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## Labor Voices: Education rally is just the beginning

*IRIS SALTERS*

A high school student. A PTO president and mother of three. A school custodian. A former teacher.

These were just some of the about 7,000 voices of people who stood on the steps and flooded the lawn of the state Capitol last week in the biggest rally for education in years.

Their backgrounds were different, but their message was the same: it's time for adequate, equitable and stable funding for public education in Michigan. It's time to make good on campaign promises and truly make education a priority. It's time for the rhetoric to end and for our elected officials to do what's best for Michigan students.

Since then, some have questioned whether the rally did any good. Did lawmakers listen? Will it change anything? Was all that effort worth it?

My answer is simple: absolutely.

We had a dozen legislators from both the House and Senate join us on the Capitol grounds. Many more welcomed visits from their constituents -- rally attendees who stopped in their lawmakers' offices before heading home. Those who were reluctant to venture outside simply had to look out their office windows to see the show of support for public education. And if they didn't see it, I guarantee they heard it.

That's not to say every elected official will embrace the message. There will be some who discard the will of the people they are supposed to represent. There will be those who think this was a one-time "event" that will fade as time goes by. There will even be others who think they can ignore the growing momentum of exasperated parents, school employees and community members statewide. They're wrong and their decision will come at their own peril.

The "Enough is Enough" rally wasn't an isolated event; it was the next step to driving our point home after more than 40 local rallies in towns and cities across Michigan on May 24. It was the culmination of months of frustration over endless attacks on public education and a growing uncertainty for students and their families.

But even more important -- it isn't the end.

Every one of the thousands of people who turned out at the Capitol can, and will, make their voices heard in an even more critical way -- at the ballot box. The next step in the fight for public education will involve making sure we hold our elected officials accountable, not for their promises on the campaign trail but for their actions in office.

On election days in August and November, there won't be thousands of people chanting "enough is enough." There will be many more. And that's when supporters of public education will know that their voices really mattered.

*Iris Salters is president of the Michigan Education Association, a union that represents teachers and education support staff. E-mail comments to [letters@detroitnews.com](mailto:letters@detroitnews.com)*

### Additional Facts

## Labor Voices

Labor Voices columns are written on a rotating basis by the United Auto Workers, Teamster President James Hoffa, Michigan AFL-CIO President Mark Gaffney and Michigan Education Association President Iris Salters. Look for Labor Voices every Wednesday in The Detroit News.

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