plan. In addition, Tom will expand the number of “magnet schools” — public schools with a specialized curriculum that attract diverse students from surrounding areas. Under a Steyer Administration, the Department of Justice and the Department of Education will work together to monitor and enforce students’ civil rights, and any changes to school district boundaries will require federal pre-clearance to evaluate the racial and socio-economic impact.
- **Fix our crumbling school buildings and bring all schools into the 21st century.** In some parts of the country, students are attending dilapidated schools not conducive to learning. Tom will invest \$100 billion over 10 years to upgrade school facilities for the 21st century, including updating technology and expanding broadband access, especially for rural schools. This builds off of Tom’s record in California where he was instrumental in the passage of [Proposition 39](#), a ballot initiative that generated \$1.7 billion to upgrade school facilities by closing a corporate loophole.
- **Provide coordinated social services through 25,000 Community Schools.** [Out-of-school factors](#) like poverty, health, nutrition and toxic stress influence student success as much as what happens in a classroom. Tom will invest in a network of 25,000 Community Schools by 2025 to address these factors and support student learning. Community schools are traditional public schools — typically with a high proportion of students in poverty — that are designed to meet the full needs of students and their families through close coordination of social services with community partners. As part of their extended services, Community Schools will offer free afterschool and summer enrichment programs that are typically out of reach for low-income students.
- **Ensure every student in need receives a nutritious meal.** Tom understands the importance of healthy, fresh food to student learning. He and his wife Kat launched [“California Food for California Kids,”](#) a program that now serves more than 300 million healthy meals annually to school kids using natural food from California farms. Tom supports continuing to expand farm-to-school programs across the nation, which connect schools with fresh produce from local farms. His administration also aims to increase the number of eligible students who take advantage of free or reduced-price meals. Many eligible students from low-income families — especially in high school when peer pressure is strongest — would rather use their own limited money to buy snacks or go hungry than take a subsidized meal due to the stigma attached. The

Steyer administration will provide funding for schools to make changes to the way they run cafeterias so that students receiving subsidized meals cannot be easily identified.

- **Freeze charter school expansion and increase accountability.** The way to fix our public education system is not by working around it through charter schools or school vouchers, but by dealing directly with the challenges such as funding disparities and segregation. Tom would follow the NAACP's recommendation to ban for-profit charter schools, and freeze federal funding for new non-profit charter schools. Under a Steyer administration, existing non-profit charter schools would be held to the same standards as traditional public schools.
- **Support students with disabilities.** Tom will fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to ensure every child receives the education they deserve.

## Tom will work to raise high school graduation rates.

Our country needs every student to graduate from high school for the sake of our economy and democracy. The U.S. graduation rate is roughly [85 percent](#), and the picture is worse for students of color and students from low-income families. [One in four American-Indian students and close to one in five African-American and Hispanic students](#) are not completing high school on time or ever.

Raising the graduation rate to 90 percent would add [\\$5.7 billion](#) to the economy and unlock new opportunities for millions of students who were at risk of dropping out. High school drop-outs earn [\\$10,000](#) less per year than graduates, and are more likely to be unemployed, and [more likely to end up in prison](#). African-American men without a high school diploma have a [nearly 70 percent chance](#) of going to prison by their mid-thirties.

**Tom is committed to cutting the dropout rate in half by the end of his first term and achieving near universal high school completion by the end of his second term.** A Steyer administration will work hand-in-hand with states, school leaders and parents to make sure we address the many out-of-school barriers, as well as poor school learning conditions and resources, that are holding kids back. Tom understands the importance of investing across the continuum of child development and education in order to raise graduation rates. Alongside investments in other key areas aimed at improving instructional quality and educational outcomes, Tom will:

- **Establish a Presidential Task Force on Graduation Rates.** The task force would oversee the strategy to raise graduation rates and coordinate implementation between federal agencies and states. The interagency nature of the task force recognizes that raising graduation rates not only involves public schools but also requires tackling poverty, health, nutrition, community violence, mass incarceration and other major social issues. The task force will be in charge of monitoring progress, and recommending additional measures or policy changes needed to hit target graduation rates.

- **Require states to come up with a plan for raising graduation rates.** States will need to show a strategic plan as to how they will meet the first graduation rate target by 2025, while maintaining high educational standards. [Reports](#) have suggested that improvements in graduation rates in the last decade may have been achieved by lowering standards. If diplomas don't represent well-established learning outcomes and skill level, they are nothing more than meaningless pieces of paper. A Steyer administration will provide funding to states to help implement pilot programs and adopt best practices, targeting investment to the [roughly 2,000 high schools](#) with unacceptably low graduation rates.
- **Launch the Every Child Reads Initiative.** Raising graduation rates begins with helping students hit key educational milestones from an early age. Proficiency in reading is a key building block to learning. [Nearly 90 percent](#) of high school dropouts could not read proficiently by the end of third grade. Tom will establish the Every Child Reads Initiative, which commits new resources to the goal of helping every student read proficiently by the end of third grade. In addition to investing in universal, high-quality preschool, the Steyer administration also will direct more resources toward improving the way reading is taught. Many teachers continue to use reading strategies that have been debunked by the [latest cognitive research](#). These teachers need additional training and support to implement a newer and better approach.
- **Provide a tutor to every struggling student.** Many students feel that the system gives up on them when they fall behind in school and so they give up on themselves. Overstretched teachers who want to help every student succeed cannot always provide the level of individual attention needed, and most families cannot afford an expensive tutor for their child. The Steyer administration will pair every student performing below grade level with a tutor participating in Tom's [National Service Program](#). Tutors can provide individualized support to a student, answer questions that may not always be addressed in a crowded classroom, and personalize instruction to help kids get up to speed on reading, math, and other academic subjects. [Research](#) shows that effective tutors can raise a student's test scores and grades.
- **Keep our kids out of jail and in school.** Every night, more than [48,000](#) youth will go to sleep in a correctional facility. Once a youth enters the criminal justice system, they can become trapped in a cycle of recidivism that is hard to escape. Tom's [Criminal Justice plan](#) decriminalizes truancy and focuses on measures that will keep our kids in school. Under a Steyer administration, the Department of Education will discourage zero tolerance policies that have shown racial bias, and will instead promote educator and staff training on positive behavioral interventions for students who get into trouble. Tom's commitment to doubling the number of nurses, mental health professionals, counselors, and social workers will ensure that schools can turn to appropriate professionals for struggling students, instead of police officers.



# Tom will ensure that every student graduates ready to succeed in our 21st century economy.

A high school diploma should be a stepping stone to a brighter future — regardless of whether a student pursues college or vocational training. Even students who directly enter the workforce after high school should be armed with a workforce credential and skills that enhance their employability and opens the door to better wages. Students are more likely to be engaged and graduate when high school is more directly relevant to their career path.

To improve college and career readiness, Tom will:

- **Expand apprenticeship and workforce credentialing programs.** Plenty of jobs in the skilled trades go [unfilled](#) because of the emphasis placed on the necessity of four-year college. High schools should be providing multiple pathways to success, including through apprenticeship and workforce credentialing programs.
- **Increase access to rigorous college-prep coursework.** Tom's plan to triple Title I funding will increase access to advanced coursework (including Advanced Placement courses) in higher-poverty schools. For students in rural communities who may have more limited options, they will be able to enroll in advanced courses online, made possible by [Tom's plan to expand broadband access](#). Advanced coursework prepares students for the rigors of college and contributes to their later success.
- **Improve STEM education.** Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) — as well as the arts — are the fields at the core of our innovation economy. The U.S. cannot continue to maintain its competitive edge globally in the innovation economy — and pioneering new climate-smart technologies — if our students lack critical skills in STEM. On international tests, American students [ranked 30th](#) in math, behind many European and East Asian countries. The Steyer administration will fund research on why U.S. students struggle in STEM and how to improve instruction. Tom also believes it is important to expand rigorous STEM coursework in schools serving low-income students who tend to get left out of the innovation economy.
- **Increase support for the college application and financial aid process.** Tom will make sure every student who wants to go to college has the support they need with the college application and financial aid process. His administration will provide low- and middle-income students with access to free or low-cost SAT and ACT prep courses, assistance filling out financial aid forms, and career counselors who can advise on school selection and the application process.
- **Foster innovation within our school system.** Our schools must continue to evolve in how they prepare students to engage in a rapidly-changing economy and world. A Steyer administration will launch the “Reimagining School” competition to fund the most thoughtful and innovative educational models for optimal learning. The competition



will encourage teachers, administrators, students, parents and community partners to work together to rethink how we structure and run schools, and promote new ways of learning.

## Tom will revitalize civic education and engagement.

[Three out of four Americans](#) cannot identify all three branches of government, let alone explain the proper functioning of our institutions. And the majority of Americans [have difficulty distinguishing fact from opinion](#). Trump has exploited these weaknesses to abuse his power and make a mockery of our democratic system of checks and balances. The health of our democracy depends on an engaged and informed citizenry holding its leaders accountable. Citizens cannot fulfill this role if they lack the knowledge to do so. To prepare our students for their role as voters, Tom will:

- **Reinvigorate civic education to make it more relevant to students' lives and focused on active engagement.** In recent decades, civics has taken a back-seat within our educational system in the drive to raise standardized tests and promote STEM. Tom will put renewed focus on the subject and change the way it's taught through a new grant program. Grants will be awarded to schools interested in experimenting with new approaches to teaching civics that emphasize relevance and engagement with our political system. The most promising new approaches will be made available to all schools.
- **Expand media literacy training so students can identify fake news.** The rise of fake news spread through social media poses a serious challenge to democracy. Tom's plan will invest in developing media literacy curriculum for educators to help students distinguish fact from opinion and assess the credibility of news stories.
- **Invest in environmental education.** To fight the climate crisis and protect our shared planet, Tom will ensure students are well-prepared in their understanding of natural systems, ecology, energy, pollution, and sustainable technologies. A Steyer Administration will ensure that all children have access to age-appropriate, place-informed, and culturally-relevant environmental education.

## Tom will address the growing mental health crisis among our students.

Our children are growing up in a new world of active shooter drills, cyber-bullying, social media addictions, and daunting college requirements. [Millions of children and teens](#) are exposed to additional stressors rooted in poverty and inequality — from the opioid epidemic to homelessness. The mounting pressures and stresses are taking a severe toll on our children's mental health. [Teenage anxiety](#) and [suicide rates](#) are on the rise. The [vast majority](#) of students do not receive any treatment.

Children can't learn if they are plagued by anxiety or other mental health issues. Tom will fight to protect our students from toxic stress and ensure that everyone has access to mental health services. He will:

- **Expand school-based mental health programs.** The Steyer administration will provide state-level funding to double the number of mental health professionals on campus, and adopt school-based mental health programs that have been [proven to foster student well-being and academic success](#).
- **Fund research to better understand and improve student mental health.** In order to improve student mental health, we must first understand the drivers of adolescent anxiety. Research also will look into the best treatments and policy changes to create learning conditions that promote student well-being.
- **Support development of curriculum on positive digital engagement.** [Nearly 100%](#) of teenagers own a smartphone, and [almost half](#) of all teenagers today are constantly online. While new technologies present exciting possibilities for students to learn and engage with the world, they also pose a danger to our children when not used properly — and they are one of the [culprits behind rising teenage anxiety](#). The Steyer administration will fund pilot programs to teach students to safely interact with digital technologies.
- **Keep our schools safe from gun violence.** This is the first generation of students who go to school with the fear that their lives might be at risk, and it's affecting their mental health. Tom believes it's long past time to implement urgent common-sense gun safety reforms, and treat gun violence as a public health crisis. Tom's plan — "***We Can End Gun Violence***" — will establish universal background checks, ban large capacity magazines and assault weapons, enact red flag laws, close loopholes, create a new Office of Gun Safety, mandate licensing requirements, and provide resources to communities to reduce gun violence. Tom believes in the importance of early intervention in our schools to prevent violence and will fund measures to implement best practices. Arming educators is not the answer — his administration will prohibit schools from using federal funds to purchase firearms.