Introduction
Thank you for this opportunity to share why I am running for Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction. I hope you are all doing well, and thank you for your commitment to serving our students. You are doing a good job, and remember, persistence, not perfection, is the key to your success. People have been working hard, and quite frankly, everybody is overwhelmed and exhausted. As district leaders, you have had the immense burden of shouldering this global pandemic's responsibilities in ways we could never have imagined. There was no pandemic playbook, but you all have been writing it and living it every day. Thank you for being such excellent care-givers of your school communities. Your leadership has mattered during this time more than ever and will continue to be essential moving forward.

1. What is your motivation to be Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction? What is your vision for PK-12 public education in Wisconsin?

I am uniquely prepared and qualified to lead Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction in these unprecedented times. My passion for serving all children for the past forty-one years in all sectors of education and my experiences at local, state, and national levels have prepared me well for taking on this critically important role at a time when our students are facing enormous learning losses, especially our black and brown children and those from underrepresented communities - rural, suburban and urban. In addition to this, the state of Wisconsin needs a leader who will address the rising and significant mental health needs among students, staff, parents, and community, and advocate for financial resources at all levels to address the consequences of this global pandemic.

Now more than ever, we need to stand together on behalf of all children and all who serve them every day. Schools can't do this alone, but we can unify our efforts and do this together. My track record of closing achievement gaps and ensuring success for all children is noteworthy. I have inspired others into the profession. I am a visionary leader of leaders, honored to have served as the President of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) and the President of the 13,000 members of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). I have been the voice of Superintendent leaders at the local, state, and national levels and will continue to do so after elected.

In addition to my varied experiences to lead our state and the department, I came to making this decision last June. In February 2020, at the AASA National Education Conference, I enjoyed introducing David Brooks for a general session presentation. David Brooks is a New York Times columnist, frequently appears on new media, writes about politics, culture, and has written several books. Recently, he authored *The Second Mountain - The Quest for a Moral Life*. Before introducing him on the AASA national stage, I prepared by reading chapters from his book. In the book, he explores commitments that define a person's life of meaning and purpose. According to Brooks, four commitments define a life of meaning and purpose: 1) family, 2) vocation, 3) faith, and 4) to a community. Upon reflection, I believed that I had climbed my “first mountain” with an established career, being part of a family that loves one another no matter the circumstances,
and worked diligently to advance my educational career to serve students and families. The main purpose of the book was to encourage us all to lead more meaningful lives.

One day late in May, I was listening to the rest of the book on Audible. This was the day that inspired me to run for state superintendent. It was this moment of reckoning as I considered what was next in my professional career. I knew that I wasn’t retiring as I would be making my fond farewell from Brown Deer at the end of June. I was not interested in taking my Wisconsin pension as this would have prevented me from continued service to support my colleagues or any other school district. So, I created my own educational leadership company, Lead Greatly, LLC. It was reflecting upon and learning about three questions that would determine my future vocation. As I thought about the answers to the three questions related to devotion of service, vocation, and solving big world problems, I knew I was called to the Wisconsin State Superintendent's position. The three questions are as follows:

1) *Is it big enough?* Those of us who have been fortunate to have had a great education, who are healthy in mind, body, and spirit, and have great work experiences should not be solving low-level problems. I answered this first question with a resounding, “Yes, the state superintendent's job is definitely big enough.”

2) *Am I uniquely positioned to make this happen?* Absolutely, my cross-sector work as a student, teacher, principal, superintendent in private and charter schools and thirty-four years of public school dedication have prepared me well for this leadership position. Also, my experiences at the local, state and national levels provide me with a network of colleagues no other candidate possesses or has access to. My experiences have prepared me well for this advocacy and equity work to serve all children in our great state and champion education at the federal level.

3) *Am I truly passionate about the answers to the first two questions?* Heck, yes! For those of you who know me, I am an enthusiastic, positive, and determined leader. This is my story and how I was motivated to run for Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to getting the support from my family to run for office, there was another defining moment that also set the stage for this decision. In late March, I had just received another accountability and compliance email from the DPI. My team and I were in week two of feeding our children, making sure parents had the resources to support their children, taking care of the teachers and support staff, and facilitating the distribution of over 1600 devices to support virtual learning for an unknown period. I called WASDA Executive Director Jon Bales to share concerns that our DPI leaders had no idea what we were dealing with in our schools. We did not have the time or energy to deal with these types of emails. In my opinion, the tone of the emails needed to be more sensitive and empathetic to our circumstances. All leaders and their teams were dealing with an unknown set of circumstances across this state, and we were on call 24/7. Before I hung up the phone, I told Jon, “this is enough to make me run for state superintendent!” I thanked Jon for listening and appreciated his help in communicating these ideas. I have been a public school superintendent for the past twenty years in Wisconsin. I have walked a mile, in fact, several miles in your shoes, and will change how communication is shared to support you in your leadership roles not just during a pandemic or crisis but as we lead together to create a world-class education system for all children in Wisconsin.

My vision is to create a world-class education system that is the highest performing in the country by working in partnership with all stakeholders to unlock a limitless field of opportunity, ensuring equity and access for all of Wisconsin's children. Our kids deserve nothing less. My mission in serving you will be setting out to transform K-12 public education and beyond in our great state of Wisconsin. Together we will create equitable opportunities and experiences to accelerate learning for all of Wisconsin's children. My plan begins with our ambitious goals to address and start closing the
achievement gaps within three years with a laser focus on high-quality instruction and providing significant support and resources for teachers, staff, administration, and parents. This will include the use of evidence-based policies and practices that will enable us to seize this moment in history to rethink schools in ways that can transform learning for all students, parents, and teachers alike. We will become stronger together.

2. Under your leadership as state superintendent, how will you define and shape the role of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in its relationship with Wisconsin school districts? What will be your priorities for the Department in working with district leaders to meet the needs of students across the state?

I am an equity leader that believes in a continuous improvement approach to all of our educational practices. My new diverse leadership cabinet and I will work collaboratively with the employees of the DPI to first listen and support them in this transition. Our goal is to understand best their roles and responsibilities as well as their challenges. This leadership coaching process will also include how we can best support all team members as a part of the new DPI professional learning community that will become equity champions. I believe that feedback on what the DPI staff have done is important and plays a decisive role in determining our collective future. As a “professional learning community,” we will first ask ourselves without blame or judgment, “Why, for the past ten years do our black and brown children have the worst achievement gaps in the country? (according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing and a recent DPI presentation). Then we will work collaboratively to create coherence and a shared understanding of the most urgent needs with an aligned, laser-focused, and comprehensive approach to improving student achievement. For years, we have had too many moving targets with too many initiatives and unfunded mandates to focus on what matters. Using a new equitable review process of achievement data, we will identify the root causes, the needs and develop a continuous learning cycle of improvement to measure what matters. We will communicate our goals and commit to full transparency to all those we serve across the state. We will ask ourselves every day, “How are the children?” We will become a mission-driven world-class education system that is responsive, reflective, and willing to do whatever it takes to help all children succeed in post-secondary success by developing strategic actions and processes. This will be our new target with clarity, on-going improvement cycles, accountability, and frequent communication to all stakeholders. We will focus on executing our organizational aims and strategic priorities and, most importantly, what we are learning from our progress. This type of collaborative culture with clear execution is an unbeatable combination in building capacity across the entire new DPI teams for learning and impact across the organization to better serve our stakeholders. To prepare for this transition, I have interviewed many DPI staff members and talked with DPI cabinet members so that I am ready to take on the transition the day after the election. We do not have any more time to waste when it comes to better serving our kids and eliminating the marginalization and barriers preventing them from achieving at high levels.

3. In your estimation, what are the current strengths and challenges within the DPI? How would you approach building upon those strengths and addressing any shortcomings?

While I am not an expert on the inner workings of the department as it exists today, I am very familiar with many staff members through my work in various professional associations and as superintendent in three different Wisconsin school districts over the last twenty years.

In my opinion, the department needs to become a better customer service agency that supports the ever-changing needs of its clients. I believe customers of the DPI support this idea and have voiced their frustrations with the lack of
transparency, helpfulness in problem-solving, and communication. We will learn and better understand the areas of need through a customer service survey, exit surveys after presentations, and other data analysis.

I believe the strengths of the DPI are as follows:

- Staff are very talented, skilled, and highly committed to education
- Educators often turn to DPI for advice and support
- Presentations are usually very well done and informative for adult learners
- The website has improved in terms of navigation, and information is timely and updated
- Data management tools have been redesigned and refreshed
- DPI is part of the Wisconsin Retirement System that provides an incentive for hiring staff
- Shared services with other state agencies are cost-effective
- Regional support to the DPI work with Cesa’s and other state consortiums
- Partnerships with Higher Education

I believe the challenges of the DPI are as follows:

- Lack of results in closing achievement gaps of black & brown children for over the past ten years
- Slow responsiveness in making decisions when inter-department collaboration is needed
- Getting a license has turned into a nightmare for many aspiring teacher graduates and out of state teachers
- Service and support has seemed to erode over the past years
- Customers do not understand how the DPI works and the sites they work from
- When calling department personnel, rarely does a human being answer the phone
- A possible shortage of staff or lack of coherence in the assignment of staff
- Lack of trusting relationships with legislators in the role of advisors and advocates for education
- The proposed budget may be unrealistic in meeting the equitable needs of all children based upon the current economy
- Role of accountability and compliance overshadow opportunities for innovation, creativity, and cost-savings

I believe that we have many opportunities to restructure and transform the department to attain better results and higher outcomes for all students. Historically, the DPI has been viewed as an enforcer of required processes without considering achieving outcomes or allowance for alternative approaches. We are in times when alternative plans and options have become essential. Leadership in the DPI will need to adapt to new processes and procedures in order to assure that outcomes can be better achieved with local adjustments as education is not a one size fits all. There are silver linings to the pandemic that translate to the world of work as we used to know it. For some students and staff, virtual learning has been a positive experience. Perhaps, this also holds true for DPI staff who were required to work from home since last March. The time that some staff spent commuting has provided more time for family and flexibility in how they completed their work. Many companies across the United States realized higher rates of employee productivity during the pandemic. We will need to reevaluate the needs of each staff member as it relates to the overarching goals of the department and the work culture we believe is essential to getting better results.
4. As state superintendent, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve academic achievement for all students and close achievement gaps in Wisconsin? How would your policies/strategies ensure equal opportunity for all students, no matter their educational needs or their zip code?

As a priority, we will commit to evidenced-based practices to lead our teachers, district leaders, and school boards to close gaps by ensuring equitable access and opportunity to high-quality instruction (Universal Tier 1), including relevant real-life learning experiences for all students. We will engage stakeholders all across the state through the use of crowd-sourcing technology and other communication tools to learn what works well in getting excellent outcomes for their students. We will become a community of practice by learning from one another. We will distill this information to refresh and realign the department to focus on the right drivers to support teaching and learning and put the right systems in place. The new DPI will be held accountable for better results for all students, not just the rich ones or lucky ones, but for all students, we serve across the state.

As superintendent of Brown Deer Public Schools, we got impressive results and closed achievement gaps with a laser focus on reading. The school board, leadership team, teachers, and staff at Brown Deer achieved these promising results by spending more time on teaching the science of reading, especially for struggling students, setting high standards, and making those high standards stick by providing individual attention. As we all know, kids who don't learn to read by the third-grade risk getting left behind, which profoundly affects their lives and their future livelihood. And now we have to contend with recovery from a pandemic that is widening these gaps and creating significant social-emotional learning issues for all stakeholders in our school communities. By measuring what matters and putting in evidence-based practices to get results in terms of time, talented teacher/staff interventions, and on-going support in and out of school, it was an all-hands-on-deck approach. The systematic changes were: acknowledging the gap; daily professional learning community time with intentional focus, school improvement teams, monthly professional development time for staff; teacher-designed and teacher-led, equity and diversity training, hiring diverse, talented staff all across the organization, and district-wide intervention time in all schools. The Brown Deer team was “all in,” and as a state, we need to be “all in” to eliminate any achievement gaps. No matter what district you come from, we all have achievement gaps to contend with. It will be our collective leadership that allows us to unite around this mission. This is what we will have to do across the state to get better outcomes. These research-based practices are scalable, take into consideration the needs of students, and provide remedies to accelerate students in their foundational learning. Brown Deer has significantly increased scores on the state school report card for closing achievement gaps data over the past five years (higher than the state) and almost 100% graduation for all students, including our black scholars, the majority group in our district. We never gave up on our students even if they left us after high school, as evidenced by our seven-year graduation data.

In collaboration with our stakeholders, we will create a new approach to our work called “Our Wisconsin Promise.” Our promise will be a renewed commitment to our learners that every child will be known by name, their strengths, and passion, their need, and be ready for career and/or college. This promise will be personalized at every school/district to reinforce the expectations of serving our students well based upon their needs. We will connect the dots between business partnerships and the need for skilled workers. We will commit that every learner will have a strengths-based pathway and entry into the meaningful world of work or pursue post-secondary education in colleges and or universities.
Equitable opportunities will allow our students to choose a learning pathway based on their strengths and passion to ensure success for all students. The current academic and career planning focus across the state needs to align with the workforce development needs of businesses, manufacturers, and other employers. I believe every student should have access to an apprenticeship learning opportunity as the skills learned through these experiences prepare our students for the work of work whether they choose to go to college, the military, or a chosen career path. From apprenticeship to Ph.D. is the future of the world as we partner with business leaders all across the state not only to fill the pipeline of skilled workers but create the working experiences that keep our talented kids in Wisconsin. There should be multiple pathways for our students to explore, with no pathway a dead end. This educational approach needs to start in our elementary schools so that our students can dream and envision what they want to accomplish in their lives. I believe it is too late to start in middle/high school as students as the choices are so vast and ever-changing due to the influence of technology and a more global economy.

Additionally, we will deliver child-centered personalized learning with innovative experiences, assistive technology, and opportunities taught by learner-responsive educators who have rich professional development when they need it. Our schools will not be mandated seat-time factories but places where they can develop their personalized learning plan based upon their interests. There should never be a high school scheduling conflict for our students as the learning can happen outside the school day and classroom walls. I would also advocate for school district digital learning plans approved by the DPI that would allow schools to continue learning online without having to make up days on an antiquated school calendar process. Other surrounding states have these types of accountability programs that provide each school district a choice on how they will address the needs of their students, families, and staff.

“Our Wisconsin Promise” also involves fostering non-traditional partnerships in our school communities to better serve student’s educational, psychological and nutritional needs. We will align resources with all entities to ensure that all children and families are well served. We will find creative ways to engage and communicate with families as valued partners in supporting their children’s learning. Their voices are essential to help lead us to world-class results. My entire platform addresses equity through excellence. We can and will ensure success for all students by creating a learning culture of high expectations with rigorous and relevant learning opportunities that reflect the real world with a focus on the NEEDS of our learner. We will build off this success by creating schools that prioritize character education with rich social-emotional and mental health supports. We will foster and celebrate innovations in our Wisconsin schools. “Our Wisconsin Promise” is child-centered and honors all educators so that our students, no matter where they come from, are joyfully served to be well prepared for success in life after high school and contribute to our citizenry.

5. 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 state superintendent, what policies or strategies would you advance to improve early learning opportunities in Wisconsin?

In my roles as superintendent in both Wilmot Grade School and Brown Deer, I started and implemented high-quality four-year-old kindergarten programs. Wilmot Grade was a charter school as an instrumentality of the district and Brown Deer, working with a community task force, created a community-based program as an essential aspect of closing achievement gaps before they start. Both programs were designed for the .6FTE for membership due to the extended
partnerships with parents and other agencies in the communities. I support full-time FTE for 4K students if the programs allow for the developmentally appropriate learning goals and objectives approved by the DPI. Many of my kindergarten teachers have often expressed their concerns about the loss of play-based instruction and other social-emotional learning activities because of an emphasis on the acquisition of academic skills over child-centered instruction. If school districts have space and staff to create a robust viable full-day program for 4K students to better serve their students, I will welcome and foster their initiatives in this area. In Brown Deer, we also committed to the national standards of room size for early learners for all 4K and 5K classrooms, with each classroom over 1200 square feet. So, there is more than just the program's want; there are other essential elements necessary to offer quality 4K programs. According to the National Education Association, high-quality early childhood education is one of the best investments our country can make. The research indicates a very high positive return on investment by providing early childhood opportunities. More importantly, these early learning opportunities become the gateway to education for many of our black and brown students and eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline. Education is the great equalizer, not a privilege, but a right.

I believe one of the ways in which we are going to recover from the calamities of COVID-19 is to leverage community partners and resources to better serve all children and families. A very impressive community outreach and collaboration model is the Strive Together-Every Child, Cradle to Career. This group has a national network of communities across the country and in Brown County, Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha, working together to create access and opportunities for racial equity and economic mobility. For example, pediatricians in some of these communities align screening tools and practices to consistently serve the children not only for consistency but also to measure consistent metrics. The health and wellbeing of our students are linked to good healthcare and parental support. These groups, coach, convene, codify, invest, and influence their local communities through a theory of action for improved outcomes. We can learn from these groups as we rethink how our communities can better support our schools and families. We will need to align all resources in our communities to ensure that all children and families are well served. We will need to find creative ways with limited resources to engage families as valued partners in supporting their child's learning. It will “take a village” approach to come together and unify resources, time, talent, and purpose.

6. 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 and 2019-21 state budgets, most believe a stronger, long-term commitment from the state is required to meet this challenge. As state superintendent, what next steps would you take to address this problem?

Children with unmet mental health and trauma is an area that needs our utmost attention. As stated earlier, Wisconsin needs a leader that will address the rising and significant mental health needs among students, staff, parents, and community and advocate for financial resources at all levels to address the consequences of this global pandemic. Now more than ever, we need to stand together on behalf of all children and all who serve them daily. Schools can't do this alone but we can unify our efforts and do this together. If students are not engaged, they cannot learn. We need to pool all of our resources to advocate for additional mental health funding to provide services, staffing, and other resources for our school communities. Grant programs, while appreciated, do not serve the communities that need financial support the most. We will need to conduct an equity audit of programs, models, and policies that leverage resources for the greatest
impact. We will then identify a long term, equitable, and sustainable plan that focuses on only those approaches with a strong evidence base and support high-quality implementation measures through training and technical assistance by DPI staff. Putting our resources in just the right places to meet the needs of our children, families, and staff must be the priority.

7. The recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of effective educators are vitally important for our children’s future. Increasingly, many Wisconsin school districts face difficulties in filling key instructional positions with highly qualified educators. As state superintendent, what policies would you advance to address this important issue?

I have always recruited teachers and teacher leaders in our great profession. We have two principals and nine teachers in public schools in Wisconsin and Illinois in my family and extended family. It starts with us promoting the work and recruiting the best and the brightest to become teachers. As superintendent, I provided teachers many opportunities to lead and develop these skills. I intentionally tapped talented staff on the shoulder to encourage them to the next level in their professional growth.

A couple of years ago, I was also instrumental in getting legislation passed for an alternative teacher license based upon prior work experience for difficult-to-fill positions such as business education and technical education teachers. We worked with a team of professionals from various school districts, including human resource personnel, superintendents, principals, and legislators, to craft the language and draft this bill. We invited the DPI to all of the meetings, and they did not attend. The DPI testified against the bill; however, the bill passed with overwhelming support and was put into law. This was a model on how good policy should be developed, representing constituents from across the state and people from both sides of the aisle. The superintendents are the gatekeepers for hiring high-quality staff. We need to let them do their jobs.

Another area to consider is the Educator’s Rising groups and “Grow your Own” programs that intentionally recruit teachers of color and represent our schools’ children. Research indicates that students achieve at higher levels and feel more connected to school when they have teachers that look like them. Legislation from other states offers local school districts, and teacher colleges shared funding to support programs in area school districts. I also believe we can learn from our most recent teacher graduates about their experiences and how we can provide more access and opportunities to students beginning in high school to select this honored profession and pathway.

Recently, I served as the co-chair along with UW-Madison Dean of Education Diana Hess for the UW System Task Force for Advancing Teacher and School Leaders in Wisconsin. Due to decreased student enrollment in teacher education programs as well as teacher certification and school leaders programs, this has become a workforce development issue. Schools all across the state are challenged with filling positions with high-quality staff, especially in shortage content areas or in rural areas. The charge of the task force, including representatives from all across the state, was to identify incentive programs to increase enrollment in the UW System Schools and Colleges of Education. While the committee’s work was
held in abeyance due to financial commitments necessitated due to COVID-19, there was information gathered from teachers, community members, and business leaders before this hiatus. Common themes emerged, indicating financial stress for those entering the teaching profession due to student loans compared to other professional careers, the lack of respect for the profession, below-market rate teacher salaries, and lack of coordination of programs amongst the UW system, a few. We also learned many students and second career individuals are willing to commit to teaching our Wisconsin children. Still, we need to remove the barriers preventing them from doing so and leaving our state. I would like to see a more coordinated effort with the DPI and UW System Provosts and Deans of the Schools and Colleges of Education to promote teacher education programming and meet workforce demands through collaborative partnerships.

8. 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?

I support one system of accountability and full transparency for all of Wisconsin’s taxpayer-funded schools. The pandemic has intensified and shined a spotlight on inequities across rural, suburban and urban districts. We have known about these inequities for years with little change. As we move forward into the 2020-21 school year, there is great urgency to address the nation’s largest achievement gaps and the deleterious impact of COVID-19 on students and school communities, particularly those most vulnerable. Our focus and resources must be on addressing these inequities. This issue has been legislated through law. Suppose we are going to become champions of equity for all students. In that case, we must work together, on behalf of all students, to improve literacy, close gaps, ensure equitable resources and support while also mitigating learning loss and addressing social and emotional needs exacerbated by the pandemic. Education is a nonpartisan matter as each child is deserving! We must stay focused on equity, anti-racism, and social justice to improve academic achievement for all students and close achievement gaps in Wisconsin. I would work with all stakeholders involved to determine how to best accomplish accountability and transparency using state school report cards or other means of assessments that measure college and career readiness for all students. No student, parent, or teacher voiced concerns about missing the state assessment this past year. Meaningful postsecondary success measures include grade point average, attendance, ability to persist in math and reading, work collaboratively in a team, critical thinking, communication, and creativity, to name a few. I look forward to coming together to learn together and to lead together.

9. A recent report from the Wisconsin Policy Forum discovered that between 2002 and 2018, Wisconsin’s per-pupil spending declined from 12th highest in the nation (11% above the national average) to 24th highest in the nation (2.6% below the national average). Compounding Wisconsin’s lagging per-pupil spending has been the recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the inequities in our school finance system, making it increasingly difficult for districts to ensure equitable opportunities for all children – no matter their educational needs or their zip code. As state superintendent, how would you address the current inadequacy and inequity of our school finance system?
With the largest achievement gaps in the country growing due to COVID-19, there is great urgency to invest in promising practices that can be found both at a state and national level. The work of the Blue Ribbon is just the beginning of efforts needed to address the current inadequacy and inequity in school finance. Even though the Wisconsin school funding is lauded across the country as one of the best in social justice and equity, it’s difficult to change the formula without creating winners and losers. However, perhaps there are some creative ways to adjust the funding formula in order to stabilize all of Wisconsin's public K-12 schools. With COVID-19, per-pupil adjustments must also be made to hold school districts harmless while dealing with significant enrollment shifts, many districts experienced this fall. Schools across the country are dealing with declining enrollment and, in some cases, have hired staff to find their previously enrolled students.

In addition, the 2018 Blue Ribbon Task Force recommendations were enacted only in part, and a more serious effort should be made to address the solutions, such as funding the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at 60% as the Task Force brought forth. However, legislators are unlikely to dedicate more funding to schools when they do not perceive that additional funding to be worth the investment. For years, the State Superintendent’s voice has been limited in the halls of the State Capitol due to a longstanding, broken relationship and misunderstanding about educational priorities. It’s time to begin the serious work of collaboration and garner respect for both the role of the State Superintendent and DPI. It’s time to show them what we can do: raise achievement for all students AND close achievement gaps. It will be hard to argue against additional funding if we can show it will be well-spent and improve outcomes. From day one, I would work diligently to amplify the State Superintendent’s voice as a reasonable and strong advocate for all students. The voice of the State Superintendent should be welcomed in the halls of the legislature, and I believe that I have the ability to work with both sides of the aisle to unite our efforts for the children and families of Wisconsin.

10. 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 state superintendent, how would you address this problem?

While the State Superintendent does not control the distribution of funds to schools under state law, however, the office has constitutional authority with regard to advocating for improvements in equity through the state budget process. As State Superintendent, I would advocate in budget proposals for improved equity in funding, especially as it relates to the three groups identified in the Supreme Court finding. However, only after completing an equity audit of the departments with a thoughtful inquiry on how funds are currently spent and distributed. Equity is about giving schools what they need, not equality where everyone gets the same amount. I would also cast a wider net for input about the DPI budget as there needs to be more meaningful interactions with stakeholders to determine priorities. My leadership style is more strategic and involving especially when it comes to financial resources and commitment to our goals. I believe that the DPI’s trouble over the years has been to seek more money for doing essentially what is currently being done, and that hasn't gotten a lot of support even from the users. The current process is somewhat of a mystery to most people. I believe that we need to be
more strategic in budget planning to adapt to evolving priorities just like we have had to do as sitting superintendents of our school districts. FTE adjustments or specific and significant aid allocations for these groups could be avenues to consider. Other states have done this for poverty, ELL, year-round schooling to name a few. However, whenever we ask for additional funding from the legislature, we must be ready to identify how these funds will result in improved outcomes for students. It’s unacceptable that Wisconsin has had the worst achievement gaps for decades. As funding levels have gone up and down, these gaps have not changed. The harsh reality is that we are unlikely to get much additional funding unless we show that we are able to make improvements. I have a collaborative working relationship with legislators on both sides of the aisle. We set the stage for the future by working together and coming up with a plan we can support as a collective unit. I will always advocate for equitable funding when I can also bring other creative solutions to the table without expecting the investment of new money for every ask.

11. Increasingly, Wisconsin school leaders are growing dissatisfied with the lack of improvement in Wisconsin reading scores and seek innovative leadership and new investment in literacy instruction for Wisconsin students. As state superintendent, what policies/initiatives would you advance to address this problem?

My leadership cabinet will provide a reading roadmap based upon the science of reading while also valuing the success of districts across the state in the teaching of literacy and reading across the content areas. We can become a community of readers in our schools and across the state by focusing on the right metrics. Using evidenced-based practices as discussed in my previous responses we will plan a three-year timeline, then offer three articulated models in Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade-3 in both reading and math for schools or districts covering:

- Training (anytime, anywhere)
- Curriculum & intervention
- Assessment (screening and progress monitoring)
- Staffing (roles and responsibilities)
- Problem-solving models
- Leverage the Wisconsin RtI Center to offer support for the implementation of each of these aspects of effective systems
- Avoid mandates, taking away local control, remove board oversight
- Require accountability for support and clear communications about options. Each of the three articulated models must be based on the highest quality research and well-documented implementation success. Offer different pathways: for instance, a school may not want to do a complete curriculum adoption. In that case, make sure they have options for improvement and hold them accountable for their success. The school districts define their destiny through a clearly articulated action plan approved by the DPI.
- Celebrate the growth and success of these schools after six months to show that a focus on the right measures gets results

12. 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 state superintendent, what policies/initiatives would you advance to reduce the disparities in educational opportunities for children in rural Wisconsin?
The majority of our school districts in Wisconsin and across the nation are rural and less than 1600 students. My first superintendency was at Wilmot Grade School. A 150 student K-8th grade school next to the fairgrounds and a block away from Wilmot High School in Western Kenosha County. I was the superintendent, business manager, principal, curriculum director, and shoveled snow when needed. I know that our rural school leaders are committed to their school communities and wear many hats in their leadership roles. The success in my role as a rural educator and leader is the openness to partnerships, consortiums, shared staffing, recruiting retired teachers, parent volunteers, and any university or college that wanted to have a great learning experience to spend time in my rural schools. In one of my schools, I did not have a nurse so we were able to get university nursing students to conduct vision and hearing exams. It’s about leveraging the support of various CESA’s as well to best serve rural students. We also used internships to get the cream of the crop student teachers which allowed them a small stipend in exchange for teaching experience and being mentored by a master teacher. Several of the interns I supervised become teachers in our rural school.

What many people do not realize is that there are parallel challenges for both rural and urban schools to serve children well. Poverty and mobility hit rural areas just as hard as the inner urban centers. Some people are just one life catastrophe away from significant needs and financial challenges. COVID-19 has exacerbated these inequities now more than ever and we need to ensure our rural schools have the resources they need to educate their students. Robust internet access was certainly an issue for many of our rural communities. No amount of sparsity aid is going to solve this problem so this is where I would advocate at the federal level for increased flexibility for use of Erate, connectivity, and other funds to support the regional support of additional fiber that needs to be in place to future proof all of our rural schools and libraries. We can eliminate the digital divide and access to robust internet through partnerships with local libraries, colleges, universities, and business partners, especially in rural areas and under-represented communities. Internet access is a necessity for life - just like food, water, and electricity. Other states have leveraged partnerships to make this happen - I will do the same.

I also believe that we could better support the rural educators and school districts with the establishment of a stabilizing baseline funding for all students in rural areas - this is equity in action, giving communities what they need. I also want to appoint a member of my leadership cabinet with rural school experience so they have a voice at the table where high-level decisions are being made. Rural school communities need to have a voice in educating their students and should also be involved in the DPI budgeting process. One size does not fit all. Some of our rural districts are the most innovative schools in our state and we should recognize their leadership in this area. We should celebrate their ability to make systematic changes much quicker than our larger organizations. The pandemic has shown us that the internet is a necessity not only for education but for rural community members to run their business and get excellent telehealthcare when the nearest hospital is over fifty miles away. I will advocate for the expansion of robust internet for rural areas with the Department of Administration, with the Universal Services ERate Committee, and the new President as our AASA is already working with the new administration on this important issue.

13. In your estimation, what is your individual role as state superintendent in advocating for evidence-based educational policy that will lead to effective educational outcomes in Wisconsin?

As I stated earlier, my role as the new state superintendent will be to listen and support students, parents, teachers, leaders, school board members, legislators, and professional organizations to best understand their needs at this particular time. While we may be socially distanced our network knows no bounds. Through the building of relationships with all
stakeholders - including but not limited to legislators, administrators, parents, etc. We will work together to create a shared vision and evidence-based policies to advance the vision for all of Wisconsin's children.

I believe the DPI has to get better about helping educators align practices with evidence, and not picking and choosing just those aspects of a practice that they are interested in. This evidence-practice work is about leadership, not just guidance. You don't get rid of an infection if you don't follow the prescription. In the same way, we won't improve our outcomes for students if we don't get better about listening to researchers and practitioners. We need evidenced-based toolkits for youth development programs, youth apprenticeships, personalized learning, and character education. The work has already been done and the systems in place with our regional CESA's to help lead the way. It's going to take a state-wide approach with regional leadership in order to make our world-class vision for education come true for all of our students and stakeholders.

14. The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have a significant impact on student learning, especially for our most challenged learners. As schools increasingly move toward in-person instruction for students and anticipate the eventual full return to daily in-school activities, what do you see as the greatest recovery needs to be addressed for effective and meaningful student learning growth? As state superintendent, how would you propose meeting those needs?

After March 13, 2020, the Brown Deer School District and other districts in the northern suburbs working in collaboration with the health departments closed down schools. We did this when the science of the data showed the virus spreading at exponential rates in the Milwaukee area. Our team of thirteen districts closed down schools before the Governor or President of the United States made the call. Our team started meeting twice a week along with the health department through the next seven months to keep on top of this new situation that no one has ever experienced in our lifetime. I was also a member of the AASA National COVID-19 Task Force which met once a week with leaders across the country not only to share ideas but to learn from one another during this unprecedented time. The shared leadership of both of these teams allowed the districts to start scenario planning while learning as much about COVID-19 as possible. My point is that our school districts had rubrics, various plans for reentry, and made decisions in unison to open up school areas. We are leading 24/7 and bringing our school communities along. When the guidebook emerged from DPI in late June it was too late to make an impact on our school communities and provide guidance. Our team had already spent hundreds of hours planning, working together, securing resources, and funding to support our students and families. So instead of spending time on matters that don't provide the support that is equitably needed for our school districts, the DPI needs to be more nimble, flexible, and able to better accommodate the needs of their constituents. We need to start planning now for the recovery from this pandemic. We don't have any time to lose as each day our students are not in front of our teachers in meaningful ways is another day wasted of progress. We need to better support the schools that are in face-to-face instruction with whole child approaches and help those we are in wings once the migration risk can be reduced. If anything was learned during this pandemic is that our teachers have gained a more profound appreciation for the work that they do without our children. Parents are watching and know we have lots of work to do to get back on track. This is our chance to redefine and reimagine an education system that focuses first on our students, driven by a whole-child approach. To evolve means to do better, and we must. We must be future-focused, responsive, creative, and innovative - all skills that our learners will need to thrive and be successful in their future careers. We need to go on this journey of equity with excellence now more than ever.
My experience already working with the new President through my AASA leadership will help influence our advocacy work at the federal level as we focus on robust internet, direct certification, and infrastructure support. I will continue to advocate at the Federal and State level leveraging my work with AASA/WASDA to obtain more resources that support equitable access for all, tools & resources for educators to transform teaching and learning, reduce & eliminate mandates, and review the assessments needed to best account for learning.

The new DPI will lead us through these challenging times with every employee adding value to the vision and mission. Our lack of a Wisconsin workforce will continue to be a challenge for all businesses if we don't connect the dots with our students to create work-based learning opportunities to fill the employment pipeline. A quality education graduating students with work skills influence our future economic development and vitality.

We must continue to advocate and lead by example while unapologetically dismantling systemic racism and overcoming the pandemics of racial inequities, coronavirus, and now an economic pandemic as our schools are significant employers in our communities. This is going to take courage and boldness to lead for successful reentry, recovery, and beyond in our school systems to deal with the aftermath of these pandemics. And, "how are the children now?" I would tell you we are on our way to recovery and beyond with a vision to create a world-class education system for all children. Kerr 4 Wisconsin Kids!

Concluding Remarks
In conclusion, thank you for this opportunity to share my vision to create a world-class education system for the state of Wisconsin. My integrity and character are hallmarks of my leadership. My record of success and willingness to speak up for my students and school community is just what I will do for all of you as our future depends on excellence and equity for ALL of Wisconsin's children. Each child is most deserving of an excellent and high-quality education, regardless of life circumstances. This nonpartisan election is about the well-being of our children, our future workforce, and economic vitality. The time is now to call for unity and rally around all of Wisconsin's children; work collectively to address the inequities in our educational system that were further exacerbated by the pandemic. We will need with all deliberate speed to raise the level of discourse and deepen the conversations to elevate education to the top of the list as the #1 priority in our state affairs. All of our futures depend on it.

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