



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

Questions for 2018 Gubernatorial Candidates

1. What is your motivation to be Wisconsin's governor?

I'm running for governor because I believe what is best for our kids is best for our state.

I love Wisconsin, and I've had the privilege of living and working in communities all around the state. Yet, I've had more than a few moments over the last eight years where I've struggled to recognize the Wisconsin I love. We've watched citizens in over half our school districts vote to raise their own taxes because the state has failed to meet its commitment to funding our public schools. We've seen historic disinvestment in our public universities. We've seen our Governor turn down resources that would provide health care to thousands of Wisconsin families who don't have it, and play games with coverage for pre-existing conditions. We've seen foreign corporations get billions in taxpayer-funded handouts and special breaks from environmental protections, while our roads deteriorate, our drinking water and air get polluted, and our once nationally renowned education system falls behind.

Enough is enough. As Governor, I know there is so much more I can do to help build a stronger and brighter future for Wisconsin. I'll use all of my skills and experience to end the divisiveness that has consumed our state and to reinvest in Wisconsin's future - to improve education, healthcare, infrastructure, our environment and our economy. I'll focus on solving problems, not picking political fights. Wisconsinites know that we are stronger when we look out for each other, and when we look out for the next generation. Our kids deserve the best from us.

2. What is your vision for K-12 public education in Wisconsin?

My vision for public education is one where every child in Wisconsin - no matter what their zip code - has access to a world class public education and the opportunity to succeed. Education is the great equalizer and a key pathway to restoring economic prosperity. Public education should inspire every child with a passion for lifelong learning and prepare them for success in college, careers and life.

To make that vision a reality, as Governor I will work to finally achieve school finance reform and restore the state's commitment to two-thirds funding, without raising property taxes. I will make historic investments in special education and dramatically expand state funding for student mental health, sparsity aid and support for English learners, so that every child who needs an

extra lift gets one. I will fund full day 4K, provide Wisconsin's first state funding for afterschool programs and create new supports for students in the state's largest urban districts. To pay for it all, my proposed 2019-21 biennial budget would invest an additional \$1.4 billion in school aids, the largest investment in public schools in a generation.

Governing is about priorities. Wisconsin's kids and families deserve a Governor who will prioritize public education and support the transformational work happening in schools across our state every year, not just election years.

3. As governor, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve academic achievement for all students and close achievement gaps in Wisconsin?

One of Wisconsin's greatest strengths is the growing diversity of our communities, which makes our workforce and our businesses more innovative and competitive. However, Wisconsin also has one of the largest achievement gaps in the country. To meet this challenge, we need an education system and economy that work for everyone.

My 2019-21 biennial budget proposal would give educators the resources they need to close gaps and help every Wisconsin child reach their full potential. While we are making broad investments to support children in every corner of the state, we're also proposing to target investments to our five largest school districts, which educate roughly 20 percent of all Wisconsin students and represent disproportionate shares of student groups experiencing our largest gaps. Under my budget, these districts would get additional resources and support, including opportunities for additional learning time over the summer, incentives for National Board Certified Teachers to work in high poverty schools and 3K start up/expansion grants to provide more access to early childhood education. I'm also proposing to fund a two-year project in each district to work with adjacent sectors (health care, child care, higher education, housing, etc.) to address out-of-school factors that impact learning.

To close gaps, I also believe it's critical to diversify our education workforce, so that our students can see themselves represented in their educators. We'll continue to work to aggressively recruit teachers of color and invest in "grow your own" programs in districts around the state.

As State Superintendent, I've led my agency with the vision to make every child a graduate and address the racial disparities and inequities in our schools, but Wisconsin needs all its leaders committed to this work. Broadly, across all sectors, we need to make investments in local neighborhoods and ensure government decision-makers, corporate leaders and educators reflect the growing diversity of our state. We need to work together to address out-of-school factors that contribute to our achievement gap, including housing, healthcare, childcare and trauma. Advancing racial equity and increasing opportunities for children, families and communities of color across the state is imperative to Wisconsin's healthy and sustainable future, and together, we can move Wisconsin forward.



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4. Numerous studies have shown that improving early learning opportunities can help reduce achievement gaps for children. In Wisconsin, the good news is families now have access to quality 4K programming in over 98 percent of our school districts. We simply need greater access to high quality birth-to-three programming for those children who have a high probability of not being ready for school. As governor, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve early learning opportunities in Wisconsin?

As governor, I will make early childhood education top priority.

For school-based early childhood opportunities, my 2019-21 budget would fund full day 4K for all districts, and would provide funding to start or expand 3K programs in Wisconsin's five largest school districts.

Before a child ever enters school, however, it's imperative that we improve access to high quality, affordable childcare. It's simply unacceptable that Wisconsin's poorest and most impoverished zip code does not have one high quality early childhood facility. We'll work to strengthen the state's YoungStar quality rating and improvement system, so that more early childhood programs continue to improve in quality, and we'll retool Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program so that more families can afford the high quality care that every child deserves. Finally, I will work with the Legislature to expand child care tax credits to make care more affordable.

5. In Wisconsin, too many children have unmet mental health needs which, in turn, result in negative consequences for those children, their families, our schools and our communities. While school leaders greatly appreciate the school mental health investments made in the 2017-19 State Budget, most believe a stronger, long-term commitment from the state is required to meet this challenge. As governor, what next steps would you take to address this problem?

With one in five students facing mental health issues, educators and schools are the frontline in meeting this challenge. Our success in the 2017-19 biennial budget was a great start, but it also underscored the depth of need in school districts around the state. State support remains far short of the overwhelming demand for programs to assist students with mental health needs.

In response, my budget proposes nearly \$64 million in school mental health funding, including:

- Fully funding mental health grants (funding covered only one-third of applicants this year).

- Increasing staff to address mental health, including school psychologists, nurses, counselors, and social workers.
- Expanding statewide mental health training and youth suicide prevention to boost efforts around trauma, AODA, and mental health first aid.

With over 80 percent of mental health incidents currently going untreated, an Evers Administration will be committed to getting all Wisconsin kids the support and early intervention they need.

6. The recruitment, preparation, development and retention of effective educators is vitally important for our children's future. As governor, what policies would you advance to address this important issue?

Over this decade we've seen a 35 percent drop in the number of students pursuing an education degree, a trend that will have devastating consequences for public education. This is one of the most critical public policy issues facing our state.

As State Superintendent, I've worked alongside SAA to develop solutions and break down barriers to school staffing issues, and we'll continue to build on the work we've done together to recruit and retain great teachers, particularly in hard-to-staff subjects and regions of the state. However, we know that one of the biggest challenges we face is one of perception. Recent polling suggests what we've heard anecdotally in Wisconsin for several years now: most American parents don't want their kids to pursue teaching as a career.

As a Governor who truly values education and as an educator, I'll work to restore respect for our profession. My budget will provide educators the resources they need to do their jobs, and the resources school leaders need to provide competitive compensation to every teacher - year after year. We'll make college more affordable, and help graduates refinance student loans, so that student debt doesn't keep aspiring teachers away from the profession. We'll continue to partner together to expand "grow our own" programs to create new teachers and leaders in our communities, and build on policies that work to recruit and retain top talent. Wisconsin's schools cannot be strong without strong educators, and together, we'll tackle this head on.

7. Do you support the expansion of taxpayer-funded private school vouchers in Wisconsin? Why or why not? What is your position on requiring greater accountability for schools participating in the voucher programs?

Wisconsin's public schools provide access and opportunity to over 860,000 kids. They have to be our priority. When we aren't adequately funding our public schools, how can we possibly afford a parallel publicly-funded private school system? Moreover, study after study show the same results: privatization does not magically solve problems.



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I've spent the last 20 years fighting back against vouchers and privatizers. On my watch, we've removed more than 30 schools from the voucher program and prevented dozens from joining. We defeated dangerous "reform" proposals that would convert struggling schools into voucher or charter schools. We've successfully lobbied to ensure voucher schools receive report cards just like public schools. Finally, we've fought back against unfair funding schemes that subsidize wealthy families whose kids already attend private school.

I strongly support voucher transparency across the board, which includes publishing the impact of vouchers on property tax bills and our recent work to publish report cards on voucher schools (just like public schools). As Governor, I would work with the legislature to phase out vouchers; if Republican control of the Legislature makes that impossible, then I would ensure the state adequately funds public schools and require voucher schools to use licensed teachers, adopt student safeguards like IDEA and non-discrimination protection, and implement needed transparency measures.

8. One of the greatest problems in Wisconsin's school finance system is the systemic gap between allowable revenue growth and school district cost increases and the investments necessary to meet student needs. As governor, would you support annual inflationary increases in school revenues?

Yes. As part of my Fair Funding school finance reform proposal, we'll restore annual inflationary increases in revenue limits and restore the state's commitment to funding two-thirds of school costs. School districts need more predictability in their budgeting in order to meet the needs of all of our kids, and I'm committed to providing it.

9. In *Vincent v. Voight* (2000), the State Supreme Court found the Wisconsin school finance system constitutional, so long as the legislature provided sufficient resources to ensure that all students are offered an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. The court specifically enumerated three classes of students to which the state has a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Since 2000, the rising costs to meet the growing needs of students in these enumerated classes have far outstripped the limited school funding directed to each of these student classes; thereby challenging the abilities of local school districts to meet the Court's standard. As governor, how would you address this problem?

My 2019-21 biennial budget proposal would provide the largest increase in school funding in a generation, focused in large part on serving these special populations of students. I'd shatter the

decade-long freeze on special education funding with a historic \$600 million investment in our state's primary special education categorical aid, raising the reimbursement rate from 25 to 60 percent. I'd provide significant new funding for the state's bilingual-bicultural categorical aid program, and establish a new stream of funding to support all English learners.

Approximately 4 in 10 children in Wisconsin are economically disadvantaged and our large investment in school aids will help children in poverty all over the state. Furthermore, my budget proposes several new programs, including early childhood investments, afterschool funding and support for students in our large urban districts all of which provide support to economically disadvantaged students. In a systemic change that supports economically-disadvantaged students, our Fair Funding school finance reform plan will account for family income as a factor in our state's school funding formula for the first time.

With these investments, and a continued commitment to a strong and vibrant K-12 system in the future, we will be making good on our constitutional responsibility to provide an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education to every child.

10. Geographically large, sparsely populated rural school districts are hit especially hard by the state's inadequate support for school transportation costs. Even with the increases to the high cost transportation aid program in the 2017-19 State Budget, state reimbursement to local school districts is still only about 10.4% of actual school transportation costs. As governor, how would you address this problem?

As Governor, I'd continue to invest in both pupil transportation aid and the high cost transportation aid program, while providing substantial new revenues to our schools for general use. My 2019-21 biennial budget proposal would increase the reimbursement rate for students who are transported 12 or more miles, and would fully fund high cost transportation aid, measures which are specifically targeted to providing additional aid to geographically large, sparsely populated districts.

Moreover, as Governor, one of my first priorities will be to solve our state's transportation crisis. Wisconsin's road quality is now among the worst in the country. Towns and villages are returning to gravel, and municipalities are passing new vehicle fees and taxes to fund road maintenance that should be covered by the state. A 2018 report from the American Society of Civil Engineers found that 27 percent of Wisconsin's public roads are in poor condition, resulting in average costs per Wisconsin driver of \$637 per year. Deteriorating roads impact school buses, increasing the cost of maintenance and increasing the burden on our schools' bottom line. As Governor, I'll work with Democrats and Republicans alike to find a long-term solution to our state's ongoing transportation standoff.



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11. Small, rural schools continue to face many challenges that limit educational opportunities for the children they serve. These include: declining enrollment, a lack of economies of scale, difficulties in recruiting/retaining qualified staff contributing to reduced programming options, and distance from post-secondary education institutions. As governor, what policies/initiatives would you advance to reduce the disparities in educational opportunities for children in rural Wisconsin?

When I'm out talking to young people and ask why they choose to stay here, they almost always point to our natural resources and our quality of life - things rural Wisconsin has in spades. While we need to invest in new opportunities, we must also maintain the high quality of life Wisconsin is known for, which keeps people here and draws businesses to the state. This includes a strong public education system from early childhood through higher education that produces an educated workforce, high quality roads and infrastructure, clean air and water as well as abundant recreational opportunities.

As I noted earlier, I'm committed to fully funding our public schools, and I can do it on day one with my Fair Funding plan. It's been endorsed by educators and school boards across Wisconsin and it ensures that every kid who needs an extra lift, gets an extra lift. It also changes how we distribute our education dollars so that every district is guaranteed a minimum amount of aid per student and income, not just property value, is taken into account. These changes will greatly benefit rural school districts in Wisconsin. Even the current hostile Legislature has adopted some of my recommendations, like expanding sparsity aid for rural districts and upping the reimbursement for transportation - things that I'd continue to build on in my 2019-21 budget.

I previously mentioned my commitment to improving our roads, but strong infrastructure also means strong internet. Reliable high speed internet is the interstate of the 21st century, and should be available in every single home and business in Wisconsin. Yet, a recent study shows Wisconsin ranks nearly dead last in average download speeds. As Governor, I'd add statewide broadband to our infrastructure plans, an investment that would bring new industries to Wisconsin, reduce costs for businesses already here and create new job opportunities for people of all ages. Reliable and high speed internet would also give rural residents new opportunities to access digital coursework to grow their knowledge and skills, including more options for rural students to access challenging courses that local economies of scale might not support on their own.

I've lived and worked in rural communities across central Wisconsin, and, as Governor, I'm committed to helping our rural schools and our rural communities thrive.