

**Concerned Women for America of North Dakota**  
**Candidate Survey for Superintendent of Public Instruction**

March 25, 2012

**Candidate:** Kirsten Baesler

**1. When a candidate uses the phrase “local control” in relating to education policy, what does this mean to you and how would you apply policy accordingly?**

Local control is very important to me. I believe in that concept of governance/management very strongly. Local control means to me the necessity of untying the hands of our school leaders from the many unfunded federal mandates the Department of Education has placed on K-12 education. Further, I believe the State Department of Public Instruction needs to empower school leaders to make the best decisions for its children in their schools. Local school leaders then need to take the control they have been given to empower its building leaders and classroom teachers to make the best curriculum and instructional decisions that meet the needs of their students and the values of their community.

**2. Do you think “No Child Left Behind” has been/is a successful program in North Dakota Public Schools? Explain your position.**

This is a question I answered several years ago in an opinion letter to the editor of the newspapers of our state. I will summarize the important parts of my letter below.  
“When Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, few could have envisioned the unintended consequences that the act would create in school districts across the nation. The core objective of the law was to reach a common goal: To provide accountability and forge a path toward increased academic performance nationwide. This was a very noble goal, accountability and increased student achievement is something all school districts should be striving for, but from the onset, NCLB focused much too heavily on punitive measures. Federal funding for mandates was based on academic results, and districts with socio-economic disadvantages encounter impossible challenges in meeting adequate yearly progress.

The reality is that NCLB's ultimate goals can only be achieved when the barriers to its success are removed, and systems are created that work of our North Dakota schools. Locally, districts across our state are working diligently and are improving our students' performance, but the one-size-fits-all approach rigidly tied to high-stakes testing is inadequate and is not a true indicator of the quality of our public education system.

Fixing the current ESEA (No Child Left Behind) is an essential necessity if our goal is to truly increase academic achievement in all of our nation's schools.”

**3. How do you propose to reform North Dakota public schools to enhance not only our grade levels, but skill levels of K-12 students?**

It is essential that the next Superintendent of Public Instruction remember - the children must come first. They must remember that the sole reason for the existence of, and the primary focus of motivation for the Department of Public Instruction is to ensure our children prosper and

flourish. Every decision, policy and practice of the Department must work toward that end--our children must come first! This is what has motivated me throughout my 21-years in public education and why I am running for North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In order for our students to be successful, K-12 curriculum and instruction must make them college or career ready and Life ready! Too many of our students are leaving high school unprepared to succeed at the next level of their life whether they choose work, college or technical training. The taxpayers of North Dakota deserve a better return on their investment. Several years ago a P-16 Task Force was created in an attempt to help solve this problem. Unfortunately, the problem still remains. There is a new leader of Higher Ed and there will be a new leader at DPI. It is time those discussions resumed and work commence to correct the problems of coordinating our children's education on a state P-16 level. Business leaders, industry and manufacturing leaders, parents and community members must also be part of that discussion so curriculum can match the needs of the workforce and the needs of our communities. Through systemic changes made by the school board, school leaders, parents and community members during my time as school board president in Mandan our schools have been providing a good return on our taxpayers' investment. Despite Mandan's high poverty rate our 11th grade student scores this year are #1 in Reading and Science and #2 in Math and English Language Arts among the 16 Class A school districts, and all of our students are achieving consistent growth academically and personally. Just as I work hard as the President of Mandan's School Board to provide a good return on investment I will work as hard to provide that same return on investment to all North Dakota taxpayers.

#### **4. What is your position in regards to health curriculum in North Dakota public schools?**

Health should be part of the science or physical education curriculum and I don't believe it is the Federal or State government's job to mandate local curriculum for school districts. The State has a responsibility to set standards and benchmarks for core subject areas and hold local school districts responsible for meeting those standards, but the local curriculum decisions should be made by those people in the schools and communities. Local decisions made by people closest to the children are the best decisions. It is my opinion that the legislature should not be prescriptive in any area of local school curriculum.

#### **5. What are the proper relationship/roles between North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, North Dakota Education Association and North Dakota School Board Association?**

I am a member of both the NDEA and the NDSBA as well as a member of NDCEL (ND Council for Educational Leaders). I also hope to be the next leader of DPI. It is important these groups work together in their work for children. It cannot be argued that teacher and principal effectiveness is critical to the success of our students. A new way of evaluating school effectiveness is being required. As this new evaluation process is being developed it will be essential to have educators and administrators from all levels working together with the Department to create an evaluation and support system that measures student progress and achievement and provides more effective professional development through the use of technology. We will then build our state's accountability systems and accurately measure student adequate yearly progress.