

## 46<sup>th</sup> District Democrats Legislative & Statewide Questionnaire

### Candidate Information

Candidate Name Robin Fleming

Office sought Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Have you read the 46<sup>th</sup> LD Democrats Draft 2016 Platform? Yes  No   
(Go to [http://www.46dems.org/2016\\_ld\\_caucus](http://www.46dems.org/2016_ld_caucus) and click "Draft Platform")

Why are you running for this office?

As someone who was raised in Seattle with a single mother and a brother with Down Syndrome (who had no rights to access education and withered in an institution), and who attended nine different schools before graduating from high school, I personally understand the struggles, discrimination, and instability faced by so many of our students today. These experiences led me to seek ways to help others, and to encourage them to turn their own difficult circumstances into strengths.

My education and experiences as a school nurse, teacher, curriculum and program developer, education and health researcher, and administrator at OSPI have provided excellent preparation for me to effectively lead our state education agency. I am the only candidate with the depth and breadth of experience, knowledge and skills who can navigate and leverage timely and critical opportunities in both education and health. By mobilizing both of these systems collectively, we can finally reduce – and eventually eliminate – the achievement and opportunity gaps and produce better educated, engaged, and healthy people; reduce the school to prison pipeline, and save millions of dollars trying to reduce the effects of inequalities when students are older by instead investing heavily in early supports and learning. The unique qualities I bring to mobilizing both health and education systems are *necessary* at this time, and that is why I felt obliged to step up and run for this office.

With a platform of equity, my top priorities are:

- To get education out of its silo to operate in collaboration with health, early learning, housing and the justice system. These relationships will promote the development and

implementation of strategies that support families and young children to stop disparities before they take root.

- Advocate for full and fair funding of public education as required by the McCleary decision – and ensure that funds are appropriately allocated to bolster student support, reduce class sizes, and reduce or eliminate districts’ dependence on local levies to meet basic education needs.
- Stop the teacher shortage crisis by restoring the teaching profession as honorable and vitally important to the health and economic vitality of our society. This can be accomplished in part by proposing that teacher salaries begin at \$48,000 as recommended by the Compensation Technical Advisory Group; by providing incentives for high school and college students to pursue teaching careers; and by creating classroom conditions that are amenable to teaching and learning (e.g. reduced class size and placing student health needs on the backs of nurses and other support providers, not teachers).

**Please briefly describe your qualifications for this office and your personal and professional background.**

My professional qualifications are extensive and precisely aligned for this position, as evidenced in part by the following:

- PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy (UW, 2008) with emphasis in school finance and multicultural education
- Master’s Degree in Community Health Nursing (UW, 2002); Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing (UW, 1998); Bachelor of Arts Degree in Journalism and French (Seattle University, 1982).
- Published research author in several academic teaching and health journals.
- Thirteen years’ school nursing experience working with some of the state’s most vulnerable students (and 13 years of membership and participation in WEA).
- School leadership. Applied for and received grant monies to develop programs for vulnerable students in multiple schools in Seattle. One program focused on providing career opportunities for immigrant students; the other was a peer-health education program designed to develop student leaders and improve health in a high-poverty school. Both programs (particularly the former) required significant community collaborations with dozens of agencies and organizations – relationships I continue to nurture.
- Nearly five years’ statewide administrative and policy experience, working with the legislature and serving as an advocate and educator for the Washington State Nurses Association, and now in my third year of overseeing statewide school health services and administering two programs at OSPI. I collaborate closely with other OSPI divisions, including Student Support; Equity and Civil Rights; Learning and Teaching; Special Education; Nutrition Services; and others. I am responsible for administering a budget of \$5.2 million per biennium.

From a personal standpoint, my early life planted seeds of advocacy that created a fierce determination to protect and support anyone who was vulnerable. After working with vulnerable (and older) populations at Harborview, I made a deliberate decision to work “upstream” to prevent many of the

problems I witnessed there. I found my home and my passion in schools, working with children, families and school staff. They inspired me to further my education, to develop curricula and create programs for vulnerable students (immigrants and poor and ethnic minorities), and to build alliances with agencies and organizations that shared my goals of creating more equitable conditions to allow all students, and especially those most vulnerable, to develop to their full intellectual, social and emotional potential. I have also raised two boys. My perspective as a mother gives me a strong sense of empathy and understanding for the many challenges faced by other families.

**Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Have you ever been a member of another party? Have you been actively involved with the Democratic Party?**

I am true blue. I have never been an official member of another party, but did once vote for a Republican presidential candidate at age 22 before I became fully enlightened. I am not only a Democrat with strong progressive values, but also have committed service to my (43<sup>rd</sup>) legislative district, serving as PCO, Secretary, and member of the executive board.

**What's your plan to win?**

I'm working hard to raise money, gain endorsements and expand my visibility. I have raised more money on a per-month basis than any of the other candidates. I have the endorsements of Rep. Brady Pinero Walkinshaw, Marilyn Watkins (Policy Director at EOI), Susan Brown (CEO of Kids' Co.); and multiple teachers, school board members, principals, assistant superintendents, school psychologists, parents, nursing leaders, and others.

**What do you see as the most important functions of the position you are running for? What qualities do you possess that make you the candidate best suited to this role?**

The main functions and duties of the SPI are to provide guidance, support and leadership for Washington State's K-12 education system. Our state is experiencing persistent educational inequalities, and special circumstances involving full funding of education under McCleary, the new federal ESSA law, and opportunities available for federal reimbursements for school nursing services potentially adding millions of dollars to the K-12 system (that the other candidates are not aware of). The individual leading this agency needs to have strong and varied educational expertise, a background in research and administration; significant on-the-ground experience in schools; strong and varied statewide partnerships; understanding of collective bargaining and unions; knowledge of health and education systems; and an understanding of the current configuration and offices at OSPI. While I have all of these qualities, I believe the most important quality of the leader of our state education agency is a vision of system-wide equity and how to achieve it. I see the big picture, the pieces that comprise the whole, and how to assemble them in ways that multiply their positive effects in a cost efficient manner while anticipating and guarding against unwanted ripple effects.

If elected what would your top three priorities be?

1) Ensure that robust health and student support services are in place to allow our most vulnerable students to engage in and excel at education; 2) Stop the achievement gap at its source by partnering with and supporting early learning and family supports in our state; and 3) Work to fully fund education in a progressive manner.

How will you support women and families' economic opportunities? Would you support legislation closing the wage gap, funding childcare options, and requiring paid family leave?

To address the last three issues, the answer is yes. As SPI I will support women and families' economic opportunities by hiring more women at the cabinet level and creating flexible working options.

How will you work to address racial equity?

Equity is the platform of my entire campaign, and has been the central focus of the past two decades of my professional life. All decisions and recommendations that I make as Superintendent – from curricula to testing to funding allocations and health supports -- will be viewed through the lens of equity. Examples of some of the work that will be done to directly address racial equity include additional policy guidance on discipline disparities, robust investments in early supports and for early learning for ethnic minority and poor populations, and the creation of career pathways for students of color who want to enter the teaching profession.

Describe your stance on Washington's tax structure. What needs to be changed? What should stay the same?

While I will have limited influence over Washington's tax structure as SPI, I firmly believe that our regressive system is in dire need of change. To fully fund education, our Legislature is now required to make changes that will increase revenue. Options include reducing or eliminating sales tax and instituting a state income tax, instituting capital gains taxes, closing tax loopholes, and initiating and increasing taxes on polluters.

Are there issues that you've worked on or are excited to work on that are not receiving much media attention?

Yes! The health of our state's students, and its relationship to academic achievement, is not widely understood or discussed. Health conditions in student populations have doubled during the past decade,

while school-based services to address them have been nearly cut in half. This contributes to chronic absenteeism, academic underperformance, and jeopardizes graduation rates and students’ life opportunities. Because I am equally expert in the fields of education and health, I am the only candidate who will be able to effectively identify and leverage both state and federal opportunities that improve students’ engagement with school through improved health supports. To date, I have done the following:

- \* Ensured nursing presence on all of our state’s nine regional Accountable Communities of Health
- \* Governor Inslee appointed my school nurse nominee to his Health Innovation Leadership Network
- \* Continue to work with the Health Care Authority to enact a new federal rule that allows school nurses to receive reimbursement for services to all Medicaid-eligible students (not just those in special education, as was formerly the case). As nearly half of all students in our state are eligible for Medicaid, this has tremendous implications – not only for the potential receipt of millions of federal dollars to purchase much-needed nursing services, but also to improve school attendance, student engagement and achievement, and graduation rates.

How will you combat climate change?

Climate change is a subject that should be taught to all students, starting in kindergarten (if not before). This is a topic that can and should be embedded in a cross-curricular fashion into science, environmental studies, humanities and math. OSPI can also serve as a better example of a “green” agency by making plumbing and electrical updates (as state funds allow) to reduce environmental impacts. OSPI also can do more to encourage bicycling and walking, and to improve its recycling program.

Question	Support	Oppose	Qualify, if needed
Do you support or oppose Raise up Washington’s initiative to increase the minimum wage?	x		
Do you support or oppose access to safe and legal abortion?	X		
Do you support or oppose amending Washington’s Constitution to require a two-thirds vote to raise revenue?		x	
Do you support or oppose allowing coal or oil to be exported from Washington State’s ports?		x	

Do you support or oppose making two years of community college or technical school tuition-free?	x		
Do you support or oppose requiring paid vacation and sick/safe leave?	x		I received the Aubrey Davis Award for Progressive Leadership from the Economic Opportunity Institute in 2012 for my work in getting paid sick and safe leave passed in Seattle.
Do you support automatic voter registration?	x		
Do you support or oppose the death penalty?		x	
Do you support or oppose barring employers from asking criminal history questions in job applications?			While I do not support required disclosure for people convicted of non-violent offenses, I do believe employers have the right to know of applicants who have been convicted of violent crimes, particularly if the jobs involve working with vulnerable people. For example, my brother, who was institutionalized, and who had Down Syndrome, was assaulted (along with several other vulnerable adults) by workers at the Rainier School. The employees who committed the assaults were found guilty in court and were barred from ever again working with vulnerable people. They should be required to disclose this when applying for jobs that involve contact with elderly, disabled people, or children.
Do you support or oppose legislation to fix Washington's "three strikes" law?	x		

The following questions are position specific. You only need to complete the questions for the position that you're running for.

### **Superintendent of Public Instruction**

How will you work to address the achievement gap in our public schools?

The SPI has a vested interest in ensuring that students arrive at school ready to learn and eager to engage to their full capacity. This requires investment in, and a commitment to, ensuring that statewide conditions are altered to help level the playing field. This is why investments in early learning and child and family supports are a key priority for my

administration. This will require long-term and ongoing work. Other specific actions I will take to ensure that vulnerable students are able to access the educational resources that will allow them to realize their potential will require the following:

- **Support services.** Vulnerable students cannot access their education in the absence of support services that enhance their health, well-being, and academic needs. While nearly one-third of all Washington State students have a diagnosable health condition, two students per week complete suicide (and many others make attempts), and a doubling in the rate of diabetes, asthma, allergies and other conditions that compromise attendance and learning, school nurse time in buildings has been reduced by half. We need to strengthen nursing support in schools as research shows that for every dollar invested in school nursing services, society gets more than \$2 back in reduced emergency room visits, increased teaching time, increased administrative time in schools, and reduced expenditures in the health system over time as chronic conditions are better managed. In addition, more school counselors, social workers, and psychologists are needed in schools.
- **Changes in disciplinary policies.** We know that students of color, poor students and special education students are disciplined at higher rates than their white and non-poor peers. I would advocate for a fair system of discipline – and one that does not include any loss of academic time or other support services. For example, students who are suspended or expelled lose precious class time, putting them at further risk for school failure and dropping out of school.
- **Teaching diversity and excellence.** We have a serious teaching workforce issue and need to provide incentives to attract a diverse and talented teaching pool. Some of the incentives I would advocate for include higher starting salaries; assistance with loans for graduates who commit to teaching in high poverty and/or rural school districts; bonuses for national and/or subject certification; and recruitment efforts, particularly at high poverty high schools. My commitment to teacher (and health care) diversity is evidenced by my work for the Martinez Foundation, which provided scholarships to students of color seeking graduate degrees in teaching, and to immigrant students for whom I helped create a career pathway to careers in health care.

Please describe your position on standardized testing.

I support the limited use of standardized tests. When used appropriately, they can be helpful as one of several evaluative tools to determine a student's academic status and progress. I am adamantly opposed to high-stakes standardized tests, e.g. those that would prohibit graduation or passage to another grade level if a student "failed" the test.

Given the *McCleary* decision, what legislation do you support or propose to fully fund education and maintain funding for other basic services? Do you support increasing revenue? Given existing public needs and the state of the economy, should such legislation include increasing revenue?

It is abundantly clear that revenue will need to be raised to comply with the *McCleary* decision. There are many ways this can be done, and I will support progressive solutions.

Do you support or oppose charter schools? Why or why not?

I do not support the siphoning of public funds into new schools that are not publicly governed. We have the duty of public stewardship over public schools, and I believe we also possess the creativity to provide the specialized services and innovations that charter proponents crave. Under my leadership, these opportunities will be explored and delivered – but they will be governed publicly. And unlike some of my opponents, my campaign will not be funded by leading advocates for charter schools and school reform measures.

I was frankly very disappointed by the Legislature's willingness to seal a deal to sustain funding for eight charters serving less than 1,000 students after charters were deemed unconstitutional by our state's Supreme Court, while neglecting its duty to comply with the court's contempt ruling to fully fund education for more than 1 million students.

#### **Secretary of State**

How will you work to increase voter enfranchisement?

#### **Legislature (House and Senate), Governor, Lt Governor**

Given the *McCleary* decision, what legislation do you support or propose to fully fund education and maintain funding for other basic services? Do you support increasing revenue? Given existing public needs and the state of the economy, should such legislation include increasing revenue?

Do you support or oppose charter schools? Why or why not?

#### **Lt Governor**



How would you use your office to promote international economic development that benefits our state?

When the Governor is out of state or otherwise incapacitated, the Lt. Governor becomes the acting Governor. How would you handle that responsibility? What kind of actions would you take?

### **Commissioner of Public Lands**

In 2015, Washington faced the largest and most destructive forest fires in history. What will you do as Lands Commissioner to prevent or respond to wildfires?

Timber, many parts of the state, is a hot button issue. While some want to protect our forest canopy, others see jobs and resources for building schools as more important. Where do you land in this debate? How will you use your position to find compromise?

### **Treasurer**

What role does the Treasurer hold in maintaining a healthy credit and bond ratings for the state of Washington? Do you see room for improvement?

### **Auditor**

How will you restore confidence in the office of Auditor as a successor to Troy Kelley?

How will you prioritize agency and organizational audits?

### **Attorney General**

What accomplishment from your tenure are most proud of?

**Insurance Commissioner**

What accomplishment from your tenure are most proud of?