

1. Why are you running for State Superintendent of Public Instruction?

I've been an educator all my adult life. I grew up in small town Plymouth, WI. Worked at a canning factory in high school, put myself through college, and married my kindergarten sweetheart, Kathy – also a teacher.

I taught and became a principal in Tomah, was an administrator in Oakfield and Verona, led CESA 6, and have twice been elected State Superintendent. I've been an educator all across Wisconsin, and no matter where I worked, I put kids first. Always.

But I have to tell you, I worry for the future. Years of relentless attacks on educators and public schools have left a generation of young people disinterested in teaching. The words and actions of leaders matter.

We have to restore respect to the teaching profession.

For teachers in the field, endless requirements and policies from Washington, Madison, and district offices are drowning our best educators in paperwork and well-intended “policy solutions” you never asked for.

I know we need to lighten the load.

As your State Superintendent, I have always tried to find common ground, while holding firm to the values we share.

I worked with Gov. Doyle to increase funding for schools and with Gov. Walker around reading and school report cards. But when Walker wanted to use school report cards to expand vouchers and take over low performing schools, we pushed back together—and we won.

When Walker proposed Act 10, I fought back. From the halls of the Capitol to rallies outside, my union thug wife and I stood with the people of Wisconsin.

I champion mental health in schools, fight for school funding reform, and work to restore respect to the teaching profession.

But I am not a fool. The world has changed.

In my previous elections, we faced weak opponents we outspent. I won 62% of the vote and all but the three counties voted Evers last time.

But last November, Diane Hendricks and Besty DeVos dropped \$5 million into the “Reform America PAC” at the last minute and took out Russ Feingold. DeVos is likely to be Education Secretary and Hendricks has the ear of the President.

And these people are coming for us.

They've recruited a field of conservative candidates vying for their support.

The folks at the conservative Wisconsin Institution for Law & Liberty are doing everything they can to undermine the independent authority of the elected state superintendent. These folks have powerful friends and allies through the state and federal government.

But we are going to win.

We hired great a campaign team in Wisconsin. We're raising more money than ever, and we will need to raise more. We're mobilizing voters and activating social media.

While Wisconsin went for Mr. Trump, those voters overwhelmingly passed 80% of the referenda questions. They love their public schools. That is what we need to connect with to win.

But I need your help. You've stood with me before, and I need your help again. I need you to do more than you've ever done before. This is the last office they don't hold, and it is the first electoral battle in the new world. We cannot afford to lose.

2. Do you believe that public schools are sufficiently funded? If no, describe your plan to provide sufficient funds?

No.

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.

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.

3. Madison schools have experienced increasing attrition over the past five years and increasing difficulty in attracting highly qualified candidates in a growing number of certification areas. What factors do you have as the causes of this shortage? What measures will you take to promote the attraction and retention of highly qualified teachers and other school employees?

There are several main factors impacting these issues. The first is the negative rhetoric that occurs all too often around the teaching profession. The second is that Wisconsin educators' pay has taken a significant hit in recent years – an actual decrease of over 2 percent over the past few years (and changes to benefits and retirement have further eroded take home pay). Our current high school students pick up on this, and increasingly they are not look at teaching as a viable career path, and in Wisconsin, our teacher preparation programs are reporting record lows.

We need to continue to highlight the excellent work our teachers do each and every day and bring back teacher voice in to what goes on in the classroom. I am currently working with a small group of Wisconsin educators, including several from Madison, on a project we are calling "Every Teacher a Leader," an effort to highlight and promote instances of excellent teacher voice and leadership. Let's highlight the leadership and critical decision-making our educators use every day in their roles. The cultures of our schools must be strong and support teachers as they work with our students. I continue to advocate for additional resources in our schools to address the most pressing needs of our students and to provide resources for teacher to do their jobs.

4. What strategies will you enact to support and value Wisconsin's large, urban school districts?

I have championed several initiatives to support large, urban school districts, including expanding access to:

- Small class sizes and classroom support staff to help teachers effectively manage behavioral issues;
- Restorative justice and harm reduction strategies that reduce the disproportionate impact of discipline on student of color;
- Fun summer learning opportunities for students to accelerate learning or recover credits (increased funding, streamlined report requirements);
- Community schools, wrap around services and out-of-school time programs that because schools are the center of our communities;
- Culturally-responsive curriculum and profession development that helps educators meet the needs of diverse students;
- Mental health services and staff integrated with schools to meet students' needs.

I also support school finance policies that recognize that many students in poverty, English learners, foster youth, and students with special needs require additional resources to succeed.

Finally, I strongly support a universal accountability system for schools enrolling publicly-funded students. All schools should have to meet the same high bar.

5. What strategies will you enact to support and value Wisconsin's rural school districts?

In addition to the proposing the Fair Funding changes, my budget:

- Fully-funds the sparsity categorical aid and expands it to more rural schools;
- Expands the high cost transportation programs; and
- Provides funds for rural educator recruitment and retention.

6. How do you feel about the present Educator Effectiveness (teacher) evaluation system? What changes would you like to see to that system?

I support the Educator Effectiveness (EE) system. It was created with input from teachers, administrators as well as school board members and legislators. I believe we have administered the EE program with great care, listening to stakeholders from across that state.

That said, I believe changes need to be made. Recently, I have recommended that results from the state achievement test (Forward Exam) not be a required element in the evaluation process.

We must also continually message that the EE system was created to support professionals through a learning centered continuous improvement process. Evaluation systems implemented in isolation as an accountability or compliance exercise, will not improve educator practice or student outcomes.

7. What is your plan to work with Milwaukee Public Schools to assure that all students receive a quality public education?

While achievement gaps persist across the state, our city of the first class presents unique challenges and requires a multi-pronged approach. Milwaukee is ground zero for our state's efforts to accomplish major reductions in achievement gaps.

I have worked closely with Dr. Darienne Driver, MTEA and Milwaukee community leaders to support improvement efforts. We are working hand-in-hand to provide more learning time when needed, expand access to summer school, establish community schools, and create a best-in-state educator workforce.

We must continue to have honest conversations about our challenges and provide the resources and support for improvement. Divisive legislative solutions from Washington and Madison have not worked. We need more support for our students and schools, not less.

8. Do you believe the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction should continue to be an elected position as currently provided in the State Constitution?

Absolutely yes.

The creators of our constitution got it right. Public education was so important they made the State Superintendent independently elected and answerable directly to the people. However, Governors and special interests always try to usurp this authority. The Supreme Court has consistently held up the independent power of the State Superintendent—mostly recently in the *Coyne* case advanced by MTI. Undeterred by their loss, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty is currently working to circumvent the authority of the State Superintendent over the federal ESSA law. Rest assured we are fighting back and must again prevail.

9. Describe your position on the voucher program?

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:

1. The state should adequately fund our public school system before expanding vouchers;
2. The state, rather than local school districts, should pay the full cost of the voucher program;
3. 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.

10. Describe your position on independent charter schools.

In general, charter schools work best when authorized by a locally-elected school board that understands their community's needs, and is accountable to them.

As both State Superintendent and a member of the Board of Regents, I am concerned the new UW System chartering authority could become controversial and disruptive. New schools are best created locally, not from a distant tower overlooking the city.

11. Wisconsin teacher licensing has the reputation as being one of the most rigorous and respected systems in the country. Recently, proposals were made that would allow any individual with a bachelor's degree or work experience in trades to obtain a teaching license. Do you support these proposals? Why or why not?

I do not support any proposal that would ignore pedagogical skills as a key component of any preparation program. Content knowledge is not enough. A prospective teacher must know "how" to teach as well as "what" to teach.

12. Teachers report a significant increase in mandated meetings and "professional development" sessions that are often unrelated or not embedded to the reality of their daily work with children. What will you do as State Superintendent to provide teachers with the time needed to prepare lessons, collaborate with colleagues, evaluate student work, and reflect on their practices

When I travel the state and talk to educators, I hear this sentiment a lot, but it's quickly followed by an important caveat: When educators believe that the meeting, the professional development opportunity, the extra responsibility, or the new idea will truly make a difference for kids they serve, they become the first and best champion of it-- always.

We absolutely must find ways to lighten the load for our teachers so that the work we do out of the classroom is meaningful, manageable and powerful for kids. My Every Teacher a Leader Initiative focuses on highlighting cultures that support teacher leadership, and this often means that a principal or a superintendent has created systems that value and honor the expertise teachers bring to an initiative. They involve teachers early in decisions rather than convening them after a decision is made to implement it.

I just heard from an educator in a school district that is receiving national attention for its dramatic academic improvement over the past five years. When asked what the recipe for success was, she said the superintendent convened a team of veteran educators on his first

day, listened to what they needed, worked long and hard to meet those needs, and kept them involved the whole way. That's it.

13. Do you support restoring the rights of public sector workers to collectively bargain over wages, hours and conditions of employment?

Yes.

I have been a champion for collective bargain and workers' rights my entire career. I signed the recall petition over Act 10—and I haven't changed my mind about it.

14. Are you interested in receiving MTI Voters endorsement? If so, why?

MTI has been a great partner of mine over the years. I would be honored to continue that collaboration going forward. Additionally, I have five grand-kids Madison Public Schools, and I want to them to continue to be proud of the strong relationship I have with Madison educators.

15. Are you interested in receiving financial support for your campaign from MTI-Voters?

Yes, my opponents will be seeking funding from organizations that have very deep pockets and MTI full financial support is more important than ever.

16. Is there anything else you'd like MTI members to know about your candidacy and why you are seeking election to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction?

I hope our work together, mutual commitment, and shared values continue for another four years.