



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 entered this race for the purpose of giving back. I am a fifth generation Wisconsinite and the product of an outstanding education offered by the great folks at the School District of Colfax. My wife, mother, and father-in-law all enjoyed successful careers as teachers in Wisconsin. Every opportunity afforded to me in my lifetime is somehow connected to public education. This includes my career as a teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent in the school districts of Melrose-Mindoro, Princeton, Gale-Etrick-Trempealeau, and West Salem. Ensuring these opportunities are provided for generations to come regardless of factors like race, gender, ethnicity, family income, and zip code serve as my daily motivation. Finally, all elections are about timing. The voters choose the person most needed at the time. I believe my experience, passion, vision, servant leadership, and unbridled love for this entire state make this the time for someone like me.

In addition to continued success in facilitating the various statutory requirements connected to public education, I envision the DPI exerting a much larger role in the social constructs of race, culture, and economic viability of our state. For example, a discussion of how best to serve

children who live in poverty should be accompanied by a question, “What are we as a state doing to reduce the number of children who live in poverty?” The DPI and our public schools will have an instrumental role in defining the future economic and social construct of Wisconsin. Now is the time for leadership.

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

No, I do not believe that public schools in Wisconsin are sufficiently funded. Our state has spent the last 40 years in a gradual trend away from a collective responsibility for the common good including a focus on tax reduction. A trend that includes a 20% reduction in the amount state income tax and local property tax paid by the average citizen when compared to their average annual income. We have gradually become less about “WE” and more about “I.”

I will work with the legislature, governor and use the “bully pulpit” of the office to rally our state to the service of our children. The solution to this and many other issues is a recommitment to our collective common good. We must promote our successes to reassert our value, create a vision for the future and enlist statewide support. This is how we restore appropriate funding.

I will end with a quote from Isabella Wilkerson and book *Caste*, “people are willing to pay higher property taxes for their own children but balk at taxes to educate the children society devalues.” It is past time to stand up for those in need of our help. Remember, we help all of us by helping each one of us.

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 issue of recruiting, selecting, training and retaining qualified staff is impacting every corner of our state. I believe several factors are at play. First, the social and political impact Act 10 devaluated professional educators in such a way as to discourage the next generation from seeking to become teachers. Second, the rapid escalation in the price of university tuition has been especially impactful on the teaching profession because teachers are often first-generation college graduates from families unable to offer financial assistance further skewing the cost-benefit analysis of becoming a teacher. An often-overlooked factor is the simple notion that teaching is difficult and demanding work. Success requires a true passion for service and a willing to sacrifice for others. Finally, the teaching profession and the public-school workforce in general are similar to other fields with respect to demographics. There are simply not enough young people entering the workforce to replace those who are retiring.

The third pillar of my campaign agenda is entitled “Teachers Ready to Teach.” The focus of this particular pillar is promoting teaching as a professional career. We must continue to support and advance programs that will attract the next generation of teachers into this wonderful profession and offer the necessary support and training to ensure professional growth and personal satisfaction. As state superintendent I will advocate for programs focused on a “grow your own” initiative urging school districts to begin developing the next generation of teachers. This includes

both encouraging high school students to explore the teaching career and facilitating the licensing and training process for adults in search of a new or different career.

I will propose a model that involves our institutions of higher education working directly with our CESAs and local school districts to expand licensing opportunities. Rather than rely on the traditional model of high school students moving away to attend college and then returning to communities across Wisconsin to serve as teachers, I propose a coordinated approach to advance “on the job” training for both new teachers and those seeking additional certifications. The critical component of this approach is the coordinated efforts of our CESA leaders and our institutions of higher education. While traveling our state I heard far too many accounts of inflexible college schedules and turf battles over accreditation. I know we can do better.

In the long term, teaching must continue to maintain its status as a true profession. We must fully recognize that a highly skilled professional educator is the best predictor of student success. As stewards of the teaching profession, we are responsible for the next generation of educators. My mother often reminds me that when she began her teaching career in the early 1960s the occupation of teacher was similar to that of a Peace Corps commitment. By the time she retired it had become a profession. We cannot afford to go back.

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

I will begin by recounting my discussion with Dr. Keith Posely, Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools. Dr. Posely, members of his cabinet and I discussed the need for MPS and other urban school districts to share information about their work with others. I envision a statewide effort where communities I recently visited such as Viroqua, Clintonville, Ashland, and Walworth understand and care about student success in our large urban districts and vice versa. We simply must begin to view the success of each child in our state as a collective responsibility. The large urban districts are in position to be our state’s greatest resource. They serve the largest share of our children. They are poised to offer statewide leadership and support. In turn, our large urban districts need support and assistance from all other school districts. The only path to statewide gains in student achievement requires a collaborative effort.

From an execution standpoint, I believe the urban schools can join forces with our rural schools by identifying policy agenda items that positively impact all school districts. For example, the Milwaukee Public Schools 2017 – 2018 Legislative Agenda recommends, among other things, more comparable revenue limit amounts, full funding for all-day 4k, universal access for 3k, increased funding for both special education and English language learners, targeted support for areas with high poverty, and transparency for the voucher program. These proposals are part of my campaign platform and will positively impact all school districts across our state.

While visiting school districts across the state, I discussed the need to create a collaborative statewide approach. I suggested the use of “like district” cohorts similar to the “big five” and promote greater use of CESA leadership as ways to increase statewide sharing of professional practice. If elected, I will offer leadership by emphasizing my belief that realizing substantive gains in statewide achievement will require all of us to work together.

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

During my recent visits to Gilman, Cameron, Pepin, Melrose-Mindoro, Thorp, Mineral Point, and to my hometown of Colfax, I heard firsthand the struggles facing many of our smaller rural school districts. First, as your state superintendent I will offer a much more positive viewpoint. The school districts of rural Wisconsin are the focal point of each community and offer a palpable sense of pride, ownership, and commitment. When given the chance, the folks in our small rural schools will make good things happen for kids. I believe the rapid expansion of “work from home” created by COVID-19 will be a rebirth for rural Wisconsin. As state superintendent I will keep focus and pressure on federal, state, and local officials to expand high-speed internet connections in all of our communities. I will promote the remarkable model of inter-district and private industry collaboration now in place in the rural communities of Arcadia, Blair-Taylor, Independence, and Whitehall. These four school districts worked directly with a local industry, Ashley Furniture, to create a collaborative “four school - high school” whereby Ashley funds a variety of technical programming in each high school and the school districts allow their students to select coursework from each of the other three high schools. This creates expansive “cutting edge” technical programming for all students through district collaboration and sharing. I will also promote the “Students Ready to Learn” part of my platform where I outline my support for additional funding for 4k, offering programming for all three-year old students, and supporting changes to allow school districts to lead, facilitate, and partner with other organizations and agencies to provide additional high quality, affordable daycare. I will support and promote an expanded role for public schools in providing a more supportive social structure for families and children. The remarkable public-school districts in the rural communities across our state are in the unique position to both lead and support a renaissance in rural Wisconsin. They are in fact, the key to the economic future of our state.

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

I will begin by offering that I completed hundreds of classroom evaluations during my sixteen years as a high school principal. Looking back, I very much wish there existed a more uniform or standardized approach during this time. The current principals and/or curriculum leaders now have common language and experiences to share regarding the best way to give feedback to teachers. It creates a PLC around providing effective feedback to teachers. As a result, I can honestly say the current principals I supervised as superintendent are far better at providing feedback to teachers than I was in my time as principal. I support the concept of a statewide approach to professional feedback for teachers.

Like any new endeavor, the Educator Effectiveness system required and still requires adjustments. The original approach to data collection and communication were far too time consuming for both the teacher and the supervisor. In my time as the superintendent for the School District of West Salem, we created a teacher/principal task force to evaluate the system. We met quarterly the first year and annually after that. The group was given permission to adjust and adapt the system to maximize the benefits and minimize the detractions. The group developed a plan requiring less artifact collection/submission and more direct conversation and

reflection by both the teacher and the principal. Our best teachers and our best principals came to really enjoy and value the process.

Regarding statewide changes, I will suggest we enlist our CESA leaders, teachers, and principals to continue to evolve the system into a manageable and effective platform that all parties value and trust. The most critical role for the DPI is to work with CESA to ensure our districts are using the system as intended because this affords all of us to use the PLC model to continue to improve the quality of the feedback our teachers receive. We must always remember that the number one indicator of student success is the skillset of the teacher, and the best way for the teacher to grow and improve is to engage in substantive and meaningful discussions about the craft of teaching - it is really that simple.

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

Having spent my entire career working in districts that are considerably smaller than Madison Metropolitan, I will “seek first to understand” by arranging meetings with teacher leaders, administrative staff, and school board members to listen and learn. I will bring to the meetings my dogged determination to serve all students. As stated during a number of candidate forums, I grew up in a small community in rural Wisconsin and worked for the past 25 years in a suburban school district in La Crosse County. My family and I have benefitted from the wonderful school districts we attended and worked. We were afforded every possible opportunity. I entered this election to ensure that children in every corner of our state, including our metropolitan areas, receive those same opportunities regardless of race, income, gender, or zip code.

Please know that I believe we are here to serve each child in every school district across our state. The key to our success is our willingness to work together in a statewide collaborative effort in service to our kids.

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, I believe the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction should remain an elected position as prescribed in our state constitution. The alternate model of creating cabinet level position to be nominated by the Governor detracts from the necessary non-partisan, independent nature of the position. One only has to look at the recent failure of the Wisconsin Senate to confirm Governor Evers’ cabinet nominees as evidence. We simply cannot afford to allow the DPI to be roiled in this type of controversy every four years. Our public schools and our communities deserve a larger voice in the selection of this position.

9. Describe your position on the voucher program.

I stand firmly opposed to the concept of publicly funded vouchers for private school tuition. Critical to this question is a reminder that public education is not a private commodity that we purchase for our child, it is a collective good we as a society provide for our children. The delivery of a voucher to a parent who in turn “spends” the voucher at a private school implies the

opposite. This erodes support and ownership of our sacred commitment to provide outstanding public education for all children. As your State Superintendent of Public Instruction will focus my efforts on strengthening public education for the common good.

I will cite my former employer, the School District of West Salem (SDWS), as an example why vouchers are a poor use of public dollars. The SDWS has a budget of approximately \$22 million. This year the district will transfer approximately \$450,000 to fund private school vouchers. The vouchers will be spent at various private schools in the La Crosse area. Not one of these private schools offers anywhere close to the quality of programming offered by SDWS. This is therefore an example of extraordinarily poor public policy - collect taxes and then use the funds to purchase lower quality academic services. Please know this is not a judgement against families who choose private education. I respect the very personal decision many families make to enroll their children in a private school. However, the choice is rarely about academic achievement, and should never come at taxpayer cost.

I will conclude with a word of caution regarding the continued use of public dollars to fund parent-controlled private school vouchers. I will offer the transfer of taxpayer dollars from the collective good known as public education to an individual commodity known as private school detracts from our collective spirit. When the increasing number of private school vouchers further erodes school budgets, our collective society begins to devalue our common good. It becomes easy to dismiss "those" public schools as failing and unnecessary.

10. Describe your position on independent charter schools.

I believe that charter schools should be limited to those connected to public school districts. Independent charter schools are simply another way of weakening our public schools by viewing the education of our children as a commodity rather than a common good. I am opposed to any public funding of independent charter schools.

I believe the concept of a charter school offers the promise of innovation and meeting the varied needs of our children. Our public-school systems are more than capable of the hosting their own charters with many success stories from across our state.

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?

No, as noted in question number three, we cannot return to a time when teaching is viewed as a non-professional activity like serving in the Peace Corps. We must stand guard over the professionalism of our profession. This issue is not about adults, this is about our kids. We know student achievement is best when our children are taught by a highly skilled professional educator. The kids deserve nothing less. Also, as noted in question number 3, I believe we can work together with our CESA, our institutions of higher education, and our teacher organizations to create alternative and more flexible pathways to a teaching license. For example, a person with experience in a trade now wishes to become a technology education teacher, can participate in a training model whereby they are able to obtain a degree with on-line courses, CESA training, and

district-level apprenticeships. Not awarded a license because of their trade. Not required to move to Menomonie, WI and attend UW-Stout to get an on-campus bachelor's degree in education. But able to participate in a rigorous bachelor's degree program, managed by a regional CESA, connected to a university, and completed at a local school district. I think we can do this without de-professionalizing our work.

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?

As state superintendent I will ask for a review of the annual state-mandated meetings to determine if they remain current and relevant. The remaining professional development session you are required to attend are determined by your local school district and employer.

I believe required professional development meetings are most effective when aligned with strategic goals and district initiatives. As state superintendent I will work with our CESA leadership to offer guidance to our local school districts regarding professional development. This topic reminds me of a phrase I often referenced and credited to Lance Armstrong the bicyclist. When asked about attempting to win other races besides the Tour de France, Lance replied there were only so many hours in a day and so many days in a lifetime, I focus the use of those days on what is important. It all works better when work on the right work.

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

As a young teacher back in the late 1980's, I represented our local association at the bargaining table. My wife, a recently retired teacher, paid association dues long after her local association dissolved in the wake of Act 10. Both my mother and father-in-law were active members of their local associations. I have deep connections to the teacher association.

I support the restoration of expanded collective bargaining rights for public sector workers. I believe the lessons of Act 10 and of the reorganization of the employer-employee relationship occurring during the past decade offers a blueprint for restoring and redefining the role of collective bargaining for public employees. Let's use what we have learned to create a new and better path forward.

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

Yes, having an endorsement from a prominent professional organization such as MTI is welcome. I would welcome this endorsement because teacher and the teaching profession are the backbone of public education. They do the “actual work” of educating our children! I would be honored if MTI considered offering an endorsement.

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

Yes. Despite wishes to the contrary, a successful political campaign requires funding. So, yes I would accept a donation from MTI.

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?

We are at an inflexion point in our state. The pandemic has laid bare our racial, social, and economic inequities. I believe public education stands poised to lead in the process of confronting these issues. I believe the solutions are rooted in a collective statewide approach. There is way too much “I” and not enough “We” in our society. Student achievement in Madison has to matter to my friends back in Colfax and vice-versa. There is no “I” in team. We are better than that.

If elected, I will begin my work **READY to LEAD** as promised in my platform. We will leverage CESA relationships to engage school district and community leaders in the process of establishing a collective vision for public education in our state. We do everything possible to ensure **CHILDREN** are **READY to LEARN**, **TEACHERS** are **READY to TEACH** and our **GRADUATES** are **FUTURE READY**. Internally, we will establish department goals that are focused on children, grounded in servant leadership, and aligned with our statewide vision.

I believe I am the person best suited to bring our entire state together for the collective good we know as public education. Success for all has to matter! We can do this!

Name of Candidate Troy Gunderson

Date January 8, 2021