

WEAC State Superintendent Questionnaire (5 Questions All Candidates Answers)

1. What are your top priorities for the Department of Public Instruction in the areas of student achievement and equity?

I truly believe that equity and student achievement go hand in hand, and it has to start early. We have to invest in children early so that they are set up for a lifetime of success. My goal is to invest in kids starting in birth to three and 4K programming, so that by the time they are in high school we are not investing in corrective measures or have overwhelming concerns about high school engagement or graduation.

- Early childhood education and universal 4K access
- Teacher recruitment and retention
- Mental Health and Health Supports
- School Funding Formula Revision
- Facilities Improvement, particularly infrastructure and HVAC in aging buildings

The heart of all of this is the school funding formula revision, and my overarching goal is to repair the formula or replace it all together so that it is equitable for all students, regardless of their zipcode. Just driving around from community to community, one notices the disparities and the discrepancies in programming and facilities. So in addition to fixing the funding formula, I would advocate for a separate stream of funding to repair and/or replace aging facilities in communities that have not been able to raise the revenue to improve their school buildings.

2. Taking the helm of the Department of Public Instruction during a pandemic, what are the top areas you will address to balance student/staff safety while keeping learning on track?

The pandemic is frustrating to so many people, but when you examine it or think about it further, but as one who has been a leader or taught in schools the past 21 years and engaged in equity work, I will tell you that these needs of student/staff safety and learning, are not issues. The achievement gap, or opportunity gap as I call it, have been a problem in Wisconsin for 20+ years and it seems in the past 10 years it has grown as Wisconsin's commitment to funding public schools has declined. There are many elements of institutional racism in our school policies or local community and state policies and practices that have widened the inequity we see in our communities. However, to recover from the pandemic, we have to address the most immediate needs first:

- Vaccinate all adults in our schools as soon as practicable;

- Provide additional staffing to maintain lower class sizes and hire/contract with more support personnel in mental health, social work, school nursing;
- Fully fund and provide universal 4K, full day/everyday
- Provide for and structure additional recovery program offerings: birth to three, after school programs for recovery and enrichment, summer camps for students currently without access, and summer school that is both recovery and enrichment.
- Upgrade our school building facilities and infrastructure to meet 21st century building codes and expectations, particularly the rural and urban schools that cannot afford it currently in their operating budgets, particularly in HVAC.

3. How do you see the role of education unions at the local and state levels when it comes to the operations of the Department of Public Instruction?

- I want the local and state affiliates of the unions to have a seat at the table regarding all education policy items, and in particular, when items impacting their professions and the working conditions are addressed.
- I would like to have monthly standing advisory meetings that are “joint” meetings with representatives from WEAC, WPEN, WIRSA, WASDA, and WASB together to address and vet educational policies that are in draft, in progress to hearings, and provide input on technical assistance or guidance documents.
- I would advocate with the professional organizations like WASB etc. and the legislative caucuses that teacher organizations, particularly unions, have a liaison to the organization.
- I would advocate for and include WEAC and Wisconsin Teacher of the Year executive board members to have a seat on the different state superintendent advisory committees, like the Equity Council and Rural Schools Advisory, among others.

4. An effective teacher is the most important school-based determinant of education outcomes, so it is therefore crucial that school districts recruit and retain high-quality teachers. Recognizing that Wisconsin average teacher pay has dropped to 33rd in America, what will you do to make sure a qualified and well-trained professional educator is in front of every student, every day? Do you support equitable, predictable and sustainable pay plans?

- Yes, I support equitable, predictable and sustainable pay plans. It can be done. The salary schedule idea still works, but it needs to be updated and pay needs to increase so that it is commensurate with education and experience for 2022 and

not 2002. Higher pay will also attract more individuals to the teaching profession because they can sustain families and a middle-class standard of living.

- I would be in favor of revising our licensing system so that it is tiered - similar to the apprentice, journeyman and master in other professions.
- I would be in favor of sectoral compensation or bargaining agreements so that we can prevent the free-agency that is threatening the rural districts.
- I am also interested in exploring the idea of a statewide base salary for school staff and then ensuring that schools are funded fully to meet that base. I would like to explore the idea that each school is also staffed with base personnel for student achievement and academic equity purposes. Staff such as reading and math specialists, curriculum coordinators, and gifted and talented, as well as counselors, OT/PT and Speech, are essential, and presently the schools that have additional funding are able to meet these personnel needs. Ideally I would explore this concept for administrative personnel too, as many of our rural and high-poverty school districts are short-staffed, administratively speaking.

To get teachers well qualified and well trained I would like to work with the educator licensing team and our schools and college of education to really rethink what skills are needed to teach, ensure that the teachers have the content background and the skills, and then also ensure more diversity in our teaching ranks of both men, women, persons of color, LGBTQ, and learning styles. I would also like to eliminate educator effectiveness from state statute and put teacher evaluations as a collaborative process of both the teachers and their school boards, where it belongs. And finally, I would like to rethink and eliminate the other hoops teachers must jump through to become licensed like FORT and the EdTPA. If IHE's are doing their jobs, which they are, then these tests are unnecessary expenses and headaches.

As State Superintendent I would advocate for student loan forgiveness for teachers in Wisconsin who teach in a rural or urban public school district for 8 consecutive years, and for administrators who serve in rural school districts (they don't pay nearly as much as urban or suburban). The idea isn't a new one, but I think it could go a long way to solving our imminent teacher and administrative shortage, and I think it would help rural renewal and attract professionals to underserved rural areas. I would work with other agencies to see if this program could be expanded to other professions like rural public defenders, prosecutors, mental health professionals, and doctors and dentists to serve in our rural communities throughout Wisconsin.

5. How will you lead efforts to ensure an anti-racist school culture in Wisconsin, where students and staff of color feel supported, safe, and empowered?

- Early Childhood Education and investing in kids when they are young, not when they are adults and in the corrections system.
- Providing mental health and wellness access to kids and staff;
- Using equity audits to analyze the school board/district and building policies or administrative practices that we have in place that are racist and biased and eliminating them and replacing them if necessary.
- Phasing police presence out of our schools and instead investing more in school counselors and social workers and other support professionals.
- Through the equity audits, ensuring that all children have access and can thrive in a rigorous academic environment, but that they are prepared for career or college - and that both options are accessible and equally attained.
- Working with the Higher Education Aids Board and the UW System to expand access to a technical college or UW System school for two years tuition free.