

## 2021 Wisconsin DPI Candidate Milwaukee Press Club Appearance

Deborah Kerr and Jill Underly

April 1, 2021 *machine generated transcript via schoolinfosystem.org*

[00:00:00] Good afternoon and welcome to the latest Milwaukee press club. Virtual news man. I'm your host Milwaukee press club, president Corey Hess from Wisconsin public radio. Today we have Deborah Kerr and Jill Underly who are seeking to become the next state superintendent. Before we get started, I'd like to thank our sponsors.

[00:00:18] Our presenting sponsor is spectrum news one. Our event partner is whisk politics.com was politics.com partners with the press club for this luncheon. As part of its ongoing event series in Milwaukee, sponsored by UWM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin Academy of global education and training 1125 at Paps Walkie Police Association, the firm consulting medical college of Wisconsin and spectrum.

[00:00:43] Once again, today we have Debra and Jill. They were the top finishers among seven candidates in the February 16th, primary. They're running in the general election, Tuesday to replace incumbent Caroline Stanford, Taylor, who chose to step down from the non-partisan position. [00:01:00] Debra is a former superintendent of the Brownier School District.

[00:01:03] And Jill is a superintendent of the, of Tanika School District. Thank you both for being here. We're really happy to have you. Um, Debra, do you want to start out by telling us a little bit about yourself while you're running? Sure. Good afternoon everyone. Um, I'm Deb Kerr candidate for Wisconsin state superintendent of public instruction.

[00:01:23] And it's truly an honor to be here with the Milwaukee press club today. My vision is to create a world-class education system that is the highest performing in the country. And we will do this by a commitment to our Wisconsin promise where every child is known by strength, named passion and need ready to graduate into a future that they choose.

[00:01:43] I have the most experience to do this job and do it starting day one. I've dedicated the last 40 years of my life to education. I've worked in all sectors of education. I'm parochial educated. I taught in private schools and I created a 4k charter school and [00:02:00] public school dedicated for the last 34 years.

[00:02:03] I'm an award-winning teacher and a principal. And as a high school athletic director, back to back state champion basketball coach and proud superintendent in the state of Wisconsin for the last 20 years. My superintendent's experience started at a small rural school. Well, my grade school, um, for K through eighth grade in Western Kenosha County, but the 150 students, I was a superintendent, the principal, the business manager, and the curriculum director.

[00:02:29] I shoveled snow and I even did playground duty every day. Um, and then it was off, up North to Brown Deer, a suburb just North of Milwaukee, first tier suburb. We put the urban and suburban. And so that district was 1600 kids 4k through 12th grade. Um, and when I got there, it was 20% students of color and 20% economically disadvantaged.

[00:02:50] But over the years we became this rich, diverse, uh, community, uh, All-America city. And we became one of the most diverse suburban school districts in the entire state [00:03:00] serving over 80% students of color and 50% poverty. I've also had elected experience at an North shore rotary president, but also state president for our, uh, state superintendents and national superintendents organization.

[00:03:16] So I have had successful experience advocating for Wisconsin kids and education for the last five years, uh, at the state Capitol at the legislature and at the Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. So I'm very, um, uh, excited about this opportunity. And my four areas is we need to get our kids back into school right now, our kids are suffering.

[00:03:37] And so our appearance, we need to get to back to the basic of teaching phonics and reading. Again, I support school choice and the Liberty of parents to choose where to send their child. And we need to decentralize the DPI. These are promises that I can keep, and this is why I'm running for Wisconsin state superintendent.

[00:03:53] Thank you. Thank you, Deb. Now, Jill, it's your turn to introduce yourself.

[00:04:00] All right. Well, thank you Corey. Good afternoon, everybody. I just like to take a moment to thank the Milwaukee press club for having me here this afternoon. My name is Jill Underly and I'm running for state superintendent of public instruction.

[00:04:12] I'm running for the kids of Wisconsin and I've dedicated my life to serving kids with over 20 years of experience in every facet of public education. I started my career teaching in a school that had a significant population of students of color in English language learners. And during my time as an advisor at the university of Wisconsin, Madison, I worked with many first-generation college students.

[00:04:33] I also spent five years at the department of public instruction where I worked in and partnered with the Milwaukee public schools. I have worked in schools of all sizes in urban, rural, and suburban. These experiences really shaped me and who I am and solidified my deep commitment to equity. I'm running for state superintendent because every child every day should have access to a great public education, that solid foundation for which they can leave the rest of their lives, regardless of their zip code, [00:05:00] gender orientation ability, um, or income status.

[00:05:04] Excuse me. Um, Wisconsinites of all stripes want a strong public education system that benefits all of our kids, but currently we're leaving too many kids behind and our schools are picking winners and losers. I want to prioritize investing in early childhood education and access. Standing full day pre-K programming.

[00:05:22] In my current role as superintendent of PECA Tanika, I've been a leader in the state by offering full day universal pre-K programming because we know how critical early childhood programming is as well as childcare is for our students, our families, and our economy. And I will prioritize expanding these offerings to every student and family in Wisconsin.

[00:05:43] We also need to invest in making sure all of our schools can provide the mental health supports and professionals that our kids need, especially after the trauma that this pandemic has caused DPI can and should be doing more to help recruit and retain

passionate quality teachers and ensure they're compensated [00:06:00] fairly because great teachers make great schools for all of our kids.

[00:06:04] At the heart of all, this is fixing the broken school funding formula that is currently fueling so much of this inequity as state superintendent, I'll use the bully pulpit of the office to be a vocal champion of our public schools and advocate for increasing and fixing the school funding formula so that all of our public schools, especially those with higher needs, like our urban, rural, and high poverty schools receive the resources they need.

[00:06:27] My experiences and strong fiscal management, putting forward a vision to reach every child and getting the job done. I'm the only candidate in this race who is currently leading a school district through the pandemic, and I'm the candidate who will safely reopen our schools and keep them open for in-person learning because I've already done it in Pekka Tanika, and I know what it takes.

[00:06:45] So I'm running to bring this leadership experience and knowledge to the department of public instruction and to build a public education system where every child gets what they need to succeed every day. Thank you so much. Now let's meet the [00:07:00] media panel. We have Scott Bauer from the associated press.

[00:07:02] Emily files from w UWM and Rory Lillian from the Milwaukee journal Sentinel. I will let them get started. Scott, why don't you lead us off? Great, thanks Corey. And thank you both for being here this afternoon. Every four years, as we know this is a non-partisan race, but every four years it becomes somewhat of a partisan proxy battle.

[00:07:23] With more and more outside money and influence from both Republicans and Democrats this year. For example, um, Jill, your campaign has benefited from more than \$900,000 from the Wisconsin democratic party, both in money and in kind contributions and dev your campaign has benefited from a \$20,000 donation from Diane Hendricks, a noted conservative donor.

[00:07:44] I want to ask each of you, whether you would support a constitutional amendment to make this office. It cabinet position appointed by the governor rather than be elected every four years. Uh, Debbie, do you want to start off? Thank you Scott for, um, asking [00:08:00] this question because I've wondered that myself, uh, over this campaign journey, um, first of all, Wisconsin is only one of 13 superintendents at ALEKS, uh, it's superintendent, uh, and the only superintendent when elected that gets to pick their own leadership cabinet.

[00:08:15] Um, I think after going on this journey, I would like to see some reform in this area because it's not a non-partisan race. The way we're both running our campaigns. We we've tried to be bipartisan. This is trying to bring people on both sides of the aisle together to unify around education. And so I think it would be very important because, um, it doesn't matter who contributes to your campaign.

[00:08:36] It's how you use the money. And so I'm going to just. Say that I'm not using the money to attack my opponent. I'm not using my money to attack the village of Pekka Tanika or their school district or their school board. And so I'm using the money because I have kids first in mind and trying to promote my initiatives and my platform.

[00:08:53] So thank you.

[00:08:57] yeah, Scott, I will, I will add that. I [00:09:00] am, I am saddened that the supporting of our public schools, which serves 860,000 kids throughout Wisconsin and all areas have become partisan. Um, and as I've read in other, um, pieces that it's very much like the judiciary and the state Supreme court races too.

[00:09:14] They're supposed to be non-partisan, but inevitably one side or the other, or both sides will weigh in. So yes, I, um, You know what it makes me, it makes me sad too. However, public education should still at the heart of it all be non-partisan. And I think if the position were appointed by governor, then it definitely becomes partisan.

[00:09:35] Um, there are certain aspects of policy in our schools. Um, You know, that, you know, are created at the legislative level that make it partisan, such as funding, you know, vouchers, for example, makes it partisan, um, teacher requirements, you know, um, makes it partisan. So, um, I would not support however, um, an appointment at the executive level by the governor for this role, because I do feel [00:10:00] that Wisconsinites throughout the state of Wisconsin still feel that, um, they support their public schools and they want it to be non-partisan.

[00:10:08] Sad that it's become this way. I could just follow up. Um, Debbie, you said you'd be interested in reforms. Are you, are you interested in, in making it a cabinet appointed position? Yes I am. Um, because I think this would, um, help bring people together. You know, this is an elected office and the voice of the people will speak, uh, when they elect the next day superintendent.

[00:10:30] But I'm, I'm just very disappointed that millions of dollars are being thrown into this election right now to buy this election for the Democrats. And that is unacceptable. And I will fight for that. I will, uh, I'll throw it over to Emily next. Thanks God. And thank you both for being here. Um, there's been a lot of discussion in this race about schools reopening, but by the time the new state [00:11:00] superintendent takes office in July, the school year will be over.

[00:11:03] So what do you think your role will be in guiding schools through the pandemic? And do you think the reopening issue will still be relevant next school year? And I guess we could start with Jill for this one. All right. Thank you, Emily. I, you know, just to address the latter part there, I don't think that the reopening piece will be relevant next school year, but I do feel that keeping them open safely will be.

[00:11:27] Um, so that being said, you know, I've worked really hard to make sure that my school district is open and to reopen our schools. We have two buildings and I've led the effort in my school district to do this and to do it safely. And my schools have been open. Um, I've, you know, I'm the candidate that can ensure that our schools will be open for in-person learning because we've done it already in my school district.

[00:11:47] I know what it takes. Um, I know we need to make sure as the DPI is concerned, the department of public instruction, that our schools have the resources, um, that they need to stay open. And that includes PPE. [00:12:00] For example, I'm thrilled that. Staff are all getting vaccinated, um, and just ensuring going forward that we can keep our doors open

because we know that that's how kids learn best and it's with an open building and that's how teachers, uh, prefer it as well.

[00:12:14] So, um, I don't think I'm necessarily, we'll be closing buildings next year, but I, you know, certainly want to do whatever we can to provide the resources to the schools that need it the most so that they can keep their doors open.

[00:12:31] Thank you for this question because, um, one of the reasons I'm running for, with this office, because there's been a lack of meaningful leadership from the local state and federal level on school reopening, and it's really disappointing to see our kids and our parents suffering. Um, and so when I become the next state superintendent, I'm going to make sure that all schools are open and they are supported all along the way.

[00:12:52] You know, right now we've got parents who become their first. A child's teacher. They've had to quit their jobs in some communities because they can't [00:13:00] afford to do childcare in the virtual learning. And so, um, it is the job of the state superintendent to show leadership and, um, recommendations and how things are going to work in the future.

[00:13:11] Conrey plan is going to take some time and we're going to need as much time as we can and partnerships all around the state. So, um, I know right now that NPS is not opening up for all of their kids. That is deplorable, that these kids who have the highest levels of achievement gaps and are suffering the most because it trauma and mental health.

[00:13:32] And social, emotional development. They're not back in school. They are totally isolated. So I think therapeutically to start the healing process, we need to get all schools back in session because it's going to take years to recover. We are losing a generation of kids itself. If I role as effective, I'm gonna require them to re open and I'll work the legislator to make legislature to make that happen.

[00:13:55] So w would require districts to reopen for [00:14:00] the fall semester in the fall semester. Absolutely. The science of the data is clear. The CDC that pediatricians, uh, can't, uh, um, uh, Academy, um, kids are not spreaders of the disease. Um, if you follow mitigation processes and procedures, it can be done safely and successfully.

[00:14:19] Teachers don't need to be vaccinated, but I am proud of the fact that Wisconsin is pulling out their vaccination plan very well. And so my opponent has called me a liar. About this, and I'm not a liar. The science is clear. We can get back to school. We can get back to school safely because that's what our children need.

[00:14:35] And this is what our parents are demanding really quickly. Jill, would you support a requirement for schools to reopen? Look, you know, as state superintendent, um, the, you know, the data is very clear that schools can be open. And so I would do everything that I could to make sure that they are open, um, and make sure that they're going that route.

[00:14:57] And like I said, as the superintendent of PECA Tanika, [00:15:00] you know, we've done it here. I know what it takes. To get it done statewide. And so we've got, you know, a couple, you know, nine weeks left here in this semester, and then certainly the schools will have the resources they need, um, for next fall so that they can all be open.

[00:15:18] And I'll hand it off to Rory. Thanks, Emily. So recently there have been bills introduced across the country and here in Wisconsin, that would limit the participation of

transgender students in sports. What are your views on these bills? And do you have any proposals that would specifically support LGBTQ plus students?

[00:15:40] And, um, we will start with Dr. Rory. This is a very timely question. Um, first of all, I think we need to acknowledge all of our kids and take care of them, um, and accept them for who they are. And that's why our schools are so important to developing character education programs that does that do just that, you know, our [00:16:00] schools have to be a place where kids feel a sense of belonging.

[00:16:02] And so I think it's important that we recognize who our children are and, uh, what we can do to best support them as they navigate life. Um, but to answer your question, um, I was a girl of title nine. I participated in sports all my life, and I still participate in sports today. I was a collegiate athlete at Valparaiso university.

[00:16:21] I played basketball and field hockey, and I want to play against other biological women and girls. I don't think it's fair. Uh, to have competition that, um, does otherwise, I know there's some other bills that, um, other legislators have, um, um, provided so far that maybe would look at a co-ed type situation.

[00:16:40] And I would be more supportive of that, but I do realize that there is a need for kids to be themselves and participate in as many school activities as possible. But I want to make sure it's done, um, fairly, thank you,

[00:16:56] Dr. Andrew Lee. Yeah, I, you know, I think that [00:17:00] that's fair. They're transphobic, honestly, um, with Dr. Curtis said, you know, kids, kids need to feel safe in their schools. They need to feel seen and heard, and we need to enforce anti-bullying and anti harassment in our schools and, you know, and in our society and, you know, um, really that statement was rather, um, Yeah, it's transphobic.

[00:17:22] I'll just say it like that. Um, we need to make sure that all our LGBTQ plus students are, are safe, um, that they are respected, that they have, um, representation in their schools, um, so that they have staff who, um, you know, see and hear them, or maybe, um, you know, look like them as well. Um, I don't know. I guess I'm just taking a little bit of backed by that trans kids are kids.

[00:17:47] That's plain and simple and they deserve, you know, they did it, they deserve to feel safe and welcome in our school. Thank you. And just to follow up, can you both clarify, um, whether you support trans [00:18:00] girls playing on girls' sports teams, as, as I said before, no, I don't. Um, I participate in sports. And I know that many parents are concerned about this kind of thinking they want their girls participating against other girls.

[00:18:16] And it has nothing to do with transphobia. This was not even an issue years ago, you know, in Brown deer we've we joyfully accepted all kids where they were, they went to any bathroom they wanted to, there was never these issues like this. And so we gave, we gave kids opportunities that would help Excel them as people, um, and as good citizens.

[00:18:35] And so, um, I do not support this bill.

[00:18:42] Trans kids are kids. That's I'm just going to leave it like that. And yeah, so I would support, um, actually I would, I do not support the bill is what I want to say. I, you know, I support girls playing girls sports because trans kids are kids. [00:19:00] I have one more.

Follow-up Dr. Kerr. Um, do you support other gender affirming, um, policies such as allowing children to self identify their pronouns, their names, and use the bathrooms of their choice?

[00:19:12] Yeah, that's happening right now. Um, but does it have to be taught in schools? I don't think so. I do think that, um, you know, this is important for our kids to realize this is the society and the world they're growing up in. Um, but if that's what they want to do, I think that's, um, uh, fine, voluntarily fine, but I don't think we have to mandate it on kids or teachers or adults.

[00:19:37] Okay. And I will hand it off to Scott.

[00:19:42] Great. Thank you. Um, Wisconsin, as well, known as having the worst or one of the worst, uh, achievement gaps in the country. What is one measurable improvement that you could make in closing the achievement gap that four years from now? We could look back and [00:20:00] judge you on one, one measurable advance. Um, I believe Jill, it's your turn to start.

[00:20:06] No, thanks for that question. Um, very much Scott. So when I look at this, I always think of opportunity gaps and that the. Um, the schools that have the most resources generally provide the most opportunities for their kids and those kids have better achievement. And the, the, you know, the contrary is true there too, that the higher poverty schools have fewer opportunities in those, in those students often have lower achievement.

[00:20:29] So one of the things that I plan to do is bring full day 4k. That is full week. Um, what we've noticed when I've done this in our school district here at PECA Tanika, is that it lifts all achievement for the kids, regardless of their socioeconomic. Regardless of their gender, um, regardless of their ability.

[00:20:48] So therefore, you know, that would be one way. I feel that we can make a positive contribution, um, and it could be certainly measured, um, by bringing more opportunities through early childhood education for all kids. And it also helps their [00:21:00] families too.

[00:21:04] I agree with Jill on that, especially with 4k, I've had the chance to start 4k programs. And two of the districts I've worked in, in Wisconsin, um, a complete community-based program. So we could, you know, try to eliminate the achievement gap before it gets even wider. But what I, what I, um, I'm making promises right now that I can keep.

[00:21:23] Um, I want to get all of our schools open so that we can get back to learning and teaching and getting our kids on an upward trajectory of improvement and growth. Um, right now, Wisconsin is on the list of having the worst achievement gap in the country. And you've got to ask yourself why is that? And it's because we haven't had targeted measurements and assessment in the area of literacy.

[00:21:44] So I want to get back to the basics, teaching phonics, again, getting math and, um, Uh, measurement and knowing your numbers well, um, and I think this is going to be important because if we get everyone aligned on these systems and the curriculum, but high quality training, not just [00:22:00] for teachers, but for principals and superintendents and parents who, and other community partners that want to help us at this journey, I want to see at the end of four years, that we're making growth and improvement, especially with our black and Brown kids in our urban areas.

[00:22:14] The other thing that I can promise is that I am going to decentralize the DPI. Because we need to become a more customer service friendly organization, and it's not going to cost a lot of money. It's not firing everybody who's there right now. Let's face it. I can't do that. Um, but what it does mean is I can realign my leadership cabinet to be on, on the boots on the ground, in the state, regionally that these supportive of our, our school districts, whether I'm in land Glade County or I'm in Antigo or Brian Lander, or I'm in lacrosse, um, or.

[00:22:46] Or down South in, um, Advil. So I think it's important that we become responsive, that there's someone who can answer the phone and answer your questions. And then we'd be copied vast array of resources for all stakeholders in Wisconsin that goes from [00:23:00] curriculum assessment, parents, homeschool, parents, school, board members, and leaders.

[00:23:05] So I'm making promises that I can keep making sure that kids go into a future that they choose, that we improve literacy. We open our schools and we decentralize the DPI. I want to follow up with each of you on that, um, dev you're saying you're making promises. You can keep, how can the, what, what authority or power does the state superintendent have to require all schools to be open in the fall and Jill for you?

[00:23:29] Um, when you say you want to have a pre 4k, um, statewide, what authority does a state superintendent have to declare that. Um, I should I go first, Scott. Okay, great. So thank you for asking that question because you know what? I have to use my bully pulpit to make things happen. And so if I can't do it by just strongly recommended and meeting with teachers, I'm going to work with the legislature to make that happen.

[00:23:56] And other States have done just that. Um, I do believe in local [00:24:00] control, but you know what enough is enough, our kids are suffering. We are going to be on this recovery plan for many years. And so we got to get back to school. And then my job as the state superintendent is to make sure that all those schools have what they need, whether it's PPE, it's support and diets and how to use all the federal money that's coming down billions of dollars and how to spend that money and invested in one time expenditures.

[00:24:24] That's going to get long-term outcomes.

[00:24:29] I want to make sure that I'm answering both your questions. So when you talk about authority, what GPI has to make school districts do anything? They really don't have authority. I mean, DPI's powers are fairly limited, um, to licensing educators, you know, um, setting the standards for example, and then allocating funding and then holding the school districts accountable for that funding.

[00:24:53] Um, so. As far as reopening schools, DPI, can't demand that the schools [00:25:00] be open. It's really a local decision, but yes, ensuring that they have the resources they need to do so safely. Um, it's certainly, you know, also peer pressure. As well, you know, I think that that's certainly something that we've, we're used to experiencing and, and our schools are experiencing that peer pressure right now to make sure that the reopened, not just for the kids, because we know that's how the kids learn best, but also because of the parents and the parents needing to want to get back to work.

[00:25:26] But also, um, you know, it's better for our economy too. So my job at DPI will be to make sure that our school. Schools can do so and, um, be able to do so seamlessly, um,



and have the resources that they need. And at that end does include, you know, the American, um, The, uh, I always want to call it something else, but it's basically the recovery funds that, um, the Biden administration and Congress have given 'em to the state of Wisconsin.

[00:25:51] So making sure we're allocating that to make sure that our schools can reopen, um, on day one or earlier if they choose right now. [00:26:00] And because that should also be a local decision, um, as for, um, the 4k programming. Yes, I do feel that. By having the guidance and the technical assistance available at the department of public instruction and how school districts can implement a full day, a full week, um, 4k program, it won't be difficult.

[00:26:20] Um, I think, you know, the evidence is very clear and the research is very clear that this is what's best for kids and all the school districts that I've worked in, or the school board members that I know they want to do, what's best for kids. And so by providing them, um, You know, the methods or the steps that they need to take.

[00:26:38] Um, you know, in order to make that happen, I believe they will.

[00:26:45] Great Emily. Okay. Um, Deb has mentioned this a couple of times, so I want to jump to this question. Um, the reading Wars have resurfaced in Wisconsin in recent years, dyslexia, advocates and brain science [00:27:00] experts say many Wisconsin school districts are using ineffective methods to teach kids how to read.

[00:27:06] So as DPI chief, would you require school districts to reevaluate how they teach reading and how will you hold districts accountable in serving struggling readers? And I don't know who is supposed to go first. Let's start with Jill. Yeah, I think it's my turn. So thanks very much, Emily. Um, so as a state superintendent, I can't again require the school districts to do any of that.

[00:27:33] Um, what I do though, are a couple of things. Certainly when we approve teacher education programs at the university level, we can ensure that they are teaching our teachers how to teach reading. I think that's extremely important. Um, I know that when I went through teacher training, it was a big part of my curriculum as a pre-service teacher to ensure that all teachers can teach reading when they are ready to.

[00:27:56] Start teaching. Um, so that's critical and DPI [00:28:00] can certainly, um, work through that method. Um, the other thing that DPI can do and they have done is that they do have standards for reading. And I think that that's important to note what is also important is that because of local control, we don't have necessarily the framework that we need to deliver.

[00:28:17] Um, you know, The standards too and train our teachers on how to use them. So what I would advocate for at GPI is to use the experts that we have work across, um, you know, with the different groups that are, um, you know, like with reading groups across the state of Wisconsin to develop, uh, frameworks. So that would be the methodology, um, that we can use.

[00:28:39] To teach reading and that our school districts would be recommended to use and then work through our CSUs. Our CSOs have, um, consultants, they have reading specialists,

they have individuals, um, who know their local school districts best. And so working between DPI and our CSUs. Um, which are the cooperative education service agencies, um, [00:29:00] working through them to disseminate this framework to our school districts.

[00:29:03] I believe that that will help. Um, but we also need to make sure that we're providing our teachers with on the job on demand embedded professional development, to keep them current in reading instruction and making sure that they're, you know, utilizing that framework and those standards. Emily. This is a question that's near and dear to my heart.

[00:29:24] Reading and literacy is the gateway to a child's future, a child to a child's education, a career. Uh, And their involvement in their community. And so I've been focusing on literacy since day one of my campaign and our kids need to know how to read. You have to ask yourself why hasn't our kids done better over the last two years, but that's because of the lack of leadership at the DPI, uh, and the state superintendent's office.

[00:29:52] And so I'm going to change things. We are going to have a focused approach. Dyslexia is a great. Um, uh, idea and [00:30:00] strategy to help reduce some of the kids who can't read and the evidence and the research is clear. And so I do believe dyslexia has to be recognized, but I think what the problem is, our school people don't know how to utilize that.

[00:30:13] They don't have the expertise in that. And so we I've been endorsed by them. Reading association and dyslexia association and the international dyslexia association. There's a new dyslexia guide book coming out from DPI. That's going to give us some, some strategies. I hope I haven't seen the final draft yet, but these issues are important.

[00:30:34] And so we have to do whatever we can to make sure that all of our kids are reading on grade level. So I've been talking to the early childhood folks and I've been talking to achieve, um, uh, groups across the state. And here's the problem. We want all kids to be able to read at grade level by the end of third grade.

[00:30:50] But the problem is there's no identified milestones and benchmarks from birth to third grade. And so I'm working with my team right now and those other professional [00:31:00] associations to make sure that we identify those things. And so we can have, um, uh, metrics that we can measure to show growth and improvement.

[00:31:09] And so my literacy roadmap focuses on number one, quality staff development for teachers. Principals superintendents and parents, number two aligned assessments that will help us get from that birth to third grade successfully. And then looking at our growth improvement, learning from each other all along the way so that we get 80% persistency starting in a year or two down the road.

[00:31:32] So dyslexia is an issue it has to be addressed and I will do anything I can as the state superintendent to incentivize. People to utilize this new science of reading that incorporates dyslexia. And that will be with my influence in getting new policies developed to do just that. But other States have done across the United States who have got improved, uh, and trajectory on, on reading.

[00:31:57] Thank you. Um, I have [00:32:00] a quick follow-up for Jill. You mentioned, um, education preparation programs, college, college education programs need to teach teachers how to teach reading. Would you be looking at the methods that the schools are using? Because the reading more is, is about the best way to teach reading.

[00:32:21] And there are people who are saying that a lot of these colleges aren't. Adequately preparing teachers with the correct methods. Yeah, I think that's important. That's a good distinction, Emily. I think we need to look at what they're using currently to teach reading. Um, but also teachers need to know how to teach a variety.

[00:32:38] You know, they need to have a toolbox full of different methods, um, to teach reading. So I think that that's important that when we are looking at our reading curriculum for pre-service teachers, to make sure it incorporate. Um, all the scientifically scientifically proven strategies. Okay. I'll hand it off to Rory.

[00:33:00] [00:33:00] Thanks. Um, so you both have been criticized for your handling of issues regarding race, Dr. with your response to the homecoming float impact, the Konica and Dr. Kerr, um, referring to your tweets, um, what's something you each have learned that you could have done better in those situations. Right. We'll start with Dr.

[00:33:20] Okay. You know, white people have, I have difficulty sometimes dealing with these kinds of issues and I've been in this space for a long time. You know, I started my teaching career at the university of Chicago laboratory schools where I was immersed in equity, diversity and inclusion. And I not, I acknowledged I made a mistake.

[00:33:39] Um, it was a conversation that I thought I could share a personal experience and you know what, we are going to make these mistakes when we talk about very important things. But. I apologize for that. And I've worked with my black leaders and my black colleagues who support me on this campaign because they know, um, where I was coming from.

[00:33:56] Um, I, I do know what I believe is best. [00:34:00] Uh, Practices, um, to deal with these issues. I, I singled out another school district for calling my quarterback, the N-word, um, and it takes, it's a process. It's a learning experience. And so I just believe that it's important to address it and acknowledge it. And unlike, um, my opponent, who was that apologize for the homecoming float and the situation going on there, I have just.

[00:34:23] I've reconciled with it and I'm moving forward. I opened up my account a week later after I had time to reflect and think about how I need to have voices and be an example of how we can work together when it comes to inclusion, equity, and diversity. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Underly. Um, I just want to comment on the fact that yes, we did condemn, um, the racist float in our school district to be alumni parade.

[00:34:51] Um, it definitely was a horrible thing. Um, the float was incredibly racist and even though it was their alumni, We immediately [00:35:00] came out with a strong statement, calling it racist and disgusting because we have to hold people accountable. And that's what I've learned from this. We have to hold people accountable when something happens like that, we have to talk about it.

[00:35:11] We have to call it out, um, say what it is and we need to, we need to, we need to address it. Um, you know, my view is this. We have to teach all kids that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, but I, you know, it it's. You know, it's, I don't know, just that, you know, attacking me on that, I think is kind of funny because there's also within Brown deer school district, you know, they were reprimanded by the department of public instruction.

[00:35:41] Because black and Brown students were suspended more than three times as often as white students under Dr. Kerr's leadership and mean we can certainly keep talking about incidents of the past there, or we can talk about what needs to be better for our future, for our kids, um, in every way. But certainly learning from that I've learned as a [00:36:00] leader, we certainly need to call it out and we have to provide education, uh, to communities.

[00:36:06] That, you know, struggle with that so that they can also heal and they can also, um, be more educated going forward about those things. But I do want to go on the record that we condemned it immediately. Dr. Craig, did you want to respond to that before we move on? Well, you know, of course we were written up.

[00:36:26] We do have a, a large population of, um, black and Brown students. And I worked very collaboratively with our current state superintendent, Carolyn Stanford Taylor, and we got grant money safe and supportive schools grant to turn it around. And so what we did is we created the character education program in Brown deer.

[00:36:44] And not only did we create a program that created the sense of community. We, we, um, uh, were able to train many teachers on character education. We also looked at, um, equity training and we developed the non-negotiable. So my district has a non-negotiable policy. It has an [00:37:00] equity policy and how we're going to work with one another, how we treat one another and it's even in our teacher contracts.

[00:37:05] And so again, the DPI needs. Become a resource. That's what we did. We took advantage of the resource and not only did our kids, um, uh, close achievement gaps, raise achievement and have the highest graduation rates across the country or across the state. Uh, in our high school, we became a state and national.

[00:37:23] Character award winning program and the state superintendent, Tony Evers visited our school because of it. And so it shows that we can overcome some of the adversity. And when you deal with the program and dealing with the strategies that get you the best outcomes. Hand it over to Scott has, as everyone is well aware, hopefully, um, Tuesday is the election.

[00:37:48] Um, for folks who haven't voted already absentee, um, a lot of people look at endorsements to try to figure out, um, which candidate they're more aligned with Deb. You're endorsed by former governor Scott Walker, [00:38:00] a number of Republicans. Uh, Jill you're endorsed by quite a few Democrats, including everyone in the state's democratic congressional delegation.

[00:38:08] So my question to each of you is Jill. Why should a Republican voter vote for you and Deb? Why should a democratic voter vote for you? And I'm not sure who wants to start,

but go for it. That'd be the start, you know? Um, that's a great question, Scott, and it's certainly, it's certainly something I'm pitching to everybody when I'm out and about.

[00:38:28] I'm working hard to get my message out to voters. I'm proud of the support that I'm receiving from every corner of the state. My supporters know that I have a real record of high student achievement, balancing school budgets, uh, leadership on an in-person learning throughout the pandemic and launching successful pre-K and daycare for all of our kids.

[00:38:46] And I'm proud of the support, you know, that my campaign has received. Um, and I'm also very proud of the campaign that we've run. Um, yes, there's a lot of Democrats and a lot of superintendents of dozens of superintendents who've come out and [00:39:00] support my campaign to, um, you know, at the end of the day, public education in Wisconsin is nonpartisan.

[00:39:07] It's our. You know, it's a community school. Um, when you look throughout the state of Wisconsin, we have, um, a lot of rural communities that the public school is the centerpiece of that community. And I'm 100% pro public school. I want to keep our resources in our public schools. I know that if our schools go, those communities go to.

[00:39:26] And so, um, I do feel that that is one of the biggest reasons that I do have bipartisan support also on my, on my side.

[00:39:38] From the very beginning. When I launched my campaign in September, I intentionally created a campaign team that was bi-partisan. I have campaign managers from the left and the right. I have fundraisers from the left and the right. I have a superintendent's retired superintendent. I have teachers, teacher leaders.

[00:39:56] I have school choice people. I have an economist and a strategist. [00:40:00] So I intentionally set up a bipartisan team to show that we can unify around education. Okay, because this is the most important issue that we are all facing because of this pandemic right now. And so I have support very biased part partisan support, including donors.

[00:40:18] So I have representatives from both sides of the aisle, senators from both sides of the aisle. I have national. Uh, people that have supported me as well. And if you look at my donations, I have over 500 donations. I don't have \$2 billion of dark money that are attacking me in my campaign and my village of Brown deer.

[00:40:38] You know, I'm not attacking anybody. I'm just trying to get the message out that we can do better. And so I have, um, representatives from both sides of the aisle that have supported me. Lena Taylor just came out, Alberta, Darlene supports me. So those are two senators that have worked really well together in the past.

[00:40:55] You know, we have divided government, we have I've I've led a divided school community. [00:41:00] I've I've led in divided. Places. And so we are going to need someone who's going to be able to manage and, um, and make that happen to work together. And so the first thing I will do when I'm elected state superintendent is I'm going to meet with all the legislators.

[00:41:13] And we're going to talk about my vision to create a world-class education system and what kind of policy that we can work together to get bipartisan support. You know, there

are many groups across the country that are working on bi-partisan, uh, strategies and opportunity. And I want to show that we can do this and unify people around education.

[00:41:32] Jill. I wanted to give you a chance to respond a couple of different times. Deb has referenced these ads that are running, um, not by your campaign, but by, by groups of support you attacking her. Um, so I want to ask if you stand by those ads, um, even though your campaign is not the one actually paying for those.

[00:41:48] Yeah, I'll be honest. I haven't seen, um, those ads. I, I, but you know what organizations and individuals are weighing in on both sides, we've got big right wing anti-public, [00:42:00] you know, education donors, um, for Dr. Kerr and we have grassroots member funded organizations, um, for me. So I'm. You know, I'm proud of the support that I'm getting.

[00:42:10] Um, because people are investing in a leader that they know has good judgment and can manage a budget and we'll make our school stronger for every kid. And again, I'm just 100% unabashedly pro public schools. And that's what these organizations are supporting. You know, I had to come back at you, Jill, because you said in a commercial that there was a financial scandal in Brown deer.

[00:42:34] That is false. That was a total misrepresentation. So don't pretend you haven't seen these ads. You need to come clean on this. You are just flip-flopping right and left about this and school reopening. So that is not fair to my village of community. One of the most diverse. The school districts in the state of Wisconsin that is very hurtful for them because you know what?

[00:42:53] I was a superintendent for 13 years, I would have never been able to survive a financial scandal, [00:43:00] um, in a school district anywhere. And so you do know about that commercial and you set it yourself. Um, and so you need to stop those ads and you need to stop that and apologize to the Brown deer school community for that inappropriate and unprofessional behavior.

[00:43:15] It's unacceptable.

[00:43:20] Yeah, I guess what I'll just say is that that information is all public information. It's in the Milwaukee journal Sentinel. So that's where that came from. So, um, you know, I'm not misrepresenting anything at that, you know? Okay. Let's move on, Emily. Okay. Um, as state superintendent, would you endorse changes to the Praxis or foundations of reading test requirements, which disproportionately screen out people of color from the teaching profession and why or why not?

[00:43:53] *Um, whose turn is it to go first? Okay. That's fine. Yeah, we're pretty good at figuring this out. Um, [00:44:00] so that's one thing we can do. Um, yes, I support the FORT. I fo I support the Praxis test. So you gotta think about something. Why do these things cause barriers and prevent people from getting certified? And so as a superintendent, I've always had to help aspiring teachers who, who needed to either pass the Praxis test or get more additional training on the Fort.*

[00:44:23] *And so. This starts with the teacher preparation programs. Okay. We need to start talking about, um, these kinds of tests earlier on in the scope and sequence of the*

*coursework and making sure that our teachers are immersed in these kinds of situations that will help allow them to do better. These are standards for making sure that we have the highest quality teachers in the classroom.*

*[00:44:46] So what I did in Brown deer is I had a couple of teachers who needed to pass the fork test. Um, the problem with that is when you take the fourth test and you fail it, you have to pay again. You don't just take the part that you didn't pass. [00:45:00] And so I believe we need to work on that, but also I made sure our reading specialists help to tutor.*

*[00:45:06] Those two teachers that needed extra support because they didn't get it for whatever reason at the university level. So I do believe that we have to have standards. We want the best and the brightest into our classroom, but sometimes just like students, they need a different approach and they need more time.*

*[00:45:23] Thank you.*

*[00:45:27] All right. Um, as far as the Foundations of Reading (FORT) test is concerned, I would support eliminating it. And I'll tell you why. I believe it's an unnecessary hoop. Um, it makes it difficult and much harder for people to become teachers, particularly when we are already struggling. Right. With recruiting and retaining teachers.*

*[00:45:45] Um, we need to trust our education preparation programs to prepare the kids. I mean, these programs are certified by the department of public instruction. Um, they have to go through a rigorous certification process to be officially, you know, To be able to [00:46:00] officially endorse teachers to get their licenses.*

*[00:46:02] Um, I do know that representative Travis Tranel who's from my area of Southwest Wisconsin, was successful in getting the legislature to suspend, um, the foundations of reading tests for special education teachers. And I think that says a lot, you know, these are barriers. And we need to eliminate barriers, um, for good people, um, who are intelligent and kind and compassionate to become teachers.*

*[00:46:26] Um, you can still be a good teacher and you could still be a good teacher of reading. Um, if you can't pass a standardized test, so I would be in favor of eliminating it. Thanks.*

*[00:46:42] Thanks. Um, so DHS and DPI have shared very little information about COVID outbreaks in schools. Do you think state officials should be sharing any data about these outbreaks? Um, I think it's my turn. Um, that says we've been through this [00:47:00] enough. Um, you know, I. I don't know if I have enough information to make that decision, to be honest.*

*[00:47:06] Um, I think sharing information is really good, I guess it all depends on what we're going to use that information for. Um, certainly there's science behind, um, you know, data collection and that's important. Um, I feel that if we're going to be. You know, sharing outbreaks, is it going to cause, um, panic or, you know, trouble?*

*[00:47:27] I don't know. I guess I'd have to get more information on that, but on the other hand, if it helps us, if sharing that information helps us make better informed decisions at the local level, then I see the merit in that for sure. Well, thanks for asking that question or*

because all of our school districts who have been open, they have these dashboards on their websites at this very moment.

[00:47:51] So you can see the percentage of kids that have had issues or teachers or staff. And so you can look at any of those schools have been open since day [00:48:00] one. And I think that's an important data point to understand, because again, the science is clear. We can open up all of our schools. We can get back to business.

[00:48:09] You know, our schools are some of the largest employers in our communities. And so that is really hurting our economy as well as not allowing our kids to get a quality education. So if you go to any of the school districts who are running programs since September 1st, you will see that data because parents wanted that data.

[00:48:25] In fact, many of our superintendents who opened had health officials or. Other doctors to help them make those dashboards up and be able to communicate that information fully. So I do think it's possible. We need to get our schools open right away. I think Scott

[00:48:47] Corey, did you want to move to questions? I could move to the questions, but

[00:48:56] I could move to the questions. Laurie, Scott, if you want to [00:49:00] go ahead and ask another one, I see a lot of questions in the queue, so maybe we can go through those. Okay, let's do that then. Um, we have a question and this is for both candidates, should the Holocaust and other instances of genocide be state required curriculum.

[00:49:14] And if so, what other curriculum mandates do both of you favor? Cool. So, um, this is another great question. This is an important, um, uh, part of our history. And so I do think that kids need to be exposed to it. Um, communities need to make the final decision because all the school boards have the local control on curriculum.

[00:49:37] So what I would do as the state superintendent of department of instruction, I would make sure that there is a plethora of resources available for communities to select a high quality evidence-based curriculum so that they can make those choices, because it really is up to them to make those choices.

[00:49:54] And I've been talking to parents across the state, indicating their concerns about what's being taught in [00:50:00] classrooms, and I've been telling them I can provide you. Resources, but you need to have a voice at the local level and talk to your school board members, talk to your administrators because that's the only place where you can make that change.

[00:50:11] Thank you.

[00:50:16] Sorry. I keep forgetting to unmute myself. Yes. You know, the legislature already does mandate, um, different components of the curriculums for our school districts to teach. And it's not something that our school districts can opt out of, even though we are a local control. Um, for example, indigenous people's history, um, that is.

[00:50:35] Something that has to be taught, um, health education, um, you know, physical education hours requirements for elementary school, um, middle and high school, and then personal finance. So certainly I think, you know, Holocaust education and genocide



information is incredibly important and it should be, you know, it's already part of our standards, but we should definitely make sure that our school districts are, are [00:51:00] implementing that instruction.

[00:51:03] Okay, thank you. Another question. If the department of health services sets the guidelines for COVID and mask mandates, why didn't DPI also set guidelines for the schools and should they. Oh, yeah. Um, you know, I think it's my turn. So can you just repeat the very, yeah, sure. So the state health department has been setting guidelines for mask mandates, um, you know, safer at home, that kind of thing, how come DPI hasn't set guidelines for the schools and, and should they be setting separate guidelines for schools?

[00:51:40] Yeah, I, you know, I fear sometimes. If the DPI were to do that, it would get struck down too, you know, because of our history of local control. So what I've, what I've seen, you know, just in the communities, um, you know, throughout the state, but also in my own school district is that our local school boards are setting those guidelines because they are, they are the elected leaders [00:52:00] for that community.

[00:52:01] Um, and I feel that that's. They're following the science, you know, the guidance that we are getting is, you know, strongly on the side of science. And so our superintendents are making that recommendation to our school boards and our school districts are, you know, having math mandates, you know, for example, when you're on school property or limiting, um, spectators, you know, for example, at a, um, at a, at a game.

[00:52:24] So I think that, that it's, um, if we were to go beyond that and if the DPI were to do that, it would just cause many problems for our local school district. The DPI needs to become a leader who provides lots of information and scenario planning for different districts. So I've talked to a lot of the superintendents who've been open since September 1st.

[00:52:46] You know, they're thinking now that people are getting vaccinated and they haven't had many outbreaks in their community or in their school districts, that they might be able to start reducing. Some of those guidelines by not wearing masks, because we know there are [00:53:00] kids and teachers who have, um, upper risks, right issues, and it's very difficult to wear masks.

[00:53:05] And let's, let's be real here, four and five-year-old kindergartners trying to wear that plane, uh, at recess and in the classroom is very difficult, but I believe that DPI needs to become a leader and giving lots of good information to people based upon the science of the data. And. Reinforcing the CDC.

[00:53:22] And so I want to be, um, become, um, a reliable ally when someone calls and says, Hey, what do you think if we start not wearing masks? And so we want to be able to problem solve with them and say, here's the scenario planning. Here's what you should be thinking. And so they sent out a guide book at the end of June, which I thought was a little bit late for a lot of us across the state.

[00:53:42] But again, sending out more information that informs communities that they can make a better decision. Okay. Um, somebody asked you Debra to explain why you support voucher, schools and school choice, and then you Jill to explain why you oppose voucher schools and school [00:54:00] choice. Yeah. I've learned a lot on this campaign trail.

[00:54:04] And one of the things that I think is important, I think there's a lot of misperceptions about school choice and voucher schools. So number one, the state superintendent is overseas, all of the children in Wisconsin. And so if we are focused on equity and excellence, we can't deny any child that opportunity.

[00:54:22] And so what I want to do is I want to bring stakeholders to the table and say, what does a high quality education look like in the state of Wisconsin? What does accountability mean? So all kids take the test. All teachers are certified, um, kids aren't allowed to just drop out of, um, a private school and attend a public school.

[00:54:42] So we've got a lot of smart people in Wisconsin, but nobody has ever brought the stakeholders together. And that's what I want to do because. I support the Liberty of parents to choose where they want to send their kids under what circumstances. And so a lot of our black and Brown parents, especially in [00:55:00] Milwaukee when they haven't had a good choice of a public school or open enrollment have decided to use these vouchers or go on to school choice program.

[00:55:09] And so if we are going to create a world-class education system, that's the highest performing in the. State and in the country, we need to make sure that all kids have an access to a high quality education. And so high tides raise all boats and I want to make sure that happens. And you know, the other part of this, so stay superintendent has to oversee everything.

[00:55:28] And number two, it's the law. So I can't change the law. Thank you. You know, um, you just to, you know, and my perspective on this, I'm a strong advocate for our public schools. And I wanna make sure that our public funding stays in our public schools. I'm the only candidate running a school district right now during the pandemic.

[00:55:48] And I see firsthand how hard hit. Our schools are, and our kids are hit by these funding shortfalls. We see it every time. There's an election by the number of referendum, for example, that are on the [00:56:00] ballot. So we should be investing our taxpayer dollars in our public schools so that we can continue to invest in things that increase opportunities for kids, you know, like technology, smaller class sizes, and our public schools are struggling and assuming these costs, especially during this pandemic.

[00:56:17] So yeah. We need, and again, we see it in the number of referendum that are passed. So in the long term, we can't afford two systems.