



MTI VOTERS

2021 Wisconsin State Superintendent Election Questionnaire

Who is MTI-Voters?

MTI-Voters is the political action committee of MTI that seeks to identify those candidates most likely to advance policies supported by the members of MTI, policies that support MMSD staff and students, and advance the quality of public education in the District.

The MTI-Voters Committee is a representative body of MTI members, comprised of the Presidents of each MTI bargaining unit, the MTI Treasurer and nine (9) others elected by MTI's Faculty Representative Council. This member-comprised committee, guides MTI's political endorsement process and advances recommended endorsements to the thousands of MTI members who contribute to MTI Voters and vote on endorsement recommendations.

Please respond to the following questions. If you wish to add to/clarify your response, please do so by attaching the additional information, and designate your response by the corresponding number which appears in the questionnaire. ***Please deliver your responses to MTI (via Vicky Bernards at bernardsv@madisonteachers.org by January 8.***

MTI-Voters will be interviewing candidates on the evening of January 13 and 14, between 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm.

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

I began my 30 year career as a kindergarten teacher. Then, as Principal at MMSD, I had the pleasure of hiring and working with an amazing group of teachers to move our third grade readers from 58% to 100% proficient and advanced-- despite our poverty levels tripling during this timeframe. I later worked at the district office as the Elementary Lead Principal, supporting 32 elementary school principals and leading the charge to add 4K to the district.

I couldn't have imagined leaving Madison until Tony Evers called me in 2011 and asked me to join him at DPI as an Assistant State Superintendent. I jumped at the opportunity and was re-appointed by Dr. Stanford Taylor in 2019. Over the past decade I have seen first-hand the high quality and caliber of DPI's staff. Just like in any school district, our staff are our most important resource, and DPI is filled with hard-working, experienced, and caring people driven by a shared mission of supporting all kids.

Sheila Briggs 1

Despite my love for the DPI and my colleagues, I think we need to make some big changes.

I want to improve DPI's level of coherence so that the agency is focused on what is most important to our collective goal of improving outcomes.

I believe that this is a moment in education when we must improve what is working, leave behind what is not, and move forward toward something better. I want to re-evaluate Wisconsin's approach in three key areas: the outcomes we value for our kids, the role of the teacher, and the structure of the school. While these are fully outlined on my webpage, below I've listed a couple of examples under each category.

Outcomes for kids:

It is time we start organizing education around what educators and families care about most: improving the lives of our kids. One example-- over the years, our focus on improving test scores has had unintended consequences. We've reduced recess, removed play-based learning, squeezed out science and social studies, and limited art, music, and physical education. Our overemphasis on testing has caused our kids to feel stressed out, our educators to leave the profession, and our test scores to decline. We are in desperate need of change. In my current position at DPI, I am leading several efforts that are increasing student engagement, teacher job satisfaction, and test scores, which is being felt most by the kids farthest behind. This can be done in strong partnership with district leaders around the state – and I'm ready to lead on day one.

Role of the teacher:

We are facing an absolute crisis in our profession – a crisis that is only exacerbated by the pandemic. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves, and our struggle to fill the pipeline with the next generation of teachers is only getting worse. Adjusting licensure requirements and other fixes we have tried may help around the margins, but I believe that we will never solve this problem until we fix the working conditions in our classrooms and stop demonizing teachers. Re-assessing the outcomes we want to focus on is an important start. We also need to empower our teachers with a sense of efficacy. Last but not least, we need to include teachers and teacher unions at decision-making tables. We have to ensure their voices are heard and involve them in developing policies and practices that are good for the kids in their classrooms.

Structure of the school:

At the state level, we need to ensure that we are encouraging and supporting innovation. It is not enough to simply remove barriers to innovation – the state should be doing more to incentivize, reward, and replicate innovative practices at the local level. Whether it's increased funding, thinking differently about instructional time and remote learning or finding the most effective way to reach each and every child, we have a unique opportunity right now to rethink some of our long-held beliefs and make changes for the better. As educators work locally to improve our public schools and bounce back from the pandemic, it will be my job as State

Superintendent to be a strong partner and ensure the state is making it easier for people at the local level to do what is right for our kids – especially the kids who need us most.

In order to make these changes and advocate for our kids, our teachers and our public schools, the Department must be proactive in addressing policy changes that are aligned with a coherent and bold agenda. While I believe it is DPI's role to vocally oppose harmful laws and legislation, I also believe we find ourselves in this situation too often-- with this week's Assembly Bill 1 being a perfect example.

We cannot deny that this pandemic will impact the next state budget. Tens of thousands of Wisconsinites are out of work, and the impact of COVID-19 will be felt for the next few years, but we cannot balance the budget problems on the backs of our kids or our teachers. They need more resources, more access to mental health services, more access to supplies to reopen safely, and more access to broadband until we do. Our kids, our teachers and our schools cannot do with less. They must succeed during this trying time so our kids can thrive.

We need to have a clear vision and be proactive in our messaging to legislators. We need to evaluate every policy on the books to make sure each one is helping us achieve the outcomes we want for kids. Where that is not the case, we must work together to adjust, replace, or eliminate those policies. I am ready to take on that challenge, and I'll be ready to start that work immediately following the election, before my term officially begins.

Above all, we need to ensure that every single public school in our state is supported and equipped so that they can meet the needs of every single student in their care. Student success should not be determined by zip code, race, income, ability status, or first language.

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

Our funding formula is broken and we need to change it. When I speak with Wisconsinites, I regularly hear their disapproval of the fact that not all students have access to the same opportunities and quality of education across the state.

Our current public school funding system creates stark inequality in the educational experiences of our children. Furthermore, the demographic make-up of our schools and communities has left key programs underfunded and ineffective. It is unacceptable that some districts receive no aid from the state, while others see high rates of reimbursement on their spending. This is not what we imagined as a state when the formula was designed. This is an equity issue – for some districts, home value doesn't always match family wealth. Fixing the zero-aid issue will be a priority of mine from day one, and that means having a base ask in my budget requests.

We also need to ensure that Wisconsin's school funding is keeping pace with the rest of the nation and the cost of living. We now provide 30 cents for every dollar spent on special education and less than 10 cents for every dollar spent on an English Learners. Simply put, this is not enough. Additionally, 387 referendum ballot measures over the past decade is a stunning indicator that Wisconsin is not meeting

its statutory obligation to fully fund our public schools. And while voters continue to support these measures across the state, this is an extremely inefficient way to fund our schools. It is ridiculous to think that as the needs of our kids get more complex, we can continue to do more with less.

The challenge of making this change – like many funding reform proposals – is that we are going to need to ensure that districts are held harmless. Otherwise, districts who historically benefit from high levels of aid will lose funding to support those who do not receive aid, and we know legislators will never support such a proposal.

To be frank, we have to completely change the way we approach the budget process. I don't think you can get this done by simply submitting an agency budget every two years. This requires sustained work with legislators all year round. It requires building relationships, demonstrating success, and clear explanations of how this translates to results for our kids. This will be some of my most important work.

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

The best way to solve the teacher shortage is to ensure our teachers love their jobs and feel like they can make a difference for our kids.

I hear from teachers all the time that they don't feel valued, they feel like they are being forced to do things that they don't feel are good for kids, and they are drowning in paperwork and requirements. We need to foster the love of teaching that drew our educators to the profession in the first place--and we must inspire the next generation of teachers. But right now, kids often don't like what they see--a thankless, stressful, and overwhelming job. If we fix the working conditions of the teaching profession, we will solve the teacher shortage. We must also place special emphasis on recruiting our students of color into the teaching profession. Because ALL students deserve to have teachers and leaders of color.

That's why I have worked to remove unnecessary barriers to entering the teaching profession, and worked to create additional pathways to becoming a teacher, while still maintaining high expectations. My team has worked with local districts and the teachers union to create Educators Rising programs to build upon high school students' interest in the teaching profession. That's why I've also been meeting with other Chief Academic and Talent Officers from around the country to improve our plans for recruiting and retaining educators--particularly educators of color.

We are facing a crisis of epic proportions if we do not act swiftly and decisively. That is why as State Superintendent our educator workforce will be a top priority. I will not rest until we restore teaching to the honored place it once was in our society. I will support local districts growing their own teachers with grant programs. I will work with the legislature and philanthropy to provide free tuition for students that graduate and agree to teach in Wisconsin, expanding on the example being set by UW Madison. I will seek to fund loan forgiveness programs for our current workforce. I will work to create

more teacher internship programs so that teachers can get more on the job support and training in their early years, as well as enhance our funding and support for mentoring programs. I will also work to ensure that every district is implementing the state required teacher evaluation system in the way we know it works--resulting in not only improved student outcomes, but increased teacher job satisfaction.

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

Wisconsin's public schools have been facing numerous challenges in the last decade, and the pandemic has only exacerbated these issues. Many of our students face unacceptable rates of poverty, racism and bias, and too many have incarcerated parents or are living in foster care. Families are struggling with unemployment, hunger, and a lack of healthcare, while rates of mental illness grow to staggering heights among young people. But regardless of the challenges that our children face, it remains our job to ensure we give them a world class education in a safe and supportive environment.

More and more schools are being asked to shoulder the burden of all of these problems and succeed despite them. I believe that if we provide the support schools need to mitigate and overcome these barriers, they will be able to provide a high quality education to every child with high expectations and quality instruction. While schools can't do all of this alone, they have the potential to make a real difference in the lives of our kids. Education is truly society's greatest hope.

I see serving kids as an all-hands-on-deck task that involves removing barriers, encouraging innovation and providing adequate resources for every district and school. That's why I will continue to work with our Governor to connect the dots across all state agencies and work with the legislature to bring comprehensive support and funding to our schools so they have what they need to serve our children. I'll work with DHS to ensure that our families have access to healthcare and that we are managing COVID-19 responsibly by making sure our districts have the PPE they require. I'll work with DWD to make sure our families have jobs, and alongside DCF to guarantee that parents have access to affordable childcare.

My team began bringing together stakeholders of what we then dubbed "The Big Five", because we realize that our urban districts face unique challenges. We also know that the educators in these districts are talented and passionate about their work, and could share and learn from each other. My team and I recognized that DPI's long held strategy of providing professional development through CESA was not an equitable strategy--so we began inviting teams from our urban districts, that do not typically access the services of our CESAs, (yet educate the majority of the students of color in the state) to specific and targeted professional learning opportunities. I have also secured millions of dollars in foundation grants, which have been made available only to our large urban districts and a few select others, to support their work.

Finally, as State Superintendent, I will serve as your advocate with the Governor and Legislature to support the funding, policy changes, and resources our students, families, schools, and communities need to recover and build back stronger than ever before. Throughout the pandemic, our schools have risen to the occasion and have continued to provide crucial, ongoing support to children and families. Now more than ever, schools need adequate resources to address students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs.

I'm ready to take on these responsibilities so that our teachers can do the most important job of all – educating our children.

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

Wisconsin has long existed as a state of extreme rural and urban environments. Yet for much of our state's history, this was seen as a strength, not a weakness. Strong public schools that could serve the needs of these different communities allowed the entire state to thrive. There are plenty of opportunities for us to rebuild our communities by prioritizing the needs of our public schools.

As State Superintendent, I'll advocate for stable funding sources and policies that recognize the unique needs of our rural schools, including sparsity aid, transportation funding, and additional support for English learners and students with special needs.

I will continue to work with schools, districts, and institutions of higher education that are investing in innovative teacher pipeline solutions and explore more funding options with the legislature to address teacher shortages. Most importantly, I will partner with our rural school leaders to directly learn what individual districts and communities need, and how DPI can support efforts to improve them.

Last but not least, I will champion rural broadband expansion. It is absolutely critical that we enhance broadband throughout our state, particularly in rural communities, to ensure that our students and staff are connected. Schools cannot be the only means families have for leveraging a high-speed internet connection – or any connection at all. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed just how dire this need is for many of our residents. Without internet access through school or a job, too many families have found themselves unable to stay connected to work. Once our rural schools have adequate broadband, they will be able to access additional supports like teletherapy and additional course offerings for students available online. And this is not just an educational issue – it is also an economic development issue. Local communities and rural districts have done a great job bringing attention to this, and I plan to use my influence as State Superintendent to keep the pressure on.

We need to stop viewing access to high-speed broadband as an issue that can be solved by one agency or one budget cycle. It's going to require sustained effort and a commitment to working across agencies and partners. The Wisconsin Broadband Office has been working on this issue for over 10 years. Some encouraging steps in the right direction have included Rural Broadband Expansion Grants and the Task Force on Broadband Awareness, and I am hopeful that these bipartisan efforts will continue to lead to concrete and actionable recommendations. As educators, we must work together to educate legislators on the urgent need for rural broadband and how we can work together to ensure that all Wisconsin communities have access to broadband.

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

Educator Effectiveness is one of the areas that I've been focusing on as an Assistant State Superintendent. I'm proud that Wisconsin was one of the few states to build a system that is

teacher-centered and designed around continuous improvement. We have been purposeful about collecting feedback on the system so we continue to make adjustments that further improve the system and better meet the needs of the field. Education stakeholders, including WEAC have been at the table with us from the beginning, giving feedback and helping to design and improve the system.

When other states were pushing to create a system that centered around holding teachers accountable, and including test scores in the scoring, Wisconsin took another path. We wanted our system to support teachers' growth, and have student test scores to increase as a result of the system. We listened to teacher feedback, and have continuously evolved and improved to make it work better. And we are getting positive results.

Last year, our evaluation of the system showed results for both student achievement and teacher retention based upon implementation of Educator Effectiveness. The evaluation also revealed the importance of local implementation – schools implementing EE in a supportive, learner-centered way that focuses on helping teachers improve show increases in student achievement and have teachers that are more likely to stay in the profession. Our evaluation data shows that in schools organized for this improvement, the achievement growth was felt most by kids of color.

But when schools focus on compliance, or ratings, rankings, and removal, we prevent these gains and can even cause damage. We don't see the same student achievement gains and teachers are at a greater risk of not only leaving their schools, but abandoning the profession entirely.

Many teachers across the state are frustrated by the system. But here's the thing. When we ask teachers if they could start from scratch to design a system--they describe our current system. The problem is not in the system--it is in local implementation. Often districts add extra requirements, require additional paperwork, control the goal setting process, or dictate the professional learning. In the schools and districts where the system is built upon trust, listening to and supporting teachers in their growth, where teachers own the goal setting and their professional growth and improvement, teachers feel respected, supported, and professional. Student achievement goes up...and teachers report statistically significant increases in job satisfaction.

My team is currently working on a plan, based upon recent evaluation data, to ensure that everyone has the support they need to implement Educator Effectiveness effectively so that we can continue to close racial divides and achievement gaps, while at the same time giving our teachers the support they deserve. This is not quick or easy work, but it is absolutely essential. Every teacher deserves to experience Educator Effectiveness the way it was designed--as a teacher centered, continuous growth model.

7. What is your plan to work with the Madison Metropolitan School District to assure that all students receive a quality public education?

I am unapologetic about my equity focus and my urgency to reform the education system so that it works for ALL our kids.

As State Superintendent, I intend to continue specific levels of support for our urban districts, including MMSD. In order to close the racial achievement gaps in the state, it is of paramount importance that our urban districts are successful. I have already met with Dr. Carlton Jenkins and his Chief of Staff, Dr. Gregory several times to provide support and opportunities for funding around his efforts to improve reading instruction in the district.

All of my priorities are rooted in equity, and I would argue that most of my colleagues feel the same about theirs. But in order for us to be successful in enacting such an agenda, we need someone with real experience and a willingness to shake things up. Change will not be easy, and it's going to take modifying our standard operating procedures. It's going to take bold leadership and a lot of work. It's going to take changing our accountability system, the way we assess students, and the way we teach skills like reading. It's going to require us to improve educator preparation and diversify our teacher pipeline. And of course, it's going to take some serious funding changes. But if we really want to make schools work for all kids, every challenge will be worth it.

I'm committed to fighting for a budget that reimburses a MINIMUM of 60% of districts' special education costs with a plan to increase that percentage over time. The gap between what our schools spend on special education services and what the state reimburses is now over \$1 billion. When we underfund special education, we are not only harming our students with disabilities-- we are harming the entire public school operation-- impacting both urban and rural districts. While I do not support the Special Needs Scholarship Program nor its funding model, it did shine a light on the disparity that continues to grow in how we administer special education programming. I'm confident that I can continue leading the way in this conversation with all educational partners. We need to get this done.

Additionally, kids need access to comprehensive mental health support to ensure they are healthy and ready to learn. The number of students dealing with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues has skyrocketed in recent years. Nearly 60% of our high school students reported a significant mental health need in 2019, and the long-term trends of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts have been heading in the wrong direction for the last few years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only exacerbated mental health issues facing our kids, but teachers and staff as well. They will need additional support and resources so they are able to deal with their own trauma created by the pandemic, and support students at the same time.

I will fight for the support we need to address the growing mental health crisis in our facing schools. We need to continue making significant investments - hiring counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists - to ensure student needs are being met. I will work to guarantee that every student has access to the social and emotional learning support they need. This cannot be accomplished with small grant programs -- it is going to require more stable funding sources in the form of reimbursement of costs.

Our schools cannot be the only means to address mental health challenges facing kids in Wisconsin. As State Superintendent, I will work with partner agencies like the Department of Health Services and the

Office of Children’s Mental Health to advocate for broad solutions to support the growing, unmet mental health needs of our communities.

This issue will require everyone working together, and I’m ready to take up this challenge.

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

Yes. In poll after poll, and referendum after referendum, Wisconsinites continue to show their support for their public schools. They are the heart of our communities, cornerstone of our democracy and foundation for our successes in our state. We have a long history of electing an educational leader in Wisconsin to lead our schools and that needs to continue.

9. Describe your position on the voucher program.

I do not support any expansion of taxpayer-funded private school vouchers. At the same time, I am happy that there are private schools available for families that wish to choose that option. That is and always will be a critical part of the education landscape in our state. But for the past decade, legislative funding schemes have funneled dollars away from public school coffers into private vouchers, causing the state to struggle to meet its obligation to the public education system. That system is the very one enshrined in the Wisconsin Constitution, designed to provide every student with a free, uniform education. Until we can meet that guarantee, we have no business investing in private education systems.

That being said, it is highly unlikely that voucher programs are going away any time soon. What we can do is demand that if they use taxpayer dollars, they meet similar accountability measures. Many large private schools educate mostly voucher students – meaning that most of their funding comes from the state. Ensuring schools in these programs meet financial and academic requirements akin to their public-school counterparts is a good place to start.

At the end of the day, my job as State Superintendent will be to fight for the needs of all our school children in Wisconsin, whether they attend a public school, a private school, a charter school, or are homeschooled. I believe the best way of doing so is by ensuring the public-school system is strong, fully-funded, and working to its full potential.

10. Describe your position on independent charter schools.

I am opposed to the idea of charter schools that are created by any entity aside from a locally elected school board. The original purpose of charter schools was to create an environment where we could experiment with innovation that was not possible under the current laws. In exchange for higher accountability, charters enjoy fewer rules and regulations. The only way that accountability works is when it is held by a local school board.

While I recognize that independent charter schools are held to similar standards as their brick and mortar public school counterparts, I believe there are systemic issues of inequity caused by their

existence -- especially as it relates to funding. The original independent charter (2R) program is funded as a first draw against the state's general school aid formula, causing an immediate drain and property tax hike across Wisconsin districts to the tune of over \$70 million. Even more troubling is the new independent charter program (2X) that draws revenue away from local schools in an unpredictable and unfair manner. Even if these funding issues could be resolved, the notion that an unelected and unaccountable entity can create and close a school tears at the fabric of our public school system.

Additional issues with independent charter schools can be seen when looking at the teaching workforce they employ. Inequities between teachers employed by the district and teachers that are employed by the charter authorizer are there are often stark differences in pay, in expectations, in requirements, and in support for our educators, setting up an inequitable system, often pitting teachers against one another. This is not healthy for a school system.

While I am not wholly opposed to the original idea of charter schools, I do not support the creation or expansion of independent charters. There are better ways to meet the innovation goals by increasing the health, strength, and success of our public school system. Independent charters are not currently accomplishing that.

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

For decades, Wisconsin has had a pathway to licensure called the Upper Level Technology Education Permit, or Trade Specialist as an available pathway. This allowed individuals with valuable skills in the trades that had completed an apprenticeship program and three years of occupational experience in a particular trade area, or completed four years of institutional training in a trade area, or were certified by the technical college system board to teach in an industrial arts or similar subject area to get a limited permit to teach in the specific trade area that they are skilled in. This was a great way to bring valued expertise from the field into our highest level trades courses, to be taught by an expert. The permit was narrow in scope for a reason.

My own two children appreciate career and technical education subjects. They both attended Madison College. My son is training to be a helicopter mechanic in the US Army. I have deep appreciation for the value that a skilled tradesman can bring into our schools. That is why this pathway was created and why it makes sense. I support this permit and other alternative pathways to licensure.

However, this experience-based Technical and Vocational Education Subjects Pathway goes way too far. It uses a point system to grant FULL Wisconsin teaching licenses in Career and Technical Education to individuals that can have no experience or background in the area they are licensed. While we have had some individuals go through this licensure program that have been successful, the rigor of this licensure pathway is greatly lacking. For example, using the point system, an individual needs a required minimum of 25 points under the "experience" category. Holding a bachelor's degree in any field gives you 65 points. So an individual can have ZERO experience or expertise in the field for which they would be licensed. The second section requires a minimum of 25 points for "pedagogical experience". One can get 75 points for holding any bachelor's degree in any field and any teaching license or permit. One

only needs a total of 100 points to be granted this license. Which means that because I personally have a bachelor's degree and a teaching license, I could be awarded a full Wisconsin teaching license in Agriculture, Business Education, Tech. Ed, Marketing, or Family and Consumer Education. I could be teaching children how to use power tools in a tech ed class with zero qualifications. This would be a very bad idea.

The department opposed this law when it was proposed because there were way too many ways that completely unqualified people could apply for and receive this license. I remain opposed to this pathway in its' current form. It is an insult to our highly skilled and professional educators and along with other legislature added pathways like the ABCTE pathway, greatly reduced the rigor and quality of our licensure system in Wisconsin.

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

I believe in professional development, but I also know the burdens and amount of tasks we place on teachers are often too high. We ask them to teach a full schedule and then squeeze in parent meetings, PD, staff meetings, lesson preparation and more on top of a full day. Moving forward, we have to question every single policy and practice. If the information we gather isn't actionable to help us improve the lives of our kids or our teachers, then the activity is a waste of time. Every minute spent on meaningless paperwork or meetings, is one less minute our teachers have to do what they love-- teach our kids.

DPI is fundamentally a compliance organization and this is an important job that we have to do well. However, I think we have fallen into a trap of enforcing things we don't still believe in, or adding more without eliminating what no longer makes sense. Let's face it, there are a number of policies on the books that we collectively don't believe in. They are not right for kids, and instead of doing something, we have just accepted these items as status quo. As they say, the status quo needs to go.

Research has shown that after a teachers' first three years of teaching, most professional learning is ineffective. But research has also shown that there are two types of professional learning that get results. The first is personalized coaching. And the second is teachers studying curriculum materials. This second approach is one that I have championed in Wisconsin. We are working to ensure that every single teacher has access to high quality instructional materials that are aligned to our standards. When teachers get their hands on the best materials they are reporting new found joy for their craft. And when the professional learning they receive is directly tied to using these materials to bring learning alive for their students, the results are profound. This is the work we've been working directly with MMSD on, and we hope to continue to support their efforts until every single MMSD teacher is being treated like the professional they are, getting access to the highest quality materials, and the professional learning that is meaningful and effectively tied to the materials they are using. Our teachers deserve it. And our kids deserve it!

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

Absolutely. MTI was my union when I was a teacher, and I signed the recall petition and protested outside the Capitol during Act 10. I know that DPI cannot be successful if we do not have teachers at every level of the decision making table.

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

Yes. Before I was appointed as Assistant State Superintendent by Tony Evers, MMSD was my professional home for my entire career.

I held my first permanent teaching position at Glendale Elementary School. I'll never forget when our principal sent us into a training, and then immediately asked us to begin training others – even though we weren't fully confident in what we were doing. These trainings grew into a yearly conference with attendees from all across Wisconsin and inspired me as Assistant State Superintendent to create a Teacher Leader Network that would advise DPI. My team also created the Teacher of the Year Network, to ensure that they play an ongoing role in advising and informing the work of DPI. I'm a big believer in the idea that teachers need to be included at every level of decision-making in order for our education policies to be meaningful and effective. I was a proud member of MTI and felt like a valued member of the community where my voice was heard.

As a first-time principal at Schenk Elementary, I led a team that successfully closed achievement gaps for our 3rd graders in reading and learned the value of setting a clear goal for your team. I bring that same dedication and collaboration to DPI each and every day, and as State Superintendent will articulate a vision for the department, our partners, and legislators to advocate for what our kids and teachers need to be successful. At Schenk, we never would've been successful without heavily involving our teachers in every step of the program – from development to implementation. I never used the union as an excuse to not do what was best for kids, because I built a climate where teachers felt valued, trusted, and they yearned for the success we were getting. They saw themselves as the engine for our school reform, and they were right.

At MMSD's central office, I supported 32 elementary school principals. I worked closely with principals and MTI to provide coaching, support, and feedback to the elementary school teachers who were on improvement plans across the district. It was here where I learned that we need to focus our evaluations on teacher inputs so they can continuously improve their craft, rather than on outputs which only penalize and frustrate them. I worked closely with MTI staff, and still consider Ken Volante a friend. Even though I was officially the administrator supporting the principal, and Ken (usually) was the MTI staff supporting the teacher, I always approached this effort as one to help the teacher improve. Teachers knew the stakes were high, but they also knew I was there to help. At one point Ken told me that MTI wished there was "one of me" at the middle and high school level. That was one of the greatest compliments I could have received from the union.

My work with MTI at MMSD has shaped, inspired, and influenced my entire 30-year career in education. While leading projects at DPI, I've always made sure that the teachers union was not just included in the process but also played an integral role in shaping the policies we developed.

We can accomplish nothing without teachers and their input, and I take my partnership with our unions very seriously.

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

Yes. I would be grateful for any financial or organizing support that MTI is able to provide in this race.

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

I have had successful leadership experience at every level, but the experience I've had at the department over the last decade – sitting at the cabinet table and supporting the State Superintendent to run the agency – is an experience unlike any I've had. The past 9 years have given me incredible insight into how the department works, where it works well, and where it needs reform.

I would describe myself as highly collaborative. I think everything is better when it is built by a diverse group of people. But after listening, learning, researching, studying, and seeing what works here and in other places, I believe it is the job of the department to create an agenda for the state that is clear and coherent. We need a State Superintendent who is bold and visionary. We need someone who has the courage to stand up for our kids, our educators, and our families. I will be ready on day one, and I will not rest until we change the trajectory of student outcomes in Wisconsin.

I have spent my career building partnerships all across Wisconsin and the country. I have built relationships with national entities such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and have brought millions of dollars in grant funding to Wisconsin, including through JP Morgan Chase, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Schusterman Foundation. Because of the quality and visibility of my work at the national level, we also have non-profits that are writing their own grants to work with Wisconsin.

While I'm proud of my work, I know that my experience alone won't be enough. We are better when we have a diverse group of voices at the table. My leadership team at the Department knows that not only can they disagree with me, but it is expected that they do. I believe that conflict is important and makes us better. I believe we are better when we are pushing and pulling on ideas. That is how I lead, and that is how we will make progress across the board.

As I said above, the Department must be proactive in addressing policy changes that are aligned with a coherent and bold agenda. I am ready to take on that challenge, and I take the non-partisan part of this job very seriously. Education shouldn't have democratic or republican values--it should represent Wisconsin values. Serving kids as an all-hands-on-deck task, and we are better when we work together.

We absolutely must ensure that every single public school in our state is supported and equipped so that they can meet the needs of every single student in our care. No kid should be forgotten and their success should not be determined by zip code, race, income, ability status, or first language.