



Association of California School Administrators Candidate Questionnaire

1. If elected SPI, what do you expect to accomplish in your first year in office, within the first term, and if you are elected again, your second term?

I believe California has neglected its public schools for decades and we have a lot of work to do over the next decade in order to make our public schools among the best in the nation-- where they should be. The State Superintendent alone can't make all the changes necessary to dramatically improve public schools, but the State Superintendent can be a key leader of the changes that are needed in our state to give all children the education they deserve.

As State Superintendent, I plan to work closely with elected leaders, ACSA, County Superintendents, CTA, CSBA, civil rights groups and others to develop a ten-year plan that lays out the path forward for making California's public schools the best in the nation. This plan will lay out the key strategies needed to dramatically improve our public schools and will include timelines. We will need to address many issues simultaneously over the next decade and we have to apply long-term thinking and continual learning and revision to our planning. Please see Question #3 for a full outline of my current ideas for the foundation for this ten-year plan, as it will demonstrate the areas I believe warrant the greatest, long-term focus in order to put our schools on track to be the very best.

I am a little hesitant to lay out specific accomplishments for my first year in office, first term and over my eight years as State Superintendent without collaborating with partners like ACSA on developing those goals and creating our ten-year plan. That being said, I have outlined out my current thinking, below, around goals during my time in office. This is not a comprehensive list and I would expect that some of the goals and the timing for many of them to change after learning more in office and collaborating with other elected officials and partners like ACSA. Also, these goals are very ambitious and require strong support from the Governor and legislature to be able to deliver on them. They should give you a good sense of how we are currently thinking about priority areas and what can be accomplished when. As mentioned

above, see Questions #2 and #3 for more details on our strategies behind many of the goals summarized below. I am available to go deeper into each of these areas if you would like.

Potential Accomplishments – Year 1

- 10-year plan for making California’s public schools among the best in the nation completed with buy-in from key elected officials, education leaders, and other critical stakeholders.
- Comprehensive waiver- giving school districts much more flexibility from the California Education Code- approved by State Board.
- Legislation directed at addressing the teacher shortage has been passed and includes funding for key programs that help attract more people to enter into and stay in the teaching profession. Programs could include: free college for teachers who commit to teaching for at least five years, accelerated pathways for career changers to come into teaching, and flexibility for teachers from out-of-state to be hired as credentialed teachers by school districts.
- New leadership positions created and filled in the California Department of Education that allow for practitioners from the field to work in the CDE for 1 to 3 years in order to allow more expertise from the field to directly influence the direction of the CDE.
- Comprehensive program for working with counties and districts for sharing best practices has been designed, and implementation is being tested in a number of different areas.
- Innovation Fund is launched at the state level, which will leverage philanthropic dollars to fund district-wide pilot programs in key areas related to the 10-year plan.

Potential Accomplishments – End of First Term

- The increase in student achievement growth rates on the state assessments in Math and English is faster than historical growth rates on those assessments.
- The increase in college and career ready graduation rates is faster than historical growth rates for college and career ready graduation
- The achievement gap is decreasing at a faster rate than historical rates of decrease in the achievement gap
- The teacher shortage has decreased substantially, due in part to increases in compensation, implementation of incentives to attract and retain teachers, and improved instructional leadership from administrators
- Improvements have been made to the rules around tenure, seniority-based layoffs, and dismissal; tenure is longer and earned, seniority is a factor in layoffs, but not the only factor, and dismissals are adjusted and streamlined
- California is closer to the national average in per pupil spending

- Significant improvements have been made in the university teacher training programs; a large number of new teachers go through a one year residency before teaching their own class
- Access to free Pre-K is available to all children in California
- Some flexibility for districts from the Education Code has been passed into law through legislation; significant flexibility for districts from the Education Code continues through waivers.
- Additional differentiated funding is in place for Special Education, as well as for other underserved subgroups of students that are not currently part of LCFF.
- Barriers between K-12 and Health and Human Services have been eliminated and the number of schools in California that are effectively offering more Health and Human Services on campus has increased significantly
- CDE has substantially improved its services to districts as evidenced by significant improvement in survey results from superintendents about how well the CDE is serving them
- A robust and comprehensive pre-K-through-postsecondary data system is in place so that we are able to track student success from pre-K through postsecondary and we are able to identify and learn from best practices at all levels of the education system quickly and efficiently.
- Programs for sharing best practices are working well and have high usage rates among educators

Potential Accomplishments – End of 2nd Term

- The growth rates in student achievement on the state assessments in Math and English continues to accelerate faster than historical growth rates on those assessments.
- The increase in college and career ready graduation rates continues to be faster than historical growth rates for college and career ready graduation
- The achievement gap continues to decrease at a faster rate than historical rates of decrease in the achievement gap
- California is above the national average on NAEP in all subjects in 4th and 8th grade
- College completion rates are dramatically up, particularly among high-poverty students
- California no longer has a teacher shortage and has a more applicants than teaching jobs available in all subjects
- The vast majority of all new teachers go through a one-year residency program before teaching their own class
- Access to free pre-K is being expanded to include even younger students throughout the state
- Significant flexibility for districts from the California Education Code have been granted permanently and districts throughout the state are continually learning and innovating

- California is in the top 20% in per-pupil funding in the country
- LCFF has been continually improved so districts get some additional funding for all sub-groups of students that have historically been underserved
- The comprehensive pre-K-through-postsecondary data system has been expanded to include job placement, so that we can effectively track and learn from data about job placement and retention post K-12, community college and university
- School districts throughout the state give the CDE very high satisfaction rates on annual surveys

2. What specific steps will you take to increase funding for public education in California?

California can't have the best schools in the nation if it continues to spend among the least in the nation on our kids. We used to be 7th in the nation in per-pupil funding and are now 41st. California needs to make an unequivocal commitment to be among the top 20% in the nation in per-pupil funding, and take the necessary actions to get there. This will be a critical focus for me as State Superintendent as we need to adequately fund our schools to carry out many of the strategies necessary for our schools to be the best. Below are five strategies I plan to pursue to help increase funding for public education in California:

1. **Launch a Marketing Campaign around our Public Schools:** To get the increases in funding for public schools that will be needed in California, we must raise the overall awareness about the situation in California's public schools and build positive energy around making California's public schools the best in the country. One way to do this is to launch a large statewide marketing campaign around the importance of our public schools and the need to fully fund our schools. Most Californians don't know how poor California's per pupil funding is, especially relative to other states. Many Californians have forgotten how important public schools were to their lives and how important public schools are to a thriving State. We need to change this. As State Superintendent, I plan to partner with media and Internet companies to run a multi-year marketing campaign to build awareness of the funding issues facing our public schools and excitement to support our schools. Marketing a public policy issue is not a new idea. The federal government invests heavily in marketing the military and California is currently investing around tens of millions of dollars to market Covered California. We need to do the same for public schools.
2. **Greater Transparency:** Beyond raising awareness about the need of our public schools, we also have to build the public's confidence and trust if we want to get their support to dramatically increase school funding. A key part of building that trust will require more transparency in how schools and school districts spend their money. Everything from

posting accessible financial information online, to reporting how new dollars are translating into results for all kids will help demonstrate that public education funds are being used wisely. As State Superintendent, I will work with policymakers and schools districts to support reporting financial information in a consistent, user-friendly format so educators and the public can see where money is being spent and how spending priorities are helping to deliver student achievement gains.

3. **Less Money for Bureaucracy and More Money to Schools/Classrooms:** In addition to increasing transparency, our state can provide greater flexibility from the California Education Code to school districts, which will often free up some funding, by reducing the need for spending on some layers of bureaucracy. The State Superintendent and CDE should also work with counties and districts to share best practices around staffing, resource allocation, and operational efficiencies. Along with more flexibility from the California Education Code, this should help push overall spending on bureaucracy down and leave money available for schools and classrooms.
4. **Re-Allocate State Budget to Education:** Our state budget must also reflect our true priorities for our children, and we need to reallocate dollars from certain areas in our budget to education, because education should be our top priority. Education makes up a larger portion of our budget, but other areas of the budget have increased at a faster rate.

This is perhaps most apparent when we consider the state's investment in Corrections, which has increased dramatically over the years; not only would some of that money be better spent on education, but a greater investment in our schools would likely release pressure on our state's correction's needs yielding even greater cost reductions in Corrections over time. I plan to work closely with the legislature, the Governor and others to find dollars in the current budget that can be moved to education.

Reallocating any dollars in the state budget is very difficult, given entrenched special interests. Irrespective of the difficulty, however, the state has a responsibility to our children and taxpayers to make the difficult decisions needed to make funding our public schools the state's top spending priority.

5. **Increase Overall Funding for Public Schools:** Ultimately, we will need to look closely at all revenue options and make the necessary changes to our tax structure to get to the top 20% in per- pupil funding, including reforming Proposition 13 to close loopholes, ensure corporate property owners are paying their fair share, and allowing school districts to pass parcel taxes at the 55% voter approval threshold, like bond measures. Some revenue increases will be necessary to fully fund our public schools. The Governor,

legislature, State Superintendent, labor, business leadership, and others need to look comprehensively at our state's revenue and tax structure to identify which taxes and policies need to be changed and over what time frame to get our schools to at least the top 20% of states in per-pupil funding in the country.

3. Other than the continuing issue of inadequate school funding, what do you believe are the 2-3 biggest challenges facing public education in California? How would you address them from the office of SPI?

We have neglected our public schools for decades and thus there a number of challenges beyond inadequate funding that face public education in California today. These challenges include, but are not limited to, a massive teacher shortage, antiquated work rules, a 2,500 page California Education Code that makes it very difficult for educators to do their jobs, a lack of investment in pre-K, and a number of systematic barriers that have resulted in a number of sub-groups of students not being effectively educated.

We have developed the starting point for a ten-year plan for California's public schools that includes a set of policies and practices that we believe need to be implemented to make California's public schools the best in the country. The foundation of this plan is a focus on five areas that will be my priority as State Superintendent of Public Instruction: a) investing in our teachers and principals, b) moving California's schools into the 21st century, c) serving all students in our public schools effectively, d) adequately funding our public schools, and e) shifting the Department of Education to being a support provider to school districts. Below is a summary some of the initiatives we will pursue in each area.

1. Invest in our teachers and principals

Nothing is more important to a school's success than our teachers and principals. When my wife, Mae, and I think about our son, Mason, and the public education we want for him, we think first about his teacher. We want him to have a teacher who believes deeply in him, is excited to be teaching, who is very well prepared, and is consistently supported by an awesome principal. That's what all parents want for their kids and that is what all kids deserve. We need to invest heavily in our teachers and principals, with specific focus on increasing compensation and incentives, and developing and supporting our educators. Below are a number strategies we will pursue related to our teacher and principals:

- a. **Increase Teacher Compensation:** Teaching is a wonderful, difficult and incredibly important profession and it needs to be compensated as such. Teachers should not have to be Lyft drivers on the side to own a home in or near the community in which they teach. We need to put in place a clear path over the next

decade to increase overall compensation for our teachers. This will require more funding (see Question #2 for additional ideas on this topic) and real changes, but it is essential if we want to elevate the teaching profession.

- b. **Provide Free College to Teachers:** As State Superintendent, I will push immediately for California to offer no-interest loans to college students that commit to teach for five years. Once a teacher finishes his/her fifth year, the loans would be forgiven. The teacher shortage in our state makes this an urgent priority. If we are unable to fund the full program immediately, we should start with teachers that commit to teach in high poverty communities and in hard-to-staff areas, like special education. Additionally we need to invest further in programs that support career changer to come into the teaching profession.
- c. **Revamp University Training Programs:** I will work with policymakers and university leaders to improve our university teacher training programs to help teachers be as prepared as possible when they begin teaching. I believe much of the coursework that is currently offered in the credentialing year should be provided in undergraduate programs so that the credentialing year can serve as a residency, where the teacher-candidate is spending the vast majority of his/her time learning in the field from highly effective teachers.
- d. **Help all New Teachers get a Quality Mentor:** We need to revamp the current BTSA program and create incentives and supports to encourage school districts to provide all new teachers and principals with a quality mentor.
- e. **More Quality Collaboration and Professional Development:** Educators learn and grow so much when collaborating with one another, and yet our schools often do not provide enough time in the day for quality professional development and collaboration. We have to give schools the flexibility and provide them with support to build these opportunities into their regular schedules, as part of a culture of continuous learning. The state also needs to help educators and schools share best practices much more efficiently (see below for additional ideas on this topic).

2. **Move California's Schools into the 21st Century**

Our public school systems needs to make sense in the 21st century. Most of our public schools have operated for decades in a way that was better suited for a manufacturing economy than our current society and economy. The demands of the 21st century require that our public education system be more innovative. It needs to be designed to allow our

educators to be more creative and entrepreneurial and enable our children to be more actively engaged in their learning, and prepare them for the jobs of the future. Below are a number strategies we will pursue to help move California's schools into the 21st century:

- a. **Make Pre-K Available to All:** A 21st century school system is one that begins in pre- Kindergarten, as we know how important learning in those early years can be. It is especially problematic that we see achievement gaps between groups of students at the very start of Kindergarten. Universal access to pre-K will help address this, while also laying critical foundations for social-emotional, and academic growth in later years. This needs to be an immediate priority for our state. If we can't fund pre-K for all right away, we need to at least fund it for our high poverty children immediately.
- b. **More Flexibility and Local Control:** The California Education Code is overly prescriptive, dictating far too much to educators, and acting as a barrier to innovative, diverse schools that meet the needs of all children. We need to enable our superintendents, principals, and teachers to innovate, and to create the schools and classrooms that work best for their students. I plan to work with the legislature, superintendents, labor associations and others to get more flexibility from the Education Code for our schools. This effort will likely take significant time so we will work with the State Board of Education in the short-term to get waivers from the Education Code while we work on longer term policy change.
- c. **Promote a More Robust and Relevant Academic Program:** We need to make changes to the programs of study for our students so that they align with what students need to be successful in the world, and with the best research on brain development and learning. For instance, we should encourage schools to offer foreign languages at earlier ages, expand access to computer science courses, and ensure that civics, art, and music are infused into what students are learning from the start. Beyond the content, the expectations of how people interact in the workplace are changing, and our education system needs to reflect that. Rather than sitting at desks from bell to bell, our students should be working collaboratively on projects to solve problems with real-world applications. Our classrooms should leverage technology to make our curriculum come to life and make student learning much more personalized and interactive.
- d. **Facilitate Sharing Best Practices and Innovation:** The State Superintendent and the California Department of Education need to be great at learning from

practitioners in the field and identifying what is working in schools and classrooms, and sharing those practices throughout the State. When a school is doing a phenomenal job offering students educational experiences beyond the four walls of a classroom, for example, our state should know about it, support it, learn from it, and help share those practices so that students across California are benefitting from those practices. The State and the CDE need to leverage highly effective counties and districts to do the actual work sharing best practices and capacity building in the districts that are struggling.

We must also invest more resources to enable districts and schools to innovate. I plan to create a statewide fund- the California Innovation Fund- with both public and philanthropic dollars that could be used to support schools that want to test new practices or scale proven practices to tackle big challenges. When a school wants to expand computer science to all high school students, or develop a unique collaboration with their city, county health services, or local businesses, our state should be there to provide the resources and support, and to learn from their work. These pilot programs could then be replicated, as appropriate, throughout the state. We need to unlock the creativity of our educators to help bring out schools into the 21st century and make sure they work for all kids.

3. Serve All Students in our Public Schools Effectively

For too long, California's public schools have not effectively educated all students. Groups of students, such as English Language Learners, African American males, students with special needs, foster students, and others have been significantly underserved for decades. This is unacceptable. As State Superintendent, I plan to work with our school districts and guide our state to make the policy and implementation changes needed to differentiate the supports we provide to our students of greatest need, and to ensure equity in our schools. Below are our key priorities for addressing the needs of all students in our state:

a. Ensure Effective Implementation of Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF):

Governor Brown's introduction of LCFF was a significant policy achievement as it created a new funding formula to provide more money to schools with high concentrations of low income students, English Learners, and foster students. My career in education has been spent working in high-needs communities, and there is no question that our most vulnerable students require additional resources, largely due to the enormous out-of-school challenges they face. As State Superintendent, I will work with the CDE and school districts to make sure LCFF

is implemented properly and that the additional funds are spent on our highest need students. We will work together to ensure that the intent of the LCFF law is carried out in practice.

- b. Provide Additional Differentiated Supports to our Students of Greatest Need:** In addition to properly implementing LCFF, we need to ensure that differentiated resources are also made available for our special education students, our homeless students and students classified in the lowest performing subgroups. We will work to provide these students additional financial resources and will also differentiate supports provided by the CDE to counties and districts serving our highest need students. We will leverage data to identify which schools and districts have the greatest success serving our neediest students, learn what is working from those schools/districts and share their practices with others throughout the state.
- c. Help Connect Health and Human Services More Effectively to our Schools:** We also must help schools better integrate other local health and human resources. There is far too little collaboration between public schools and health and human services and that needs to change. We will work to break down barriers between these two areas so that we can better support the physical and social-emotional health of our children, which will lead to more academic success.
- d. Promote Public School Options to Underserved Families:** No child should be forced to attend a failing school because of where he or she lives. Over the past three decades, California has adopted policies to give parents more power to decide which public schools their children will attend, and more options when their neighborhood schools are failing to provide a quality education. I believe it is important to preserve and strategically expand high-quality public school options for parents, particularly in communities where the need is greatest. I believe all students benefit when the system offers diverse public school options to meet the needs of diverse students. These public options can take many forms: some are magnet programs that focus on a particular academic discipline, some are charter schools that have flexibility to innovate with new practices, and some are specialty programs, like those that focus on the arts or sciences. This kind of variety is healthy in a system serving a population as large as ours, and provides opportunities for families to find the best fit for their kids, and for schools to learn from one another.

- e. **Support Parent Engagement in Our Schools:** We must actively engage parents, supporting their efforts to be involved in our schools, and in the education of their children. Schools should provide parents with the information and opportunities they need to be strong advocates for their children and public education. At the Partnership schools I led, we launched a Parent College where parents came to campus once a month on Saturdays to learn about how to get more engaged in their children's schools and what their rights were in public education. As State Superintendent, I will work with the CDE to identify best practice programs for parent engagement (like the Parent College) and work with counties and districts to scale those programs.

- f. **Champion Protections for our Most Vulnerable Students:** It is growing increasingly important for California and the State Superintendent to champion and safeguard the rights of all kids to receive a high quality public education in a safe and nurturing environment. No one should be fearful on our school campuses, and no one should slip through the cracks. Whether you're a student with special needs, part of California's large and growing English Learner population; no matter your immigration status or, gender identity our public schools need to be safe and welcoming environments for all students.

4. **Adequately Fund Our Schools**

See Question #2 for detail.

5. **Lead the CDE to support our schools**

The focus of the California Department of Education (CDE) should be serving and supporting county offices of education and school districts, and helping the Governor, legislature and State Board of Education pass high impact policies for our schools. Unfortunately, the CDE historically has spent too much time on compliance and regulation and not enough time on those core focus areas. I will work with the staff at the CDE and superintendents and other administrators to shift the culture and practices of the CDE to be more about serving our educators in the field. Below are a number strategies we will pursue related to leading the CDE:

- a. **Sharing Best Practices:** The CDE is uniquely situated to spot innovative practices in districts, schools and classrooms, and should be the expert in the state at identifying best practices and sharing them with educators throughout the state. Utilizing the robust data it collects (and expanding the data the CDE collects, as necessary), CDE staff can find experts in the field who are yielding unusually strong results in the face of big challenges, and help make those expert

practitioners available to districts and schools that may be struggling when confronted with similar challenges.

- b. **Launch Pilot Programs and Scale-Up What Works:** Though the California Innovation Fund that we plan to create (described above), we hope to provide districts with some of the funding and support needed to launch innovative pilot programs and scale-up proven best practices.
- c. **Bring More Practitioners into the CDE:** As State Superintendent, I plan to create rotating leadership positions for 1 to 3 years to be filled by education leaders in the field. To move the CDE to really being a service and support agency, it needs to consistently be guided by what is happening in classrooms, schools and districts. Having practitioners from the field in key leadership roles will help make sure the CDE is doing the work that can be most helpful to our school district's' efforts to improve student achievement.
- d. **Conduct Annual Surveys from County Office of Education and Districts:** To help shift the culture in the CDE, I plan to launch an annual survey where Superintendents and other key educators will be asked to give feedback on how effectively the CDE is supporting their districts. This feedback will be aggregated and shared with the staff at the CDE as well as with superintendents. Surveys can be build more of a service culture in the CDE, and also allow the State Superintendent and CDE to pinpoint areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.
- e. **Helping Struggling Counties and Districts:** The CDE needs to be more deliberate at identifying counties and districts that are struggling to effectively serve their students (or a subgroup of students) and provide targeted support to those counties/districts. The CDE should not necessarily use its own personnel to provide support, but rather it should fund successful counties, districts and nonprofit organizations to build the capacity of struggling districts to better serve their students. The CDE should work closely with the CCEE on this endeavor.
- f. **Better Support Governor, State Board, and Legislature in Policymaking:** The State Superintendent, the CDE should also better support the Governor, State Board, and legislature, as they make statewide education policy. The State Superintendent needs to leverage the expertise and voices of educators at all level to support policymaking in Sacramento. Education policy is often driven by non-educators, so there can be unintended consequences that could have been

foreseen and prevented if the policymaking process had included the voices of educators and experts. As State Superintendent, I will focus on elevating the voices of Superintendents and other administrators in the policy making process so that education policy crafted in Sacramento is aligned with the most important issues impacting educators in the field (and thus our students). I will also work with education leaders to develop buy-in around education priorities, so that the various decision-makers (i.e., Governor, State Board, legislature) have a shared sense of purpose and vision for California's public schools.

4. To what extent do you believe the Local Control Funding Formula has contributed to closing the achievement gap? If elected, what changes would you make to improve LCFF?

I am a strong supporter of the Local Control Funding Formula and I believe that it has the potential to be a great mechanism for equity, and closing the achievement gap. Additional funding for students with additional needs is critical; we would not have doubled graduation rates at the Partnership schools without raising additional dollars to support those students. Unfortunately, the data suggests that the LCFF has not yet made a meaningful impact on closing the achievement gap, and I believe that there are several explanations for this, each of which I will work on as State Superintendent:

1. ***LCFF is still relatively early on in its implementation:*** We are only a few years into the implementation of LCFF and it can take time for new programs to result in material changes in student outcomes. Many of the programs that LCFF is funding in school districts may be new and/or require change and thus significant increases in student achievement results may take a couple of years to materialize. Additionally, the additional funding will only drive increases in student achievement for high poverty students, if it is used well.
2. ***Overall funding is still too low:*** Redistribution of funding, when there isn't sufficient funding to begin with won't necessarily deliver substantially better results. Additionally, many communities with local resources (i.e., Basic Aid districts, districts with significant philanthropic foundations or parcel taxes, etc.), have continued to find ways to locally supplement their inadequate state funding, so high-needs schools often do not have as many additional resources as would be expected. The additional state dollars for high-need communities under LCFF have been sorely needed, but still well below what is necessary. California has the most diverse and expensive school populations in the country; even just meeting the national average in funding is insufficient. That is why we need to work towards the top 20% of states in per-pupil funding. LCFF is a useful vehicle, because as we make those improvements to funding, it will ensure the largest and

fastest gains go to those that most need them: low-income students, English Learners, and students in foster care.

3. ***LCFF dollars are not all getting to the students of greatest need:*** If LCFF is going to help close achievement gaps, it should be used to provide additional funding for students that require additional services. This is not happening today in all districts. A big reason for this is the guidance the State has provide school districts when it comes to utilizing LCFF dollars. One of the great virtues of LCFF is that it provides greater financial flexibility to local educators. However, the fundamental promise of LCFF was that it would provide additional funding for those students that most required it. Unfortunately, the current State Superintendent has put several districts in difficult legal situations by concluding that LCFF supplemental and concentration grants could be used for district-wide salary increases, even when that meant that certain areas of the budget that didn't provide direct services to high-needs children would receive these resources. We need to ensure the LCFF dollars are actually being spent to support our EL, foster and high poverty students.
4. ***Other issues beyond funding play a big role in persistent achievement gaps:*** The achievement gap has been in existence for decades and there are many factors beyond just funding that will need to change in order for it to close. Within our public education system, a number of changes beyond just funding need to be made including: offering pre-K to all students, as the achievement gap starts well before Kindergarten; changing staffing policies and strategies to ensure that our Latino and African American students have more experienced, high quality, teachers and principals; creating more opportunities for learning and enrichment for high poverty students after school and in the summer; investing more in social-emotional supports; and, giving school districts much more flexibility for creativity and innovation. Additionally, beyond our public education system, a number of issues such as healthcare, poverty and racism must be improved in order to for the achievement gap to be completely closed over time.

In terms of additional changes to LCFF, as State Superintendent, I will work with school leaders and educators across the state to identify if there are any other categories/subgroups of students that warrant inclusion in the LCFF formula, as well as work to increase the base funding for all districts (see Question #2). I will work with school leaders to make sure that those LCFF dollars are impacting the students that generate the additional funding, and work with practitioners around California to highlight and share best practices where schools have utilized LCFF funds to make meaningful progress on closing the achievement gap. See Question #3 for more detail on many of the strategies we plan to work with schools on to help close the achievement gap.

5. What is your view on public employee pensions? How would you mitigate school districts' rising pension obligations?

The unfunded pension liability is one of the most glaring examples of the ways in which politicians have neglected our public schools, causing great strain on our ability to deliver quality schools to all California's kids. The current unfunded liability stands at \$100 billion, and continues to climb, and the most recent "reforms" from Sacramento did little but shift the burden from the state to local school districts. Whereas districts had been contributing 8.25% historically to pensions, they currently contribute 14.43%, and will contribute 19.1% by 2020. With our schools already underfunded, this has a devastating impact, consuming a significant portion of LCFF increases.

There is clearly no easy solution to such an enormous problem, but it first requires that our elected leaders take ownership of it, and prioritize it. For such a big issue, it is seldom discussed by our politicians and the general public has very little awareness of it. As State Superintendent, I will bring together fiscal experts, labor leaders, school leaders, and other educators to develop a long-term solution. I will also work to make sure the public builds an understanding of how problematic the currently situation is for our students. While I don't know yet what that solution will look like, it will likely include some mix of the following: (1) more realistic assumptions about the rate-of-return on pension investments, (2) increased contributions, especially for employees and the state which currently have the lowest contribution rates, (3) slightly later retirement, (4) potentially reduced "unearned" benefits (5) additional funding from taxpayers..

None of these is ideal, but we should look honestly at the math to determine which is necessary, and to what degree; we should also consider how to mitigate the impact on our schools and employees by determining which reforms can be responsibly phased in over time.

If we don't tackle this head-on and soon, it won't be good for our pensioners, employees, or students. The pension funds simply do not have the capital to pay what is owed to retirees, and schools have less and less money to pay current employees, and to provide programs and services to students. This is an area where we can't be dogmatic, or simply kick the can down the road; we have to do what is difficult, because it is what is right for our kids.

6. Do you support the use of LCFF supplemental concentration grants for an increase in employee salaries? Additionally, if elected, what advice would you give to the field on this issue?

As discussed a bit in Question #4, I think it is generally problematic to use LCFF supplemental and concentration grants for across-the-board employee salary increases. LCFF was designed to

help bring greater equity to school funding. It is not uncommon for school districts to have their more experienced (and, therefore, more expensive) teachers in their higher-performing, more affluent schools. Eliminating that kind of inequity- a disproportionate share of a district budget being spent on those with less need- was a key potential outcome of LCFF.

It is important that additional dollars generated by the LCFF supplemental and concentration grants are being used to provide programs and services for the students that generate those dollars. This can be accomplished while also using LCFF grants on salary increases; I would provide school districts with advice that helped them ensure that when doing so, they were still living up to the intent of the LCFF legislation. For instance, rather than across-the-board salary increases, a school district might consider providing a supplemental salary schedule in hard-to-staff schools or programs, providing stipends to staff that are participating in targeted programs for high-needs students, etc. While I was leading the Partnership schools, we were able to bring some phenomenal principals to our highest-need schools, for example, by offering them additional annual compensation; there is no doubt that this led to improved opportunities and outcomes for high-needs students. Additionally, across-the-board increases may be more appropriate if the concentration of high-needs students is sufficiently high at each of a district's schools, such that all who receive the increase are, in some way, participating in the success of those students.

7. “The California Way” is often used to characterize the new system of accountability and continuous improvement. What actions do you believe the state should take if schools do not demonstrate growth, in achievement and progress, within this new system?

I believe we need to provide school districts a great deal of flexibility and resources to do what is necessary to provide the best possible education to their communities. The State Superintendent and California Department of Education have an important role to play when it comes to providing the support and accountability necessary to all school districts. First and foremost, I believe the CDE needs to reorient itself from a compliance-driven organization, to a support-driven one.

If a school or district is struggling in a particular area and not demonstrating growth in achievement and progress, the CDE needs to be great at helping to diagnose the precise issues, and then bringing targeted supports to address those areas. And rather than relying on the expertise within the CDE, the CDE should be leveraging practitioners in the field, finding educators who are doing great things in that particular area, and fund those educators to share best-practices and provide direct support.

8. When making critical decisions that would widely impact education policy, please describe how you approach the decision-making process if you are elected SPI. Who would you seek out for counsel and advice before making such important decisions?

In both of the school systems I have led, I tried to employ a decision-making process that included the expertise of those around me, especially those that were closest to the work. I believe that on-the-ground practitioners can provide strong guidance about how policies truly play out in practice, and as State Superintendent I would work to develop consistent and systematic ways to collect feedback from educators at all levels, and particularly from superintendents and administrators. Specifically, I will hold an annual policy planning meeting with education leaders to put together our policy agenda, and create structures to get quick feedback on time sensitive, critical decisions related to policy.

In addition to more formal feedback collection (i.e., through committees, etc.), I also plan to have channels by which educators- and others- could freely provide feedback in an ongoing way, on any topic. The role of State Superintendent is strongest, I believe, when it is providing support to those that are actually working to serve our kids every day; my decisions about how to best do that will be informed by a wide variety of feedback.

9. Do you believe the growth of charter schools in California are having a negative impact on traditional public schools? In your opinion, what changes, if any, does the state need to make to charter school law and regulations?

While the majority of my time leading public schools has been in a district context, I have also led public charter schools. This blend of experiences gives me an interesting position from which to evaluate both the benefits and potential trade-offs of charter schools. Those experiences lead me to ultimately be supportive of non-profit, high-quality public charter schools, especially in areas where there have been few or no high quality public school alternatives.

When considering charters, I tend to think first about Shirley Ford. When I first met her, Shirley didn't want to send her son, Robert, to Inglewood High because she believed the school would fail her son. Shirley didn't have the money to move to a different neighborhood or to pay for a private school. She was desperate. Shirley took a chance on a brand new public charter school in her neighborhood, called Animo Inglewood, part of the Green Dot network of schools I led. She helped build that school, and it changed her son's life. The best part is that Robert is now a high school calculus teacher.

Too many of our high poverty children-of-color- typically in urban and rural areas- have been stuck in failing public schools and I believe this cuts directly against our values. The middle

class and upper class have never been left with no quality school options. They have been able to move to a neighborhood with better schools, navigate magnet systems, or send their kids to private schools. It is our neediest that have been hurt the most, and I support the creation of public charter schools that can give our highest-need families an additional public school opportunity. I think that is a net positive for our public education system.

There are some unintended consequences from charter schools and they can have some negative impacts on district schools in the areas where they are opened (particularly in the initial years after a charter is opened). I think policy can be used to mitigate those impacts. A few policy changes related to charters that could help the overall public school system include: (1) making for-profit charter schools illegal; (2) requiring charter schools to be transparent by following the Brown Act and complying with public records requests; (3) ensuring no conflicts of interest at charter schools; (4) holding charter schools more accountable, and (5) ensuring that all public schools must welcome all students. Charter schools that are consistently failing, turning away students, mishandling public dollars, or treating employees illegally, should be shut down.

The state needs to take more of a leadership role in improving collaboration between charters and districts by convening educators from district and charter schools regularly to work together on key problems-of-practice and to share best practices. Additionally, the state should look into the possibility of providing short-term financial support and flexibility to districts that are losing significant revenue due to loss of enrollment, in order to help those districts make any necessary operational changes needed to adapt.

10. The Vergara lawsuit aimed to affirm a child's right to a quality education, and to instruction by effective teachers. If elected SPI, what are specific policies you would advocate for that put the rights and needs of students first?

Along with ACSA, I was a supporter of AB 1220, and was honored to have recently received the endorsement of the bill's author, Assemblymember Dr. Shirley Weber. This bill represents a smart way forward on crafting education policy that puts the needs of students first, while also protecting employees. I was pleased that a broad coalition came together to support this bill, including ACSA, and that it ultimately passed the State Assembly 59-3. It was disappointing that last-minute politicking was able to stall those efforts; that my opponent in this race was a primary obstacle to AB 1220's passage, is emblematic of the stakes in this election. And while the efforts were temporarily stymied, they will resume in earnest in the next session, while I am running for State Superintendent and as State Superintendent I will work closely with Dr. Weber, ACSA and others to pass AB 1220 or a bill like it.

In addition to working to make changes to the tenure systems, I will also advocate for making changes to the other laws called out in the Vergara lawsuit. I will advocate for changes to the seniority-based layoff system so that seniority is not the only factor used for determining layoffs. Teacher effectiveness and the impact of layoffs on sub-groups of students should also be factors. Additionally I will work to reform our state's teacher dismissal process, under which it is uniquely difficult for school districts to dismiss teachers for consistently poor performance or misconduct.