

Steven J Norton


Board of Trustees, Ann Arbor Public Schools
2555 South State St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

23 May 2026

BY EMAIL

Dear Trustees,

I write today to apply for appointment to the suddenly open seat on the Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education. This is a difficult time for the district, which is facing potentially painful choices at home while at the same time needing to work within the constraints of a policy environment that disadvantages community-governed public schools. I hope and believe that I could make a constructive contribution to the Board and the district while it navigates the challenges of the next seven months.

After living in Ann Arbor for the last forty years, this community has long since become my home. My wife and I made a home and raised a family here, and our two children are proud graduates of AAPS. One of the reasons we decided to stay was the opportunity for our children to have access to an excellent public education, and we were not disappointed.

Even so, as we volunteered in the schools and got more involved in district affairs, we saw the increasing strain inadequate resources was putting on the district's efforts to maintain the depth of programs it had historically provided. My training gave me the tools to dig into how school funding works in this state, and it quickly became clear that most of the hard choices AAPS was having to make year after year had their origin in the state capitol.

In response, I helped form a group of parents, teachers, and other citizens who wanted to understand and address the financial and policy issues involved. Very quickly, we saw that only state-wide advocacy, building coalitions across districts and regions, had any chance of improving the system. That group, which became Michigan Parents for Schools, has operated for nearly twenty years, building alliances to spread a real understanding of the origins of the obstacles facing our schools and advocating for meaningful positive change in state education funding and policy. It has been difficult work, but with some victories.

At around the same time, I became involved in the district's 2007 strategic planning process and served on a working group focused on ensuring adequate resources. There I met intelligent and committed volunteers, AAPS Board members, and district officials who introduced me to some of the financial intricacies of operating a school district. That experience began my own efforts to address, here at home, the consequences of the policies we were fighting in Lansing.

At the same time as I was working to support my children's schools as a PTO and PTO Council volunteer, I joined with colleagues from the workgroup to revitalize the Citizens Millage Committee and to help our community understand the real constraints faced by AAPS and the role local millages could play in softening those hard choices. As a result, I developed over many years a close working relationship with AAPS Board members, district administrators, and leaders of the Ann Arbor Education Association. We worked together, successfully, to spread understanding about school funding issues and to engage our community in constructive efforts to address the challenges faced by our schools.

I know that, today, all the district's stakeholders remain committed to offering an excellent education to the children of our community. My hope is that we can find a way forward through the immediate crisis to work on long term solutions together.

Respectfully submitted,



Steven J Norton

References:

Carrie Chester

(former Burns Park Elementary teacher; board member, Michigan Parents for Schools)

[REDACTED]

Glenn Nelson

(former AAPS Board of Education trustee, Ann Arbor Citizens Millage Committee organizer)

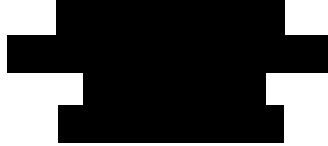
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Jack Panitch

(former PTO Council chair, Ann Arbor Citizens Millage Committee treasurer)

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Steven J. Norton



WORK EXPERIENCE

Michigan Parents for Schools, Ann Arbor, MI. **Executive Director**, 2007–present.

- Co-founded, with other public-school parents, a state-wide public interest advocacy group working to ensure excellent, adequately funded public schools for all children in the State of Michigan.
- Wrote articles and analyses on state education policy and funding for our own web site and as op-ed pieces in regional and national newspapers.
- Worked with elected officials on the content of proposed legislation and led the drafting of a bill to revise the state's school accountability system.
- Used web-based tools to encourage grass-roots advocacy on important education bills under consideration by the state Legislature.
- Testified regularly at Legislative education policy and appropriations committee hearings on pending legislation and budget issues.
- Prepared data analyses and visualizations using budget and student outcomes data in support of our policy positions and testimony.

Okno Group, Partner 1990–present. Okno Group is an independent consultancy providing a range of services to non-profit organizations and small business, including policy analysis for public interest organizations. From 1990–2001, we provided policy analysis for organizations interested in the environmental and health-care sectors of central and eastern Europe.

EDUCATION

University of Michigan, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Master of Public Policy (May 2020) with a concentration in Public Policy Analysis Methods. Program focused on domestic policy process, including education, and quantitative methods in policy-oriented research.

- Subjects studied: quantitative methods, including program evaluation, applied econometrics, and causal inference in education; the politics of the policy process; strategic communications for advocacy; organizational assessment and accountability; public and nonprofit budgeting and financial management; values and ethics in public policy issue areas.
- Assembled and analyzed a substantial dataset on the linkages between poverty and K-12 school performance in Michigan for an independent research project.

University of Michigan, Department of Political Science. ABD; candidacy achieved September 1992. Major field: comparative politics. Minor fields: world politics with a specialization in international political economy and international organization, research methods.

Yale University, B.A. *cum laude* with Distinction in Economics & Political Science, May 1986.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Selected board service

Ann Arbor PTO Thrift Shop. **Board member, treasurer**, 2017–present.

- Co-led a strategic planning and transformation process designed to improve governance structures and address workplace climate/culture issues, strengthening the organization in anticipation of welcoming a new generation of leadership (and managing future uncertainty).
- Led a project to upgrade and modernize financial operations and management information systems.

- Developed new formulas to allocate our funds with a focus on educational equity; helped design a new granting program to support district-wide initiatives in literacy, disability awareness, and the arts.
- Joined the board at a time of severe financial stress; I worked with my colleagues to successfully return to normal operations, reaffirming our ability to act on our mission (financial support to AAPS Parent Teacher Organizations as well as the district) and to rebuild our contingency fund,

Parents Across America. National Board member, Treasurer, 2014–present.

- As a national board member, contributed to setting the goals and strategies of PAA, a national public interest nonprofit working to assist parents in supporting local public education, understanding key policy and educational issues, and making their voice heard on relevant national, state, and local issues of special concern.
- Both led and participated in panels at national conferences on public education.
- Helped to modernize the systems used by the geographically diverse board to collaborate and consult. As treasurer, streamlined and modernized financial recordkeeping for this 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Ann Arbor PTO Council. Representative, executive board member, 2012–2018.

- Helped to organize the work of the PTO Council, an umbrella group comprised of the individual school Parent-Teacher Organizations of the Ann Arbor Public School district.

Selected other volunteer service

AAPS Strategic Planning, Action team 8 on “ensuring adequate resources,” July–October 2007.

- Participated in the work of the team, including district officials, teachers and community members, to assess opportunities for AAPS to access sufficient resources to meet its educational mission. Co-wrote the team’s final report.

Ann Arbor Citizens Millage Committee. Ann Arbor, MI. Co-chair, campaign manager, volunteer 2008–present.

- Led effort in the Ann Arbor Public Schools district to pass the 2009 Washtenaw Education Millage, a property tax proposal which would have provided additional operating funding to all ten public school districts in the Washtenaw ISD. As campaign manager, led the steering committee in deciding strategy and tactics; recruited and oversaw directors for the field campaign, communications, finance and fundraising; helped develop message materials; ensured compliance with campaign finance laws.
- Co-chaired the 2008 campaign to renew the AAPS operating and sinking fund millages, including laying the framework for A2CMC become a permanent presence informing the public.

Michigan Department of Education. Invited advisory committee member.

- ESSA Additional Indicator action team, 2016.
- ESSA Fiscal action team, 2016.
- Top 10 in 10 Stakeholder advisory group, 2016.
- School accountability advisory committee, 2015.
- School funding advisory committee, 2015.
- Invited to present to State Board of Education on Top 10 in 10 strategy, August 2015
- Invited to present to State Board of Education on organization and funding of K-12 education in Michigan, May 2014

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

- Parent of two wonderful grown children, who along with their mother continue to inspire and teach me.
- Enjoy reading, woodworking, traveling, and talking about politics.
- Committed to social justice and reconciliation, and still hoping to leave the world a little better.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

In addition to articles and analyses posted on the MIPFS web site (mipfs.org):

“Opinion: How Did We Get Here? Michigan’s Education Crisis in Context,” *Bridge Magazine*, 15 September 2025.

Steven Norton and Meredith Days, “Michigan and Federal Aid: Brother, Can You Spare Some Stimulus?” *Local Government COVID-19 Fiscal Strategy and Resource Guide*, Center for Local, State and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, June 2020.


Stephanie Leiser and Steven Norton, “Strategies for Short-Term Cash-Flow Borrowing,” *Local Government COVID-19 Fiscal Strategy and Resource Guide*, Center for Local, State and Urban Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, May 2020.

“Opinion: State shouldn’t duck school responsibility,” *The Detroit News*, 4 June 2019. [On the Detroit literacy lawsuit before the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals.]

“EAA gambling with our children’s future,” *Detroit Free Press*, 16 December 2013. [On bills to expand the Education Achievement Authority.]

“When did parents and teachers become enemies of education?” *Lansing State Journal*, 2 June 2013 [On Gov. Snyder’s “skunk works” project for restructuring public schools.]

“Michigan parent to Arne Duncan: ‘Our schools are at the breaking point’ (Open Letter to US Education Secretary Arne Duncan),” *The Washington Post*, 10 May 2013.


May 26, 2026

To: Trustees, Board of Education, Ann Arbor Public Schools

Fr: Glenn Nelson 
Former AAPS School Board Member, 2002-2015 and 2020


Re: Recommendation for Steven Norton

I recommend Steven Norton without reservation to fill the vacancy on the BOE. Steve and I have had productive interactions on public education for over two decades. I know him well.

Steve is intelligent, educated, and hard-working. These qualities are the foundation for effective work.

The topical area in which Steve has built upon this foundation is what sets him apart. He understands the importance of high quality public education for all. His children graduated from AAPS. He was an active parent — from the classroom level to PTOC. He wants every child and young person to have the benefits of an excellent education as they pursue personal goals and participate in civic affairs. The well-being of our community, state, and nation — as well as individual well-being — are at stake.

He has over two decades of experience in educational policy at the building, AAPS District, Washtenaw Intermediate School District, and State of Michigan levels. He was active in his local PTO, was selected as a representative to the AAPS PTOC, and was soon chosen to be an officer and leader of the PTOC. Steve has been a leader in seeking passage of every, or nearly every, ballot proposal seeking funding for AAPS or WISD for the last 20 years. He has been a leader, including treasurer in many years, of the Ann Arbor Citizens Millage which is the primary citizen volunteer group at the interface of AAPS leaders and AAPS voters when millage proposals are placed on the ballot. He understands the structure of school finance. In 2007 he was the key person in the formation of Michigan Parents for Schools (MIPFS) which brings together parents from around the state. MIPFS serves an important public policy educational function as well as being an advocate.

To make the obvious explicit, Steve has enormous experience in working with other volunteers, elected officials, and paid professionals. This experience includes countless one-on-one interactions, formal and informal committees, community forums, and conferences — plus testimony at legislative hearings.

Because of his knowledge and experience, Steve would be able to be an effective, informed trustee faster than anyone else I know. This is important in a short term appointment. Going back to where I started, Steve has my unqualified recommendation.

Jack Panitch
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May 20, 2026

Trustees of the Ann Arbor Public Schools
2555 South State St
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
boardofed@a2schools.org

Greetings esteemed Trustees, and heartfelt thanks for your service on the community's behalf:

It is my privilege to recommend Steven Norton for the open appointed position as a Trustee of the Ann Arbor Public Schools. My recommendation is without reserve and is based on my direct experience working with Steve, as well as my consideration of the talent the Board may desire to secure.

Steve has been a tireless champion for pre-K-12 issues, trusted by parents and educators, who can help lead the community in effective advocacy at the State level with an eye on federal developments and their consequences. Through his lobbying work on behalf of Michigan Parents for Schools, Steve has developed a consistently factual, dependable voice, working with members of the legislature and the Michigan Department of Education toward rational outcomes that best serve all of Michigan's and especially Ann Arbor's students. I have watched Steve at work, and I know the care he puts into analysis of proposed pre-K-12 legislation, eschewing demagoguery, gathering data, analyzing and adhering to facts, developing relationships across party lines, and masterfully framing the "pitch." Adding Steve's talents to an already strong local team will make it immeasurably stronger.

I have also had the privilege to work with Steve directly on numerous past local millage election campaigns and on the Executive Board of the Ann Arbor PTO Council from 2013-2016. Specifically with regard to the PTO Council, it is humbling to work with a team of highly talented community leaders and to watch that team put the interests of member PTOs above all. Steve's contribution to the success of any volunteer organization he serves is towering, visionary, and unmistakable. He is a highly reliable team member who parks his ego at the door, has "broad shoulders," and thrives in the public service environment.

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His hand in local millage election campaigns, both as a member of the Citizens Millage Committee and in support of the PTO Council's organizing efforts, has always been a strongly positive and inspirational influence. In our time as members of the PTO Council Executive Board, we acted with critical independence on behalf of parents, students and teachers to study and formulate the campaign, ask tough questions of the District that our member PTOs would need answers to, determine ways to frame and enhance the message, and package materials for our members to use to get the word out in their communities. In the Citizens Millage Committee, Steve has always served in a leadership role, working to help develop timetables, message, strategy, and fundraising, and working tirelessly in street-level campaigning. Steve's work has been instrumental in each of these campaigns.

Steve's talent and vision, along with the trust he has built in the community, would all be a strong asset to the Board of Education. While I appreciate the privilege of highlighting some of his demonstrated strengths, you Trustees need to assess the merit of his candidacy in relation to students', the Board's, the District's and the Community's overall needs and in relation to the talents of other applicants. This is Ann Arbor, and you will have a strong applicant pool. In Steve, you will have a team member who will instantly be a solid contributor and decision-maker.

I wish you great wisdom on behalf of all the students of the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Best regards,

Jack Panitch