

Context

Public education is one of the most important institutions in our country, an institution in which the public has always played a role. It is the public who elects school board members, pays taxes to support public schools, votes for school bond referenda, and visits and volunteers in the schools. Public schools, in turn, transmit important values and information that help young people participate in our democracy and become responsible citizens.

Clearly, public education is important to all members of society given its impact on the community, the economy, jobs, safety, and health.

- The skill level of the population increases national productivity and leads to higher salaries. (Public Schools and Economic Development: What the Research Shows, Jonathan Weiss, Knowledge Works Foundation, 2004).
- The better educated a person, the more likely that person is to report being in excellent or very good health. (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003)
- The more education a person has, the more likely that person is to be registered to vote and to actually vote. (United States Department of Commerce, 2002)
- There is a strong relationship between the drop-out rate and crime among many young males (Justice Policy Institute, 2003)

Many candidates are vocal about their support for public education, but voters can do a lot to ensure that elected officials are aware of the wide range of important education issues, and that they honor their commitment to education.

This voter guide is designed to help voters focus on important education issues and ask political candidates and office holders informed questions.

To learn more about public education in America today, including the results of PEN's annual poll conducted with *Education Week*, go to www.PublicEducation.org.

Strong Public Education Candidates:

- ☑ Know about school reform and ways to improve public schools
- ☑ Know education policy; the federal, state, and local laws that govern public education; and the responsibilities of the desired office
- ☑ Make public education a high priority in their political platform
- ☑ Solicit opinions and viewpoints from citizens through polling, town meetings, community conversations, and face-to-face discussions
- ☑ Have prior experience with public education policy
- ☑ Have a clear message about public education priorities
- ☑ Have a realistic funding plan to support public education improvements and ensure adequate resources for all schools
- ☑ Communicate who will be held accountable for student and school performance



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

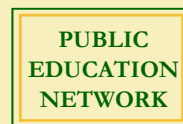
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A Voter's Guide To Public Education Candidates

Choosing Champions of Public Education



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

About This Guide

This guide presents a list of questions that highlight the most pressing concerns and issues in public education today. Public education is a leading issue in American politics. The information in this guide will inform voters about important education issues, and help voters determine a candidate's stance on public education. There are many possible answers to the questions raised in this guide. No single answer is "correct". The questions help identify the education decisions candidates will have to make if elected, and encourage voters to make ballot selections based on which candidates they believe have the strongest public education agenda.

Offices up for Election in 2004

In the upcoming national election, voters will elect a president, vice president, 435 members of the US House of Representatives, and 33 US senators. In state elections, voters will elect 13 governors, more than 6500 state house and senate members, and countless mayors, regents, city council members, boards of supervisors, county officials, and school board trustees.

Who Should Use This Guide?

Everyone! A free, public education is one of America's most vital assets. Every member of society has an investment in a quality public school system. Good schools lead to strong economies, better jobs, less crime, and many other positive social outcomes. Education is an important responsibility for elected officials at all levels, and thus an important area to consider in every election. From the President of the United States to local school board members, making decisions about public education is a critical part of the job. We hope this guide helps you make informed decisions about which candidates to support.

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Questions for Candidates

Public Education & Other Supports

A quality public education requires the assurance of basic physical needs: shelter, nutrition, physical safety, sleep, and exercise. Quality education begins at an early age with the development of cognitive and social skills. A candidate who supports education will have a clear position on a wide range of health and other children's issues.

- What proposals, if any, do you offer for public programs to support underserved children?
- What is your position on the value and importance of public education?
- What are your top priorities for improving public education?

Responsibility for Public Schools

How well students achieve is only partly determined by students themselves. Schools play an important role, and elected officials at every level have some say in how schools are run and who is held responsible for student achievement. Strong education candidates understand the role their offices play in public education, and should be able to articulate what they will do to improve school quality.

- Who do you think should be responsible for ensuring that public schools operate effectively and children achieve?
- If elected, what responsibility and authority would you have for public education?
- What do you believe are the best ways to evaluate school and student performance?
- How would you evaluate teacher quality?

Paying for Public Schools

Most candidates for office support quality and improvement in public education, but their proposals for how to pay for public education vary widely. A strong education candidate should have developed a viable plan for school funding.

- What are your views on how much is spent on public education and whether this amount is adequate?
- What changes, if any, would you make to the existing education funding structure?
- What is your position on current pending court cases that would affect funding for education in the state?
- What programs and areas do you consider most vital and deserving of the highest protection from budget cuts?
- How would you fund the program and policy changes you are proposing?
- Do you have any tax proposals to offer for public school funding?
- Do you support generating funds for public education through taxes on liquor, tobacco, lotteries, casino gambling, slot machines, or through any other "sin" taxes or revenues?

Special Programs

- What is your position on bilingual education?
- Do you believe the amount spent for students classified as "special needs" is adequate? What changes would you make, if any, to support these students?
- What is your stance on school choice?
- What is your stance on the adequacy of school facilities?

PEN's Vision

Every day, in every community, every child in America benefits from a quality public education.

PEN's Mission

To build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for all children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals