

## **School Administrators Alliance**

### **Questions for State Superintendent Candidates**

1. As state superintendent, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve academic achievement for all students and close achievement gaps in Wisconsin? How would your policies/strategies ensure equal opportunity for all students, no matter their educational needs or their zip code?

*Promoting excellence for all children continues to be the defining work of my administration. An equitable education for all students is our priority, and it will continue to be as long as achievement gaps among student groups exist. This is what we must continue to do:*

- A. Financial resources. My current state budget request restates our Fair Funding proposal. Under my proposal, all students will receive a minimum amount of aid. To provide an extra lift for some students, the general aid formula will weight students living in poverty. Additionally, the per-pupil categorical aid will be weighted to account for foster kids, English learners and students that come from impoverished families. Furthermore, changes to the summer school aid formula will incentivize all schools, but especially those districts that have students who need extra time to achieve at higher levels to engage in fun, summer learning activities.*
- B. Professional Development. I initiated the Promoting Excellence for All program three years ago. This program provides information and strategies successfully used by Wisconsin educators to raise achievement of students of color, closing the gap between them and their peers. These educators represent all grade levels, urban, rural, and suburban. The online modules focus on effective instruction, teacher-student relationships, family and community engagement, and school and instructional leadership.*
- C. National Leadership. I had the honor of leading the Council of Chief State School Officers' effort to fully realize their commitment to equity. In early February, my colleagues will be releasing, in conjunction with the Aspen Institute, 10 specific opportunities that we, as state leaders will commit to to remove barriers to equitable opportunities for all children. The commitments range from reallocating resources to designing accountability systems that have an equity lens and increasing a focus on culture, climate and social-emotional development.*
- D. Support Milwaukee Public Schools. While achievement gaps persist across the state, our city of the first class presents unique challenges and requires a multi-pronged approach. I have, and will continue to support Dr. Darienne Driver's work in Milwaukee. Milwaukee is ground zero for our state's efforts to accomplish major reductions in achievement gaps. We are working hand-in-hand with MPS to provide more learning time when needed, working with neighborhoods to establish community schools and creating a best-in-state educator workforce.*

2. Improving the quality of preschool education can help reduce achievement gaps for children. Although Wisconsin has made improvements with the expansion of 4K and the YoungStar program, the state has yet to realize a comprehensive preschool policy. As state superintendent, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve preschool education in Wisconsin?

*Clearly, our collective work around Four Year Old Kindergarten has created a robust opportunity for our four year olds to begin their PK-12 journey with a significant advantage. The department also has created Early Childhood Learning Standards that help to transition children for early childhood programming to kindergarten.*

*I also co-chair the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council. The Council operates under the belief that the ages 0-5 presents the greatest opportunity to provide a successful trajectory for every kid. The work of this council has gone a long way to establish a comprehensive birth through grade 12 policy structure. During this time, the Council has set goals and strategies to double the number of kids in YoungStar 4-5 rated programs, double the number of families served by the home visitation programs and expand the number of public-private partnerships that leverage resources for our youngest kids.*

3. In Wisconsin, too many children have unmet mental health needs which, in turn, result in negative consequences for those children, their families, our schools and our communities. As state superintendent, how would you address this problem?

*The SAA and the Office of the State Superintendent have worked tirelessly to develop meaningful recommendation to improve the mental health of our students. Through our collective work a robust budget proposal is now in front of the Governor. These proposals include additional funding for school social workers, money for community and school mental health grants, and resources to support mental health training for school personnel and community members. Furthermore, we are partnering with the Department of Health Services to provide Medicaid funding for youth treatment of mental issues. These proposals have the support of many organizations within and outside of the school community. This comprehensive program will provide the necessary resources to identify and treat kids with mental health issues. An estimated one in five children need these services.*

4. The recruitment, preparation and retention of effective educators is vitally important for our children's future. As state superintendent, what policies would you advance to address this important issue?

*Lots of good work has already been done. With the SAA, I have convened high-level stakeholders (WASDA, AWSA, WCASS, WASB, WACTE, UW System, WAICU, WEAC) to make recommendations on how to improve school staffing in Wisconsin and promote the recruitment, preparation and retention of Wisconsin educators. Recommendations will include changes to state or local policies, administrative rules, or legislation. To begin, I support eliminating the archaic "double-dipping" legislation. Other preliminary work has also taken place.*

- A. *The Professional Standards Council has developed a strategic plan to address school staffing issues that will guide our work going forward.*
- B. *The State Superintendent's Working Group on School Staffing Issues identified pressing school staffing issues and recommended administrative policy solutions. As a result of their work, DPI published emergency rules addressing several of the group's recommendations including licensing flexibility for near-retirement educators, substitute teachers, emergency licensed educators, and add on licenses. Finally, a Supply and Demand Report being developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison is scheduled for publication in 2017. This report will provide more extensive and detailed data staffing issues in Wisconsin, and a sophisticated problem diagnosis.*
- C. *I have put money in the budget for rural schools to compete for top-notch teachers and scholarship money to increase the pool of qualified English Learner teachers.*

5. As the expansion of taxpayer-funded private school vouchers continues according to statute in Wisconsin, as state superintendent, how would you propose taxpayers pay for adding thousands of private school students to Wisconsin's publicly-funded system?

*Powerful special interests and the majorities in Washington and Madison have spent years cutting revenue, growing bonding, and expanding entitlement programs like school vouchers. The result: historic cuts to education followed a slow trickle of financial support for public school amidst the statewide expansion of vouchers.*

*My friend former Sen. Dale Schultz often said, "We can't afford the school system we have, how can we afford two—a public and private one?"*

*It is a good question. A recent Fiscal Bureau reports indicate that over 200 districts (almost half) would have received more state aid without the changes in voucher funding that shifted cost to local districts.*

*When we move past the ideological battles, we're left with tough choices about priorities and responsibilities. Bottom line: we have a constitutional obligation to provide an education for every kid in this state, from Winter to West Salem.*

*Our friends and neighbors are stepping up to pass referenda at historic rates to keep the lights on in rural schools. It is an admirable, but unsustainable effort that leaves too many kids behind. Expanding vouchers while underfunding rural schools exacerbates the problem.*

*That said, we all know the current majorities and proposed U.S Education Secretary support voucher expansion, so here are some key principles for moving forward:*

- A. *The state should adequately fund our public school system before expanding vouchers;*
- B. *The state, rather than local school districts, should pay the full cost of the voucher program;*

C. *Accountability should apply equally to all publicly-funded schools, including voucher schools;*

*Finally, we should talk more about the great things Wisconsin schools are doing and less about vouchers. They suck the air out of the room and allowing them to dominate the conversation is unhelpful.*

*Around 96 percent of publicly-funded students go to a school governed by a local school board. Regardless of whether legislators support or oppose vouchers, they need to support our public schools. That's where our focus needs to be and what I will champion.*

6. One of the greatest problems in Wisconsin's school finance system is the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth under state-imposed revenue limits and school district cost increases driven by state and federal requirements as well as community expectations. As state superintendent, what policies or strategies would drive your approach to school funding?

*Expectations at the local, state and federal level continue to challenge our districts. However, districts have always embraced higher expectations through innovative practices. I have worked with SAA to create large scale discussions around innovation zones. This work is ongoing and I hope to have something in place by the end of this school year that would could remove barriers that prevent the implementation innovative practices. The removal of barriers would be tied to an equity goal of closing achievement gaps. An example of this is my work with districts to change administrative rules that govern summer school. These changes could create more opportunities to create fund learning activities to stop the "summer slide" in achievement levels.*

*On the funding side, the people of Wisconsin are on record that they want to keep their schools strong. An astounding 88% of the districts (600,000 voters) approved revenue limit exemptions just this last November. Ultimately, I come down on the side of local control and support the eventual elimination of revenue limits. In my budget proposal I requested a reasonable increase in revenue limits. In the future, these increases should be tied to the cost of living.*

7. In *Vincent v. Voight* (2000), the State Supreme Court found the Wisconsin school finance system constitutional, so long as the legislature provided sufficient resources to ensure that all students are offered an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. The court specifically enumerated three classes of students to which the state has a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Since 2000, the rising costs to meet the growing needs of students in these enumerated classes have outstripped the limited school funding directed to each of these student classes; thereby challenging the abilities of local school districts to meet the Court's standard. As state superintendent, how would you address this problem?

*The vast majority of SAA members and citizens of the state believe the school funding system is broken. Growing numbers of kids in the enumerated classes identified by the Supreme Court continue to struggle in our schools, due in large part to the state's*

*reluctance to support these kids financially. If we believe in equality in outcomes, we must believe in the equitable distribution of resources. The categorical aids for these kids has remained unchanged for many years. That is why I have continued to advocate for increasing all categorical aid for these children as well as weighting them in both the categorical per pupil aid as well as in the general aid formula. If the state does not recognize their obligations soon, I believe that it will be resolved in the courts.*