



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 am running because I am a champion for our public schools, their kids, teachers, staff and families. I also want a public school system that is equitable for all kids. I want a system that is well-funded; puts kids first. We must prioritize early childhood and learning interventions for kids when they are younger rather than investing in corrections and detention when they are older. I want a public education system that, no matter where you live, who you are born to, or what your parents do or even if you don't have parents - you are going to get the best, highest quality of education regardless of your abilities, your income status, and your race and gender or language origins. I taught in a high poverty school that had a high-EL population, where too many kids struggled who didn't know English as their first language. In high poverty schools, like many schools throughout rural and urban Wisconsin, we struggled recruiting and retaining teachers. I worked at UW where I helped 1st generation college students navigate a system that they had no idea how to manage. Because of my experience working with 1st generation college students, teaching in high poverty schools, teaching in both rural and suburban and leading at the DPI and in a school district currently, I have a unique perspective and vision for what public schools can be in our State. I will work with all of you to champion with the legislature a system that works for ALL kids. We need a funding system that works for ALL kids, all communities, and all teachers. We need improved infrastructure. We need to pay

teachers more. And I can't make those changes at the local level. I will fight for them as your state superintendent of public instruction. Finally, I am inspired to run by all the people around me, who fight tirelessly for kids every day - teachers, administrators, our current DPI leadership, and Gov. Tony Evers. I got the bug years ago to be this advocate for kids, but in 2017, I was honored to introduce Gov. Evers the morning he announced he was running for Governor. All of my experiences have coalesced around a vision that we need to do what is best for all kids, for our future.

2. **Do you believe that public schools are sufficiently funded? If no, describe your plan to provide sufficient funds.** I don't think that public schools are sufficiently funded or *equitably funded*. Too many high-poverty schools in both rural and urban zipcodes are insufficiently funded. I would advocate that the legislature adopt its own recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Commission Report in 2019. High-poverty schools should be getting more resources. We need to target our resources to the schools and students that need it the most. We need to target our human resources, which are expensive, to the highest need schools and increase our aid to bilingual students and special education. There are other states that do this well, and we can always look to how others provide sufficient funding to its highest poverty and highest need school instead of reinventing the wheel. Either way, it will have to take a financial commitment from the state budget and the state legislature to sufficiently fund our public schools. As a public school leader and advocate I have been regularly asked to testify at joint finance hearings and the Blue Ribbon Commission on school funding. I am also actively involved in the Wisconsin Public Education Network and their advocacy efforts.
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?**

There are a number of factors at play in decreasing recruitment and retention of teachers and other licensed staff positions.

- a. Low Pay - according to EPI/Edweek, in 2017, teachers were paid nearly 20% per week less than counterparts in other professions. This wage gap has grown over time. The cost of living has increased and demand for well educated professionals in all economic sectors has increased. It makes sense that we need to pay our teachers more (as well as our other professionals, including support staff and administrators), otherwise, Wisconsin will lag in recruitment and our school children will suffer the consequences. In Wisconsin, teacher compensation has fallen steadily in the past tens years to be less than the national average, and starting salaries are among the lowest in the nation.
- b. Demonization of Teachers - and pitting community members against teachers (re: divide and conquer politics, funding and privatization battles, COVID-19 and virtual learning vs. in-person learning debate), as well as the union busting that happened in 2011.
- c. Disrespect of the teaching profession by too many legislators and some corners of the business community and by some school board members from Act-10 onward.
- d. Educator Licensing hoops and unnecessary testing, devaluing of education degrees, particularly masters' degrees by transitioning to the life license, but also through the PDP under PI-34. Additionally, factor in the increased cost of a college degree and student loan debt burden - it doesn't make economical sense for some to go into teaching..
- e. Standardized testing time commitment for teachers to proctor and teach to the test.
- f. Educator Effectiveness - a good idea based on research, but so badly implemented. EE is also used by some school districts to hold teacher pay/compensation hostage and other inappropriate practices.

- g. Uncertainty about a “career ladder” or career path in education in the same district, particularly with the dissolution of pay scales.
- h. Threats to the teacher retirement system by our state legislature.

What’s funny is that it’s never about the kids being the reason people leave teaching. It’s all the external factors that we should be able to control that can make working conditions better, make the job more respected, and provide a family-sustaining income for teachers. We can solve our teacher morale problems and shortage problems by getting educators the resources and support they need to be successful. My plan is to put more thought into educator licensing and rid the profession of the hoops that they must jump through (like EdTPA, for example, and the FORT). I will instead work with the schools and colleges of education, our teacher and support staff unions, and focus groups like the Wisconsin Teachers of the Year to instead develop a professional system of licensing that has a career ladder and family-sustaining compensation. I would like to work with the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Association of District Administrators and the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) as well to develop a system of support for our educators. We will educate and spotlight for the general public the good work of educators and bring awareness of how it’s in everyone’s best interest to have strong public schools and that they are worthy of investment. Invest in our schools so we can provide our teachers with living wages and benefits, and deliver to them the respect they deserve.

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

The answers are pretty similar to both questions 4 and 5. The issues facing both urban and rural are overall state share of funding (equalized aid) vs. local funding, higher poverty, higher ELL populations, teacher recruitment and retention/shortages, low reimbursement for special education, declining enrollment, teacher shortages and recruitment/retention issues and aging buildings.

- a. Funding: work to get a new school funding system that funds schools equitably and puts more money and resources in higher poverty schools, and is also population based, such as ELL funding.
- b. High Poverty: more financial resources in higher poverty schools, and also ways to close the “opportunity gaps” - including how can we get more curriculum, gifted and talented specialists, and reading and math specialists into the higher poverty schools?
- c. ELL Students: again, more financial resources through higher reimbursement rates, but also professional development for all teachers so that they can all be secure in teaching ELL students.
- d. Special Education Reimbursement: I am in favor of 60%, but in reality, I would like it to be closer to 90% reimbursement for special education costs. A higher reimbursement rate impacts Fund 10, which impacts all kids.
- e. Teacher Shortages/Recruitment and Retention: I’ve discussed ideas at length and on my webpage, but some of those include also increasing the number of teachers of color in our classroom, and ensuring that our teachers come from a diverse background instead of the mold of white-middle-class female that we tend to recruit in colleges. I would also like to remove Educator Effectiveness as a punitive measure for both teachers and administrators, and instead go back to a local system of evaluation. There is good research in EE, which should continue to be explored to help everyone continuously improve, but it does not belong in state statute. We also need family sustaining income/salaries for our teachers.
- f. Declining Enrollment: urban schools and rural schools need a school finance system that works, and right now the non-recurring exemptions in declining enrolment from the three-year average are hurting us all.
- g. Aging buildings and facilities: I would be in favor of grants from the state to upgrade facilities, improve energy efficiency and building security so that school districts don’t have to carry the financial burden to improve their learning environments to 21st century standards. I would be in favor of getting all aging HVAC systems replaced too, to include A/C.

5. What strategies will you enact to support and value Wisconsin’s rural school

districts? The issues facing both urban and rural are overall state share (equalized aid) vs. local funding, higher poverty, broadband internet and technology issues, higher EL populations, teacher recruitment and retention/shortages, low reimbursement for special education, declining enrollment, and aging buildings.

- a. Funding: work to get a new school funding system that funds schools equitably and puts more money and resources in higher poverty schools, and is also population based, such as ELL funding.
- b. High Poverty: more financial resources in higher poverty schools, and also ways to close the “opportunity gaps” - including how can we get more curriculum, gifted and talented specialists, and reading and math specialists into the higher poverty schools?
- c. Broadband internet and technology issues: many places of rural Wisconsin simply do not have adequate (or any) broadband or high speed wireless access, and if we are to talk about equity, or the economic values of working from home for the general population, this technology is essential for students and their parents alike to be successful in school and work.
- d. EL Students: again, more financial resources through higher reimbursement rates, but also professional development for all teachers so that they can all be secure in teaching ELL students.
- e. Special Education Reimbursement: I am in favor of 60%, but in reality, I would like it to be closer to 90% reimbursement for special education costs. A higher reimbursement rate for legally mandated services frees up funding for other vital educational needs and impacts Fund 10, which impacts all kids.
- f. Teacher Shortages/Recruitment and Retention: I’ve discussed ideas at length and on my webpage, but some of those include also increasing the number of teachers of color in our classroom, and ensuring that our teachers come from a diverse background instead of the mold of white-middle-class female that we tend to recruit in colleges. I would also like to remove Educator Effectiveness as a punitive measure for both teachers and administrators, and instead go back to a local system of evaluation. There is good research in EE, which should continue to be explored to help everyone continuously improve, but it does not belong in state statute. We also need family-sustaining incomes/salaries for our teachers.
- g. Declining Enrollment: urban schools and rural schools need a school finance system that works, and right now the non-recurring exemptions in declining enrolment from the three-year average are hurting us all.
- h. Aging buildings and facilities: I would be in favor of grants from the state to upgrade facilities, improve energy efficiency and building security so that school districts don’t have to carry the financial burden to improve their learning environments to 21st century standards. I would be in favor of getting all aging HVAC systems replaced too, to include A/C.

6. How do you feel about the current Educator Effectiveness (Teacher) evaluation

system? What changes would you like to see to that system? I don’t like the current EE system. I think the intentions behind it, as well as the research (Danielson) are good, but the fact that it became what it is today - a system that is cumbersome and penalizes teachers instead of focusing on continuous improvement, is unfortunate. I don’t think this is something that should be managed by the state or in state statute. I think that evaluation should be local, it should be placed based, it should be managed by school teachers, their administrators, and have input from unions and school boards, and again, managed locally. I regret that it was not vetted by all stakeholders before it was advanced to the Legislature and put into statute, and that many school districts saw this as an opportunity to ‘grade’ and rank teachers, or provide their bonus based on how ‘effective’ they are. I would try to get it repealed from statute, and instead, work with unions, the Wisconsin Teachers of the Year Council, school principals and administrators, and the school boards association to design a fair system that is grounded in research, but focuses on continuous improvement and instead have DPI provide technical assistance. I think evaluation

should be local and not coordinated by the State or tied to educator licensing in any way.

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

The students and educators of MMSD, and our other large urban districts, deserve more from the state and the DPI. I would like to restructure DPI so that we have point people that can work on the equity pieces of my agenda, as well as have an Equity Officer on the State Superintendent's Cabinet, and Office for Urban Education, as well as an Office of Rural Education. I know that MMSD doesn't usually work with a CESA to receive technical assistance, so I think that the Office of Urban Education could coordinate that with the other urban districts, too. I would like there to be more research and development done at DPI or at least contracted with the UW System on what works in our school districts. I would like there to be more collaboration with our larger districts directly with DPI. One of my plans is to coordinate a Literacy Network with the CESAs to provide literacy frameworks and plans for our school districts to improve literacy and close learning gaps, and I think in those situations, the larger urbans should have a seat at the table. Above all, my agenda is rooted in equity. We need high-quality preschool, full day/every day, for every child - and I would want MMSD to implement that as well. I would work with our schools and colleges of education to recruit more teachers of color so that we can get more professionals in the classroom who look like our students. I would want to revise our school finance system to get more funding for mental health professionals, counselors and social workers, but also get more funding to our urbans (and rurals) that have older buildings and aging infrastructure to get grants to replace our HVAC systems so that every school district, no matter how large or small has 21st century learning and working environments that include modern HVAC, A/C, heating and even solar power. I'd like to upgrade urban district facilities so that there is better building security as well as energy efficiency and meet modern building standards.

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?**

100 percent, yes! Public Education is and should be non-partisan. Eighteen States elect their superintendent. When it is not elected, as it is in about 2/3rds of our states, it becomes political - and partisan issues like private school vouchers, or independent charters, Title IX changes, they get enacted into law, and the vast majority of Wisconsinites no longer have a say in that policy that impacts them and the basic cornerstone of our democracy: public education. In Wisconsin with all of the gerrymandering that has happened, it is important that the position be independent of both the legislature and the executive. I am pleased that the position is elected in the spring with other non-partisan races such as school boards and county boards. There is nothing more independent, nor refreshing when you think about it, than local control. By electing our State Superintendent in the non-partisan spring election, we are ensuring the essence of local control continues. If it weren't elected, it would be a gubernatorial appointment, and that would be disastrous: considering that for the past 2 years, the state legislature hasn't confirmed all the current appointments. Plus we'd have to change the State Constitution to do this.

9. **Describe your position on the voucher program.** I am strongly against private school vouchers and I would not support their expansion. I would encourage the legislature to phase this program out with no new additional schools or increases in students. In lieu of elimination of the program I would be very supportive of more accountability for the voucher programs.

10. **Describe your position on independent charter schools.** I am not in favor of expanding the independent charter schools because they literally have no local accountability and they receive both state and federal dollars. I would support facilitating their move to a status within local school districts under authority of elected school boards with freedom to innovate and support their current students. When I served at DPI, one of my responsibilities was to be a fiscal monitor for the 2R/independent charter

schools for the 2009-11 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. DPI had to consistently educate some of the independent charter schools on appropriate use of funds for the stimulus dollars because they would misuse them otherwise. Further, independent charter schools never have to go to referendum. Instead, the 422 public school districts send a portion of their aid to the 2R's, and we instead have to go to referendum. It's inherently unfair. I am fine with local school district charters because those are governed by a locally elected school board. It is inappropriate in my opinion that there is so little oversight of 2Rs and even more inappropriate that Wisconsin public schools and their taxbase support them.

- 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?** I don't support these proposals at all. It should not be "easier" to become a teacher. I think there are a lot of issues with how teachers are now licensed, particularly with PI-34 and post-Act 11, but I would not allow anyone with a BA degree and work experience to necessarily get a regular teaching license without having gone through an educator preparation program first. There is so much more to the art and science of teaching, including content knowledge, pedagogical training, classroom management, and, of course, other coursework and knowledge in child-development, mental health and wellness, special needs and teaching reading and differentiated learning. I understand that there are teacher shortages and recruitment and retention issues, but there are other ways to solve our shortage and retention problems than making it easier to become a teacher. I am in favor of working with our institutions of higher education and educator licensing programs to ensure quality and healthy supply, and I am in favor of doing more to recruit individuals to the teaching profession - including increasing salaries and student loan forgiveness.
- 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?** To be honest, if I could redo our entire structure of schooling I would. We still structure our school day like it's 1920 rather than 2020. Other countries, where teachers are highly respected, structure their school day and use their school staff differently - almost like a medical model with rounds, assistants, nurses, and doctors, as well as interns and specialists. When you think about it that way, it makes a lot of sense to structure our school day in similar ways with diagnostics, treatments, practice, and assessment. But it costs money to do this. When you have a school system that has limited resources, unfortunately staff and human resources are stretched in multiple directions. I would support a new funding model that allows us to have more professionals working with our kids, that then allows teachers more flexibility in their day to structure time for professional development, data meetings and diagnostic conversations, and time to reflect on continuous improvement.
- 13. Do you support restoring the rights of public sector workers to collectively bargain over wages, hours and conditions of employment?** Yes.
- 14. Are you interested in receiving MTI Voters endorsement? If so, why?** Yes. I think it would differentiate me from the other candidates who are not as pro-teacher and pro-public school as I am. It would send a strong and important signal to voters.
- 15. Are you interested in receiving financial support for your campaign from MTI-Voters?** Yes.

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 am pro-union, pro-teacher, but most of all pro-kid and pro-public school. I'd like the membership to know that I am a mid-career professional. I have lots of energy and I have many researched-backed ideas that I would like to implement in Wisconsin. Even though I am presently the superintendent of the rural Pecatonica School District, I have a lot of urban and larger school experience. I am always testifying at JFC hearings, and I was invited to testify at the Blue Ribbon Commission in 2018, and I attended other Commission hearings too. I am active in the Wisconsin Public Education Network. I also worked at DPI for 5 years where I worked with federal programs/Title I, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and Green Bay Area School District. I also worked at UW Madison for 4 years advising diverse students who were often first generation college students from larger cities. I was a teacher union member; elected vice-president of my local. I come from a union-family that was very community service minded, with hard-work and action out of respect as our main values. I am the only candidate who has worked in EVERY aspect of public education in Wisconsin: teacher, principal, superintendent (school, building, district administration), DPI and UW Madison. I worked with rural and urban kids in student services who struggled finding their place in a large comprehensive school, and I also worked at DPI. As aforementioned, I worked with the Milwaukee Public Schools on DPI projects such as Federal ARRA funding from 2009-2013, and also with Madison schools with Title I fiscal monitoring and in Title I-D and Homelessness. I worked in administration as a substitute/medical leave assistant principal in Middleton, and I also worked in rural schools. I am very active in my state organizations, as I am on the WASDA executive board, and I regularly present at conferences like the Joint Education Convention in Milwaukee, the Wisconsin School Business Officials, and the Rural Schools Association. I am a mom, first. I have two children in middle school, one with special needs - and they are my bellwether - because if it's not good enough for my kids, it's not good enough for any kid. I want outstanding public schools - not just for the present, but for the future. I strongly believe that public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. What makes this country and this state great is that we have great public schools where every child is given the opportunity to find their passion and grow into healthy, well-adjusted, creative, well-informed citizens. If the public schools fail, so does our democracy.

JILL UNDERLY

1/5/2021