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Hoekstra Welcomes New School Year

Across the country, students and teachers have returned to the classroom to begin another year of education. Below are a few initiatives U.S. Rep. Hoekstra has undertaken to improve education in Michigan and the country.

Greater Flexibility for Schools in Michigan under No Child Left Behind

In June 2008, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Michigan would participate in its growth model pilot project. The state will measure the growth of students over time instead of comparing cohorts of different students to determine student achievement. The increased flexibility will help schools identify how individual students are able to comprehend and demonstrate their knowledge of the curriculum. This is a right step toward giving states and local school districts the autonomy they need to teach their students.

In March 2007, Hoekstra introduced the A-PLUS Act, which would give states maximum freedom and flexibility to determine how to improve academic achievement and implement education reforms to meet the unique needs of their students. The bill frees states from the regulatory and bureaucratic burdens tied to federal education funding. States that choose to assume full responsibility of the education policies of their state would be required to demonstrate fiscal transparency and be held accountable to parents and taxpayers. The bill was instrumental in stalling the expansion of No Child Left Behind in the 110th Congress.

Education Tax Deductions

On July 31, Hoekstra introduced H.R. 6737, a bill that would provide an education tax deduction for all families. Under H.R. 6737, parents who choose to send their children to a private, parochial or home school would be able to receive a tax deduction equal to 100 percent of the state's average per pupil public education spending. Families that choose to send their children to a public school would be able to receive a tax deduction equal to 25 percent of such average for the purpose of supplementing their education with tutoring or other education services. Parents need the tools to make the best decisions about how to educate their children.

In 2002, Congress passed a bill that allowed teachers to deduct up to \$250 from their taxes if they used their personal resources to purchase supplies for the classroom. Unfortunately, the tax deduction expired in December 2007. Hoekstra co-sponsored legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI) that would increase the deductible amount to \$400 and make it permanent.

Congress Addresses Cost of Higher Education

At the end of July, Congress passed the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, a bill that reauthorized the Higher Education Act. The bill included numerous provisions to address the rising cost in higher education including: provides college affordability comparison tools on the U.S. Department of Education's Web site; creates a one-stop Web site that streamlines the information about federal financial aid; expands student loan forgiveness for high-need vocations; and improves Pell Grants by increasing the authorization level to \$8,000 and offers them to students year-round.

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