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HOW I VOTED: EDUCATION ISSUES

I said when I ran for office that I would support options in education, and that I would encourage new ways of thinking about schools. At the same time, I also said that I would not support legislation that undermines our good local schools. Most importantly, I believe in a thoughtful approach to complex issues. Toward that end, here is how I have voted on some of the leading educational issues in 2007 and 2008:

Virtual school program: FOR *(This program will expand the use of technology in our classrooms, allowing our best teachers to reach more kids, and allowing more programs to be offered in smaller, rural schools.)*

Alternative teacher certification: FOR *(This bill provided for streamlined certification for folks coming to teaching as a second career, especially in critical areas such as math and science. Certification satisfies the “highly qualified” requirements of No Child Left Behind. We have over 800 unfilled teacher positions in the state)*

Educational opportunity scholarships: FOR *(This is the closest thing to a “voucher” bill that came up last year. It would have provided tax credits for families in the worst of our failing schools --- none of which are in Lancaster or York Counties. It included additional accountability measures and teacher qualifications from previous versions, and had a “hold harmless” provision to guarantee full funding of public education. The bill failed by a half-dozen votes.)*

Incentives for business that hire from our technical schools: FOR *(Our technical schools are a critical part of building a workforce that is well-suited for modern job opportunities. This program would encourage private businesses to build relationships with technical schools in order to make sure that kids are learning marketable skills.)*

Increased scholarships for math and science: FOR *(For some reason we have difficulty attracting young people to these critical fields of study. One way to possibly solve that is to provide additional financial incentives by way of increased scholarships.)*

Open Enrollment: AGAINST *(see my “How I Voted” report for more details on this very important piece of legislation.)*

There are also several important bills pending that have not yet come up for a vote:

Public School Choice: Support/Primary Co-Sponsor *(This bill, proposed by Superintendent of Education Jim Rex, would encourage consideration of alternative teaching methods, such as single-gender schools, Montessori programs, and year-round learning. Most good school systems are already considering these sorts of programs on their own. However, others appear to need a push from the Legislature.)*

Requiring 65% of all school funding be spent in the classroom: Support/Co-Sponsor *(In some school systems in the state more than 50% of all money is spent on administration, leaving less than 50 cents of every dollar for use in the classroom. This bill would require that at least 65% of every dollar go toward actual instruction. Fort Mill and Lancaster schools already satisfy this requirement.)*

Charter School Improvements: Support/Co-Sponsor *(Charter schools --- which are fully public schools in every sense of the word --- are an important option within the realm of public education. South Carolina has traditionally led the nation in its approach to Charter Schools. Several years of experience have exposed important needed changes to the way these schools are established and run so that they can be more effectively used throughout the state.)*