



2022 Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire Governor Evers Campaign Response

1. What is your motivation to be Wisconsin's governor? What is your vision for PK-12 public education in Wisconsin?

Having spent years as an educator, I know how important a quality education is, that's why during my first term, I brought both parties together to fund Wisconsin public schools at their highest level in nearly two decades and signed the largest increase in special education funding in a decade. But I know we can do even more to improve the quality of education in Wisconsin.

I will work to increase state aid to schools, ensuring districts have sufficient resources to face the upcoming fiscal cliff, address rising costs, and support additional funding to support special education programs. I will also increase funding for student mental health and financial literacy programs to help our students receive the support they need to succeed in and out of the classroom.

I will also continue to support Wisconsin's rural school districts through sparsity aid and transportation funding to give rural communities the support they need to deliver high-quality education.

2. Under your leadership as governor, how will you define and shape your relationship with Wisconsin school and district leaders in the development of state education policy? What will be your priorities for working with district leaders to meet the needs of students across the state?

Since my first day in office, I promised to be the Education Governor. I've prioritized our public schools, stood with teachers and parents, and fought to increase funding for universities and technical colleges. By investing in our public education, we can build a bright and prosperous future for all of Wisconsin. That's why I am committed to working with teachers, parents, and school leaders to ensure they have the resources needed to help our kids

succeed. I'm not going to make decisions about you and your kids, without you.

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

We must work to close the achievement gaps in schools, which is why I've supported increasing funding for our schools and working to close these gaps. The Urban Excellence Initiative I proposed earlier this year would expand summer school, enhance early childhood education, support community engagement to improve academic achievement, and support principals in the state's five largest school districts. I'll also continue to support Wisconsin's rural school districts through sparsity aid and transportation funding to give rural communities the support they need to deliver high-quality education. We've got to make sure when we provide funding for education, that no kid gets left behind.

4. A recent report from the Wisconsin Policy Forum discovered that between 2002 and 2020 Wisconsin's per-pupil spending declined from 11th highest in the nation (11% above the national average) to 25th highest in the nation (5.6% below the national average). Compounding Wisconsin's lagging per-pupil spending has been the recognition of growing 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 governor, how would you address the current inadequacy and inequity of our school finance system?

Every kid deserves access to a quality education. Budgets are about priorities, and that's why building our budget always begins for me with doing what's best for our kids, and we know our kids, families, and schools need our help now more than ever to get caught up, get more educators and staff in our classrooms, and ensure every kid has the support and resources they need to be successful.

Whether it's helping make sure our kids can access mental health services and healthy meals, improving reading outcomes and investing in financial literacy and out-of-school programming to make sure our kids are prepared for their

future, or making sure our schools are fully funded and can meet staffing needs to keep our class sizes small, investing in education will pay dividends for our state's future. And with a projected \$5 billion surplus, we also know we can make meaningful investments in our kids and our schools without having to raise property taxes across our state.

I recently announced that as part of my biennial budget, we are going to increase spending authority for school districts without raising property taxes by providing additional state funding for schools and increasing per-pupil aid.

5. One of the greatest problems in Wisconsin's school finance system is the lack of predictable, sustainable funding for districts to plan and invest to meet the needs of all their students. As governor, how would you address this problem?

For years, I have advocated to increase state-level support for our kids and our schools. In my last budget, I brought both parties together to fund Wisconsin public schools at their highest level in nearly two decades and signed the largest increase in special education funding in a decade. I will continue to fight for long-term investments in our schools, including funding literacy and financial literacy programs, permanently funding the "Get Kids Ahead" mental health programming, and continuing to increase state aid and per-pupil aid.

6. While other states fund as much as 100 percent of the costs of special needs services for their most vulnerable students, Wisconsin struggles to support just 30 percent of these costs. Wisconsin school districts collectively transfer more than \$1 billion annually from district general funds (used to meet the needs of all students) to cover the funding gap between required special education costs and current state special education funding. As governor, how would you address this problem?

Students learn in different ways. That doesn't mean they should get left behind, it means we need to give them the tools they need to learn. I'm proud to say that I signed the largest increase in special education funding ever in my last budget, but that doesn't make up for years of neglect under previous

administrations. We're just getting started in this area — and my plan for our schools will direct a portion of the state's surplus into additional special education staff and programming.

My most recent budget proposal includes investing \$750 million over the biennium to increase special education aid. This would increase the reimbursement rate for special education from roughly 30 percent to 45 percent in the first year of the biennium and to 60 percent in the second year of the biennium, with a goal of achieving 90 percent reimbursement by the 2026-27 school year.

7. Increasingly 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 value the school mental health investments made in the past three state budgets, most believe a much 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?

Kids face mental health challenges, too, and it's critical that they're receiving the support they need to succeed in and out of the classroom. A kid who's in crisis isn't going to be able to pay attention at school, finish their homework, or engage with their friends or teachers. That's why I created the "Get Kids Ahead" the "Get Kids Ahead" initiative to provide mental health services in K-12 schools across Wisconsin. We started with an initial investment of \$15 million, available to every school in the state, and we've invested even more in this program since then. Just last week, I invested an additional \$15 million for the program to help schools with mental health needs.

In my second term, I will make investments in my "Get Kids Ahead" initiative permanent, to continue funding school-based mental health programming and staff in districts across the state.

8. The recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of effective educators is critically important for the development of Wisconsin's future workforce. Increasingly, many Wisconsin school districts face extreme difficulties in filling

key instructional positions with highly qualified educators. As governor, what policies would you advance to address this critically important issue?

Our teachers, our schools, and the entire public education system have been under attack for decades. We have seen teachers demonized and harassed for political gain when they are just trying to do their jobs. Additionally, the last administration signed legislation that has resulted in historic teacher shortages. We need leaders who work together with teachers and parents to improve our kids' education, rather than trying to divide our communities.

During my first term, we restored more funding to schools to help hire and retain teachers in the state budget, and directed an additional more than \$200 million to schools to help fill funding gaps and help with things like staff shortages. I also created the \$1 million Teacher Training and Recruitment Grant program. I will also continue fighting for tuition assistance at our universities and increasing teacher pay to recruit more teachers in Wisconsin and improve teacher retention rates.

9. Small, rural schools continue to face many challenges that limit educational opportunities for the children they serve. These include declining enrollment, 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?

Every student deserves the opportunity to succeed, regardless of where they live. That's why I'll continue to support Wisconsin's rural school districts through sparsity aid and transportation funding to give rural communities the support they need to deliver high-quality education.

I'll also continue to fight for investments in our public schools. I recently announced a \$75 million investment designed to help meet staffing needs in order to help address the teacher shortage and keep classrooms small while addressing rising costs for school supplies due to national inflation, and other needs.