We cannot underestimate the influence of a good education. Students gain confidence and upward mobility, communities often experience decreased crime rates, and employers get access to a skilled workforce, bringing good jobs and higher wages to the area. In many ways, South Dakota excels in the learning opportunities we provide, but as the parent of a high school sophomore, college student, and recent graduate, I can tell you our education system faces challenges too.

While recognizing many aspects of a child’s life influence educational success - from family dynamics to school lunches - my administration will work to improve K-12 outcomes and make post-secondary education more affordable and applicable to the modern workforce.

**STRENGTHEN K-12 EDUCATION**

South Dakota students consistently produce good test scores, graduate on time, and meet college readiness benchmarks. But many schools struggle to make ends meet, jeopardizing the long-term success of South Dakota’s K-12 education system. As governor, I will be committed to balancing the needs of families, teachers and administrators, and taxpayers as we prepare students for college, the workforce, and citizenship.

Empower families. When it comes to raising kids, family is better than government. As a conservative, I will protect the rights of parents to choose the educational path that’s best for their child, whether it’s homeschooling, public schooling, or a private education. Regardless of a family’s decision, I will work to ensure all students have equal opportunity within the education system.

Do more with every taxpayer dollar. Public education policy is too often evaluated by expenditures, rather than student success. That’s a mistake. We need to focus on creating a better system, not a more expensive one – a goal that can and should be accomplished without taking necessary resources out of classrooms. As governor, I would:

- Work to centralize and standardize purchasing, giving local schools more options to cut costs by taking advantage of the state’s massive buying power;
- Encourage schools to share resources and expand long-distance learning opportunities;
- Assist local school districts in pursuing private funds to mitigate the cost of capital projects;
- Continue leveraging the state’s AAA bond rating to help schools borrow at a lower cost;
- Reform the Department of Education, adopting a model that promotes much closer collaboration with locally elected school boards; and
- Improve transparency in school district budgeting, as proposed in my Sunshine Initiative.
Create a culture of performance. From teachers and administrators to school board members, South Dakota is fortunate to have many talented people dedicated to student success. I want to elevate high-performers while expanding continued learning opportunities for those running our classrooms and school districts. As governor, I will pursue public-private partnerships to financially reward rockstar teachers. For instance, I’d like to collaborate with local businesses to sponsor a robust “Teacher of the Month” program. Additionally, my administration will explore opportunities to improve overall performance through evidence-based school board training and teacher mentorship programs.

Reject Common Core and federal overreach. In the U.S. House, I helped get legislation signed into law limiting the federal government’s role in our education system. As governor, I will take advantage of those flexibilities, continuing to reject Common Core and seeking appropriate waivers and grants to customize South Dakota’s education system.

Promote civic education. Our republic only works if citizens are active and informed. The next generation of South Dakotans must understand the foundations of our nation, the tremendous sacrifices made to protect our constitutional rights, and the freedoms, liberties, and responsibilities we have as citizens. In collaboration with school districts, I will work to expand civics and U.S. history programs and encourage schools to include the citizenship test as part of their graduation criteria.

Encourage kids to explore in-demand jobs early. South Dakota already faces severe labor shortages, and even greater demands for a skilled workforce are on the horizon. As governor, I would work to:

- Provide career counseling and information regarding in-demand jobs beginning at the middle-school level;
- Inspire students by expanding experience-driven learning opportunities before college;
- Coordinate resources to identify and help at-risk children plan for their futures; and
- Dramatically increase shared-learning opportunities among high schools, technical schools, universities, and employers to better manage the transition from home to post-secondary education to the South Dakota workforce.
EQUIP POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH JOB-READY SKILLS

My path to a college degree wasn’t typical. After my dad died, I left school and came home to manage our family’s farming operation full-time. Years later, I began taking classes again – this time, online – finally completing my degree while serving in Congress. Given this experience, I understand a four-year degree isn’t right for every high school graduate, and the truth is, it isn’t always right for our labor market either. Still, college graduates, on average, earn 56 percent more than high school graduates. As such, my administration will work to drive down the cost of a university or technical school degree, while focusing on producing job-holders, not simply degree-holders.

Increase affordability. South Dakota ranks near the top when it comes to student debt. That needs to change. As governor, I will:

- **Simplify the scholarship application process.** South Dakota has a robust scholarship network, but it can be confusing for students and families to navigate. Working with financial aid offices, my administration will help create a single, online repository for all scholarships. Additionally, I will take on the task of bringing state-allocated scholarships under a single umbrella, simplifying the process and building in cost-saving efficiencies.
- **Challenge schools to prioritize affordability.** Tuition costs have steadily increased in recent years. Working with the state legislature, my administration will challenge universities and technical schools to identify efficiencies and reinvest savings toward affordability.
- **Increase on-time graduation.** Just under 25 percent of South Dakota’s college students will graduate in four years; about 50 percent will do so in under six years. At the same time, about one in three are spending credit hours and hard-earned dollars on remedial courses. If we better prepare students in high school, we can reduce the likelihood of a fifth year in college, potentially shrinking their cost for higher education by 20 percent.

Arm students with job-ready skills and training. South Dakota has a legendary work ethic - one that my Kickstarting the Economy initiative seeks to harness. For decades, however, the priorities of employers and educators have failed to fully align. This leaves some young people with limited job prospects in their chosen career fields while many industries face difficulties recruiting skilled labor. To better fill good-paying jobs with South Dakota workers, I am committed to:

- Strengthening the relationship between area employers, state agencies, universities, and technical schools;
- Focusing state resources on high-need areas of the labor market;
- Expanding apprenticeship programs; and
- Working to ensure South Dakota technical schools and universities continue to lead the nation as one post-secondary system that is able to satisfy academic curiosities and meet tomorrow’s workforce needs.