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# SCOTT ALLEN

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REPRESENTATIVE • 97<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

For Immediate Release  
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Today Representative Allen released the following statement regarding his experience on the Speaker's Task Force for Urban Education:

It has been a pleasure to work with Rep. Rodriguez and my other Assembly colleagues on the Urban Education Task Force. We received great testimony and resources during our study. The conclusions and thoughts below are my own.

From 5 year old kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, it appears that there is very little that we can do to narrow the achievement gap between the urban poor and middle and upper class students. In spite of considerable effort from the educational establishment, the gap grows wider with age and years in school.

Many experts are suggesting that the area of focus ought to be at the ripe young ages of 0 to 5 years. It is in these formative years that the foundation for learning and achieving is either laid or not. It seems that young children from the most nurturing and supportive environments enter kindergarten better equipped than some of their counterparts. A nurturing and supportive environment places children on a higher trajectory that allows for achievement. The environment provides children with coping skills to deal with setbacks as well as a positive self-esteem which fuels achievement.

Coping skills are so critical to success in education, in part, due to the cumulative effects of multi-generational repetition of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's). ACE's are highly correlated with impaired mental and physical health, poorer school and work outcomes, and lower socioeconomic status among adults. ACE's are identified with different types of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, or drug or alcohol), violence in the home, parental separation, or a household member who is mentally ill or incarcerated. The evidence suggests that the more of these ACE's that a child experiences the less likely they are to do well in school and subsequently in adult life. Today's children are enduring the consequences of their parents' and grandparents' ACE's. It would be difficult to teach coping skills if you haven't developed them for yourself.



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Additional research has suggested that the time period in a child's life where there is the most rapid growth in what is called the executive functions of the brain occurs between the ages of 3 and 5 years. Executive functions are largely decision-making skills relating to following rules, solving problems, setting goals, etc. It is largely for this reason why there is a growing push for 3 and 4 year-old kindergarten.

With growing dependence on government-subsidized programs and a projection of minimal growth in the workforce, it is clear that Wisconsin needs a long-term strategy to reduce poverty, particularly in urban environments where the effects of poverty include higher rates of crime. It is time that we re-think urban education. Providing strategic solutions to urban education challenges is vital to our long-term success as a state. We must be bold and we must be swift.

Over the next several months I intend to synthesize research and report on several strategies that we ought to explore to improve our delivery of education in urban environments. Excellent work has been done in 2015 by the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council which provides a good starting point for conversations. I am eager to collaborate with my legislative colleagues and I am seeking a commitment, from those who are interested, to embrace innovation.

The areas of research and reporting will be:

1. Early Childhood Education and Supports
2. Teacher Training for Urban Education
3. Recruiting Teachers of Color
4. Improving Access to Physical and Mental Health in Schools at Early Age Levels

We have a responsibility to the taxpayers of Wisconsin to make wise investments and to be good stewards with the available resources. We have a responsibility to produce results. Re-thinking urban education does not mean doing more, it means doing education differently."

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