



Schauer's ed plan thin on substance

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Mark Schauer didn't exactly rock the boat when he presented his education goals last week.

The Democratic contender for Michigan governor put together [a six-page report](#) that's short on details but full of teachers union talking points. Basically, Schauer is posing as the anti-Gov. Rick Snyder, with the exception of supporting universal preschool — Snyder has made expanding early education opportunities for the state's neediest families a priority, too.

Schauer says education is his highest priority, and he wants fewer profit-driven charter schools (which is most of them in Michigan) and, not surprisingly, more money. Of course, Schauer failed to mention where all this additional money would come from — or even how much he needs.

His agenda sounds very similar to that of new Democratic New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who ran on the platform that he would reverse the school-choice friendly agenda his predecessor had put in place. Now that de Blasio is acting on his campaign promises, he's getting more push-back — especially from charter school proponents.

In the section of Schauer's plan titled "accountability," he spends much of the page raising the tired specter of corporate profit-hungry charter management companies. The national data show that students who attend for-profit and nonprofit charter schools perform about the same.

Schauer also unfairly slams charter schools by saying they should move employees into the retirement system for teachers — the Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System — even though the vast majority of charter schools offer teachers more cost-effective 401(k)-style plans instead of pensions. Why should these schools pay into a system that hasn't benefited them at all and that they don't want?

When it comes to improving schools, Schauer says he thinks the "demonizing" of teachers needs to stop and that teachers deserve more support and training. But accountability is more nuanced than that.

The state Legislature has worked hard the past few years to bring more accountability into the classroom through hard-won fights to reform Michigan's teacher tenure system. Those changes

now work to ensure the best teachers stay in front of students and that layoff decisions are based on merit rather than seniority.

That's tangible reform. Yet Oakland County Clerk Lisa Brown, Schauer's running mate, voted against all of those measures when she was minority vice chairwoman of the House Education Committee. She made sure to follow the Michigan Education Association's playbook.

Schauer has also continued to blast Snyder for cuts to school funding. That's just not true, though. Senate Fiscal Agency reports show that since Snyder took office, state support for K-12 schools has grown to \$11.4 billion, from \$10.7 billion. And money doesn't solve all problems. Studies frequently show, including a comprehensive report [recently published by Andrew Coulson at the Cato Institute](#), that the correlation between spending and student achievement is almost a perfect zero. Simply giving schools more money doesn't move the needle at all.

Schauer's plan seeks to unravel much of the competition-driven, outcome-centered approach to education that the current governor has put in place. That would result in a significant step backward for public schools in Michigan.