

Concerned Women for America of North Dakota
Candidate Survey for Superintendent of Public Instruction
March 25, 2012

Candidate: Max Laird

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?

There is a misunderstanding that there is local control of schools today. That hasn't been true for many years. We don't really know what local control would look like. The federal govt. in particular, with special education laws, controls nearly 100% of that function but provides less than 20% of the funds. The state now sends the local schools nearly 70% of the funds and with that goes a substantial amount of controls. My vision of the federal and state control is that they would paint a broad brush stroke and let schools have access to dollars and decision making as to how to achieve success.

I functioned for most of my career in an environment where I was offered the opportunity to customize instruction for each of my students based on their needs. I expected that my professional experience and training gave me the skills to accomplish this for the benefit of my students. So I am more about local control than many educators. I would like to see a policy agenda that extends local control all the way to the classroom with the assumption of accountability for the child's success built in. I can live with some oversight from the state or federal govt. but it cannot compete with my professional assessment of the needs of the children for whom I am responsible.

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

NCLB has succeeded in only one sense in ND. It has caused us to use data to drive some decisions around teaching and learning. I say that with emphasis on "some". NCLB, over 1000 pages long(which I read), was, in its design, not necessarily its intent, a bill that would cause nearly 100% of all schools in America to fail to meet the standards set in it. That is why we are seeing waivers being offered to states in year 11. Testing for the sake of testing alone cannot measure all of the issues going on in a child's life much less the instruction that they are being provided. Today, we educate in a test-heavy environment, and we need to push back on that to offer only what works to allow educators to customize instruction.

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?

Advancing the skill of students is a multifaceted project. I support individualized instruction wherever and whenever we can. I support testing only when it can directly impact instruction today not next year. I support a 5th year of preparation(internship). I support improved recruitment and retention policies. I support innovation that can produce different outcomes. I support access to a full spectrum of opportunities regardless where a student lives.

I will never be a reading and math "only" advocate. I believe that children need to be exposed to a wide variety of opportunities, including the arts, while in school. I discovered while teaching at risk students for almost 20 years that an art class often had a direct correlation to my students' success in other academics areas. Their creativity needed to be addressed so they could then focus on other things.

I believe in moving students forward when they are academically and socially ready. I believe that we must encourage innovation in how we configure schools in the future. We are often driven to do the same as before by demographics and/or finances. This is when I would like to challenge educators to ask "what if?" I would argue that using school funding to balance state budgets is a mistake.

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

I am licensed to teach health. I taught health for a number of years. I support the health education standards that we presently have in North Dakota. Having taught at risk high school students for as long as I did, I was often stunned by lack of understanding of just the basics of nutritional health, medical health, mental health, reproductive health, hygiene, and basic physiology. I see each of these issues as equal parts of a health 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 believe in arms length relationship with these organizations. I have no relationship with any of the three organizations today. They should be talking with each other and with the DPI on a regular basis but only about things that reflect "kid" issues not the parochial priorities that each organization has. They have to deal with those issues themselves. The DPI needs to be a facilitator of these conversations but would never carry any agenda of one organization or another for them. I am very comfortable when it comes to being a child advocate and knowing the difference between organizational priorities and what is good public policy.