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## SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION CANDIDATE QUESTIONS 2021 ELECTION

1. What do you believe is the role of public education in our society writ large? What are the broad policy implications of that role?

In my view, we have public education to ensure our children can function as residents and citizens of the United States. Because we live in a democracy, the primary purpose of schools is to ensure our children are literate, can analyze facts, can critically think, etc. These skills are necessary to ensure we make informed decisions when supporting a policy and/or electing our leaders. Also, children learn about problem solving, conflict resolution, etc. These essential skills are important for us so we can positively interact with other people in our society.

Schools also prepare our children for our mixed economy. I believe in the American Dream. That we can work hard for a better life and see our children have more opportunities than our own. I recently read that for the first time in United States history that we have a generation that did not do as well as their parents. I see our eroding education system as a partial culprit. We have a teacher shortage in the thousands. Children's experiences differ so widely depending on the school they attend. For example, some class sizes are around 15 while others are around 45. I believe these issues are a symptom of a broken school financial system (I will talk more about this in questions 3 & 4). Our plan is to address the above issues so that we can truly build great schools across Wisconsin.

2. How would you make the Department of Public Instruction more active/effective in making state K-12 education policy? How can (or should) DPI address the differing needs of urban and rural districts?

In 1996, the Wisconsin Supreme Court drafted an opinion confirming that no other officer can be equal or superior than the state superintendent when it comes to public instruction. To me, this confirmed mandate means that it is the duty and responsibility of the state superintendent to not only to supervise public instruction in Wisconsin, but also to act as the chief advocate for policy change. This means in addition to using the powers vested by the constitution and legislated law, I will work with the legislature, governor, and stakeholders to pass reforms that will lead to a more equal and equitable system of schools in Wisconsin. I believe that if we can get the reforms I am proposing into law, then we will give all the children of Wisconsin more opportunities in life and it will position us to become national leaders in education.

Rural and urban districts have individual and different needs. Just like great teachers individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student, DPI should work to meet the individual needs of each school district. We would not only work with the over 400 Wisconsin school districts, but also leverage the CESA's to move into the direction of ensuring every district has the support and resources necessary to be successful. For example, there are some rural school districts with high transportation costs, slow broadband, and they find great difficulty attracting teachers and substitute teachers. We will not only push for the reforms necessary to address the structural issues facing districts, but we will also provide support, as needed, to help local districts win.

3. Wisconsin's per-pupil spending has declined from 12th highest in the nation (11% above the national average) to 24th highest in the nation (2.6% below the national average).
  - a) Do you believe that the decline in resources has impacted educational outcomes in our state? How?
  - b) How would you predict that this decline is likely to impact educational outcomes in the future?

School funding is broken in Wisconsin. We rely heavily on property taxes, which I believe has resulted in some districts getting about twice as much base money per child than other districts. The only way districts can raise funding beyond the revenue limit is to go to referendum. Too many of these referendums are done just so districts have the operating money needed to stay afloat. The fact that we had over 1,000 referendums in the past ten years is evidence to me that we have a broken school financial system.

To answer the question, revenue limits and decisions by the Wisconsin legislature are a main reason for our funding challenges. In my view, the revenue decline resulted in cuts in the student services and a shortage of quality/qualified teachers. We know that services like after-school programs, summer enrichment camps, and small class sizes positively impact student outcomes. We also know that quality/qualified teachers are one of the top influencers of student achievement. So revenue cuts resulted in fewer services and a teacher shortage, which negatively impacts student outcomes.

I believe we will continue to see our education system crumble before our eyes if Wisconsin stays down the path of sponsoring a broken school financial system. If the austerities continue, we will not have the funds to encourage a vibrant teaching profession. We will also continue to see a decline in student services. These taken together will mean that our children and grandchildren will lose opportunity and the future of Wisconsin will look grim.

4. How can we balance taxpayer concerns with educational needs?

I am proposing sweeping reforms to our school finance system. Right now we rely heavily on property taxes. As mentioned above, districts have to go to referendum to raise funds. If the referendum passes, the new funding comes from property taxes. Personally, I feel it is unconscionable to ask our elders on fixed incomes to choose between giving schools the funding they need or, in some cases, paying their bills and/or purchasing prescriptions. To remedy this issue, I believe we should begin to move away from property taxes to fund schools. Under my plan, we would establish a basic standard of student care and fund schools at the state level. Homeowners could see up to a 30% decrease in their property taxes. The state could then raise the funds needed by eliminating loopholes, exploring funding sources used by other states, shifting priorities, and/or donations (which Wisconsin receives).

Properly funded schools will in part pay for themselves. If we provide suitable funding to schools, then we can hire the best teachers and provide the best student services. The result is we could expand great schools to every corner of Wisconsin. We know that great schools tend to reduce crime, so we will save money on prisons, jails, and DA's. We know that great schools tend to reduce teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, and drug use, saving us overall in medical and social costs. We also know that great schools increase student outcomes and can result in a better job with more pay, reducing the need for social services while also increasing the tax base. School finance reform can lead to better schools, fewer costs, and more opportunities for future generations.

5. What changes if any would you propose in the school voucher program? How have the policies of the Department of Education under Betsy DeVos affected school policy and achievement in Wisconsin?

The voucher system is part of a movement designed to reduce and/or eliminate public schools. Roughly a third of Milwaukee children attend a voucher school instead of a public school. New Orleans is reported to have zero traditional schools because of school choice and vouchers.

School choice, which includes vouchers, relies on competition. As we know, competition requires there to be a winner, some close to winners, and a whole lot of losers. When we apply competition to schools, we see the same results. For me, I oppose vouchers and school choice for two reasons. The first is that I do not think that any school should be a loser school.

My second reason for opposing vouchers is that I do not think the government should be in the business of propping up failing businesses or organizations. If many of these voucher schools were not subsidized by the government, they would go defunct. I believe that if a parent wants to choose a private school for their child, then they should pay for it out of their pocket. Let's go back to what worked for over 100 years, traditional public schools.

6. Why has it been so difficult to reduce the gap between minority and white achievement? What changes need to be made if we are serious about reducing the achievement gap?

The school I run is very diverse and we have done an excellent job at meeting the needs of every child. We are culturally responsive and we individualize instruction so that every child is engaged and learning. We have seen great success! The Department of Public Instruction rates us high. 12 of 12 subgroups beat the state growth average in English Language Arts and 11 of 12 subgroups beat the state growth average in Math.

Though we see success, I believe we could do much more if we had an equitable educational system. You see, we have amazing teachers who are qualified and quality. Imagine what we could if our class sizes were 15 instead of around 30. Imagine what we could do for our ~200 English Learners if we had more than two English as a Second Language teachers.

We cannot truly solve the achievement gap until we address the structural problems facing our education system. We need quality and qualified teachers. We need small class sizes, after school programming, summer enrichment camps, Art, Music, Physical Education, recess, and STEM courses. We need to ensure our Special Education, Bilingual, and English Learners have the support they need. We need to end bullying and ensure every child feels physically, emotionally, and socially safe to learn. Until we fix the structural issues facing our educational system, we will never truly be able to end the achievement gap.

7. When the pandemic is finally over, what actions should we take to help our children catch up on what they have missed -- especially those who lack broadband access, computers, and/or adults who lack the education and/or time to become teachers-on-the-fly?

This pandemic has spotlighted the inequities within our system. When children return to school, these inequities will still be there. Children in resource rich districts will have the equipment, small class sizes, and such to reduce the impact of learning that may have been missed during the pandemic. Whereas children in resource poor districts will be slower to catch up on learning. I believe this is a perfect time for us as a state to really address the systemic issues facing our schools. We can rebuild our system in an equal/equitable manner and create opportunity for all children.

8. What is your position on police presence in our schools?

I oppose assigning police officers to schools because it can lead to the school-to-prison pipeline. Because of access, things that normally may be handled at the school administration level might be pushed on to the police. This leads to situations where a child who might normally be suspended or receive another disciplinary measure, could receive a citation. This is not to say that we should not work with police if there is a crime. Simply that officers should not be fixtures in our schools.