

State Superintendent Of Public Instruction Candidates Answer Mark's Questions On  
Prime Conservative Issues  
By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The only two candidates running for State Superintendent of Public Instruction that do not appear totally hostile to school choice and other alternatives are Deb Kerr and Shandowlyon Hendricks-Williams. I asked both candidates direct questions about what I consider the two most pressing issues in the state pertaining to schools. I am printing their responses verbatim. Deb Kerr's response is first:

---

Good morning, Mark.

Thank you for asking for Deb Kerr's response to your questions.  
Her answers are as follows:

1. Do you support the Wisconsin School Choice program and do you believe it should be expanded?

DK:

"My job as your Superintendent is to advocate for ALL children in Wisconsin. Together, we will create a world-class education system that will be the highest performing in the country. This will be done by bringing all stakeholders to the table to develop one system of accountability and full transparency while also upholding the law fairly and as written so that families and educators have a stable landscape to forge a better future. I will advocate forward not backward in an effort to make Wisconsin the best place. Together we will not take the road to our future, but make the road to our future."

2. Do you believe all public schools in Wisconsin should offer the option on in-person classroom instruction (fulltime)?

DK:

"Yes. Here is my plan to do so safely, a plan that is based on evidence-based medical and accelerated learning approaches. I have published this on my website/social media for all to see.

We are at a crisis point in our public schools. Statewide data reveals declining enrollment across Wisconsin; 4K & 5K students are not showing up in virtual school programs. Teachers are burning out, and there is a teacher shortage, not to mention parent fatigue, a stressed workforce, and an impacted economy. It is time for a statewide

recovery plan to return our students to school. It is time to address the learning loss and inequities that have been exacerbated by this pandemic, such as robust broadband access, tech devices, and food insecurity.

My plan includes the development of a stakeholder communication plan with school-based health and safety precautions. We will ensure personnel safety through ongoing collaboration and communication between administrators, building leaders, staff members, students, parents, and health services, and health departments. Staff will have adequate PPE along with safety training and clear expectations for student and staff safety protocols. Other key components are:

1. Start with elementary students going back to in-person instruction, then a gradual release to/from hybrid models for middle and high school students, and then full in-person teaching and learning in all schools.
2. Provide parents and caregivers with choices on how to serve their children best moving forward - whether in-person or virtual approach.
3. Support teachers with quality professional development that addresses their mental health and well-being and best practices to address student learning loss.
4. Implement a transition plan for social and emotional learning activities to welcome students back to school, especially those who did not have closure last year, and quickly reestablish relationships traumatized by school closures.
5. Use evidence-based acceleration practices to identify learning loss for all students, prioritize grade-level content, and target interventions to ensure growth in specified essential standards.
6. Support collaborative planning to develop modified school calendars that may require learning opportunities through the summer, evenings, and weekends.
7. Create innovative school partnerships with community non-profits, universities, and businesses that support the accelerated learning required for all students - high-intensity tutoring, before/after school programs, weekend programs, summer learning academies, evening classes, and online modules, etc.
8. Work collaboratively with policymakers to support state and federal funding resources to accelerate learning, support training for educators, and recover safely from the pandemic.

I want us to learn from others across the country and the world who have safe and successful models in place with a plan to prioritize in-person instruction.

Finally, my plan would allow each district to customize its recovery approach to meet the needs of students, staff, and the school community. No two plans will be the same because no two students, schools, districts, or communities are the same.

I know that Superintendents and Boards of Education have lacked clear guidance from DPI about how to reopen. This work should be as quickly as possible so kids can be back in school safely, as soon as possible."

Here are the responses from Shandowlyon Hendricks:

Hi Mark,

Thank you so much for reaching out and offering this opportunity to fully share my positions. You are correct that candidates have not had the chance to adequately discuss these pertinent topics at many of the previous forums. Please see my responses below.

1. I fully support and defend parents' liberty to enroll their child in a high performing school, public, charter, choice, or otherwise (as stated on my website). I am the only candidate who has consistently held this stance throughout my career and this campaign despite the backlash. Other candidates have flip-flopped when this is posed as a simple yes/no question (*see the WAEF forum*). I don't change my response to this question based on who is in the room and I'll always defend parents' liberty to choose.

In my 25+ years of education, I worked in public, private, charter, choice, and higher education. I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly across all of these educational arenas. Employers and institutions of higher education do not ask for you to state on your resume whether you went to a charter, choice, or public school. The reality is, we know that the academic outcomes of students are determined by zip code due to our antiquated funding formulas that are based on property tax value. As such, high performing schools aren't available in every zip code. This is not due to the fault of teachers, administrators, or school board members but rather because the State does not fund our schools equitably.

We say that all students should receive a high-quality education no matter their zip code, but that is not the reality. **As such, I defend a parent's right to enroll their child in a high performing school, public, charter, choice, or otherwise.** To deny a parent that right, one is essentially saying even though we aren't equitably funding the school in your zip code area, you still must enroll your child in a poor performing school. I cannot morally, ethically, or consciously do that. As state superintendent, I will eliminate inequitable school funding and implement my Student Bill of Rights that guarantees students a well-rounded education and ensures every zip code has a high performing school so parents don't have to look far for options.

2. My Student Bill of Rights states that students have the unequivocal right to receive instruction in various modalities, face to face, blended, and/or virtual. **I know we must provide an option for all students to return to in-person instruction swiftly and safely while working diligently to maintain educator morale and ensure expedient vaccinations.**

As a parent of a child with disabilities and pre-existing health conditions, I consider the fact that one size doesn't fit all. As I think of the parent of a child who received a kidney transplant and is taking immunosuppressive meds to prevent rejection of the organ. I empathize with parents who may not wish for their child to return to school until we have a better handle on COVID-19 and would benefit from continued virtual instruction. As state superintendent, I will follow the science and collaborate with public health experts. Based on scientific assessments by international, national, state, and local

organizations, **we can be confident that the potential for community spread in schools is significantly lower compared to other activities.**

We also must recognize the thousands of students who are falling behind as a result of the current virtual learning regime. We are witnessing deteriorating mental health for our children, asymmetric access to broadband, and lack of access to meals and childcare services. Virtual learning creates uneven challenges for special needs students, rural communities with limited broadband access, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students. As such, I understand the urgency in making in-person instruction available for those who need or want it.

Thank you,

Dr. Hendricks

---

As you can see from the above responses, Hendricks is the only candidate for the office who specifically states support for school choice. All of the other candidates for the DPI position have stated adamant opposition to school choice and are unacceptable alternatives for conservative voters.

Mark Belling  
February 8

State Superintendent Of Public Instruction Candidates Answer Mark's Questions On  
Prime Conservative Issues  
By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The only two candidates running for State Superintendent of Public Instruction that do not appear totally hostile to school choice and other alternatives are Deb Kerr and Shandowlyon Hendricks-Williams. I asked both candidates direct questions about what I consider the two most pressing issues in the state pertaining to schools. I am printing their responses verbatim. Deb Kerr's response is first:

---

Good morning, Mark.

Thank you for asking for Deb Kerr's response to your questions.  
Her answers are as follows:

1. Do you support the Wisconsin School Choice program and do you believe it should be expanded?

DK:

"My job as your Superintendent is to advocate for ALL children in Wisconsin. Together, we will create a world-class education system that will be the highest performing in the country. This will be done by bringing all stakeholders to the table to develop one system of accountability and full transparency while also upholding the law fairly and as written so that families and educators have a stable landscape to forge a better future. I will advocate forward not backward in an effort to make Wisconsin the best place. Together we will not take the road to our future, but make the road to our future."

2. Do you believe all public schools in Wisconsin should offer the option on in-person classroom instruction (fulltime)?

DK:

"Yes. Here is my plan to do so safely, a plan that is based on evidence-based medical and accelerated learning approaches. I have published this on my website/social media for all to see.

We are at a crisis point in our public schools. Statewide data reveals declining enrollment across Wisconsin; 4K & 5K students are not showing up in virtual school programs. Teachers are burning out, and there is a teacher shortage, not to mention parent fatigue, a stressed workforce, and an impacted economy. It is time for a statewide

recovery plan to return our students to school. It is time to address the learning loss and inequities that have been exacerbated by this pandemic, such as robust broadband access, tech devices, and food insecurity.

My plan includes the development of a stakeholder communication plan with school-based health and safety precautions. We will ensure personnel safety through ongoing collaboration and communication between administrators, building leaders, staff members, students, parents, and health services, and health departments. Staff will have adequate PPE along with safety training and clear expectations for student and staff safety protocols. Other key components are:

1. Start with elementary students going back to in-person instruction, then a gradual release to/from hybrid models for middle and high school students, and then full in-person teaching and learning in all schools.
2. Provide parents and caregivers with choices on how to serve their children best moving forward - whether in-person or virtual approach.
3. Support teachers with quality professional development that addresses their mental health and well-being and best practices to address student learning loss.
4. Implement a transition plan for social and emotional learning activities to welcome students back to school, especially those who did not have closure last year, and quickly reestablish relationships traumatized by school closures.
5. Use evidence-based acceleration practices to identify learning loss for all students, prioritize grade-level content, and target interventions to ensure growth in specified essential standards.
6. Support collaborative planning to develop modified school calendars that may require learning opportunities through the summer, evenings, and weekends.
7. Create innovative school partnerships with community non-profits, universities, and businesses that support the accelerated learning required for all students - high-intensity tutoring, before/after school programs, weekend programs, summer learning academies, evening classes, and online modules, etc.
8. Work collaboratively with policymakers to support state and federal funding resources to accelerate learning, support training for educators, and recover safely from the pandemic.

I want us to learn from others across the country and the world who have safe and successful models in place with a plan to prioritize in-person instruction.

Finally, my plan would allow each district to customize its recovery approach to meet the needs of students, staff, and the school community. No two plans will be the same because no two students, schools, districts, or communities are the same.

I know that Superintendents and Boards of Education have lacked clear guidance from DPI about how to reopen. This work should be as quickly as possible so kids can be back in school safely, as soon as possible."

Here are the responses from Shandowlyon Hendricks:

Hi Mark,

Thank you so much for reaching out and offering this opportunity to fully share my positions. You are correct that candidates have not had the chance to adequately discuss these pertinent topics at many of the previous forums. Please see my responses below.

1. I fully support and defend parents' liberty to enroll their child in a high performing school, public, charter, choice, or otherwise (as stated on my website). I am the only candidate who has consistently held this stance throughout my career and this campaign despite the backlash. Other candidates have flip-flopped when this is posed as a simple yes/no question (*see the WAEF forum*). I don't change my response to this question based on who is in the room and I'll always defend parents' liberty to choose.

In my 25+ years of education, I worked in public, private, charter, choice, and higher education. I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly across all of these educational arenas. Employers and institutions of higher education do not ask for you to state on your resume whether you went to a charter, choice, or public school. The reality is, we know that the academic outcomes of students are determined by zip code due to our antiquated funding formulas that are based on property tax value. As such, high performing schools aren't available in every zip code. This is not due to the fault of teachers, administrators, or school board members but rather because the State does not fund our schools equitably.

We say that all students should receive a high-quality education no matter their zip code, but that is not the reality. **As such, I defend a parent's right to enroll their child in a high performing school, public, charter, choice, or otherwise.** To deny a parent that right, one is essentially saying even though we aren't equitably funding the school in your zip code area, you still must enroll your child in a poor performing school. I cannot morally, ethically, or consciously do that. As state superintendent, I will eliminate inequitable school funding and implement my Student Bill of Rights that guarantees students a well-rounded education and ensures every zip code has a high performing school so parents don't have to look far for options.

2. My Student Bill of Rights states that students have the unequivocal right to receive instruction in various modalities, face to face, blended, and/or virtual. **I know we must provide an option for all students to return to in-person instruction swiftly and safely while working diligently to maintain educator morale and ensure expedient vaccinations.**

As a parent of a child with disabilities and pre-existing health conditions, I consider the fact that one size doesn't fit all. As I think of the parent of a child who received a kidney transplant and is taking immunosuppressive meds to prevent rejection of the organ. I empathize with parents who may not wish for their child to return to school until we have a better handle on COVID-19 and would benefit from continued virtual instruction. As state superintendent, I will follow the science and collaborate with public health experts. Based on scientific assessments by international, national, state, and local

organizations, **we can be confident that the potential for community spread in schools is significantly lower compared to other activities.**

We also must recognize the thousands of students who are falling behind as a result of the current virtual learning regime. We are witnessing deteriorating mental health for our children, asymmetric access to broadband, and lack of access to meals and childcare services. Virtual learning creates uneven challenges for special needs students, rural communities with limited broadband access, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students. As such, I understand the urgency in making in-person instruction available for those who need or want it.

Thank you,

Dr. Hendricks

---

As you can see from the above responses, Hendricks is the only candidate for the office who specifically states support for school choice. All of the other candidates for the DPI position have stated adamant opposition to school choice and are unacceptable alternatives for conservative voters.

Mark Belling  
February 8