

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

March 25, 2012

Candidate: David Monson

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?

When I use the term "local control", I think of it as meaning that it is a decision made by a local school board vs. a mandate sent down by the state or federal government. I would allow as much flexibility for local control as possible. I don't like being told what to do, and I don't think I'm unique in that regard. Usually the best people to judge what is needed, what works, etc. are those closest to the problem. The parents, students, teachers, and local boards.

Bear in mind that the Supt. of Public Instruction may not have much flexibility to grant to local school boards. The Congress (federal) and legislature (state) pass the laws. The Supt. of Public Instruction has to follow the laws. The Supt. does have 2 roles, though. 1. To try to influence the legislature or Congress to make laws that do allow for local control. 2. To interpret the laws passed by the ND legislature through administrative rules.

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

I was a skeptic of NCLB when it was first passed. Anyone with any sense could tell that the goals were unachievable and unrealistic. Continuing to raise the bar on AYP test scores meant that sooner or later all schools would show up as failing. The program was a typical "one size fits all" approach. It didn't fit ND, and really didn't fit any state as far as I could tell. They supposedly gave us flexibility, but they wrote the rules and changed the rules and still are changing the rules. It was filled with mandates and turned out to be underfunded like nearly every federal program. What's more, now we can't really compare how ND kids are doing with other states since each state has their own standards and tests to those standards, not national norms. So, did any good come out of NCLB? Perhaps a couple of things. It forced us to look at our education system, and that led to more rigor in our curriculum and more highly qualified teachers. We could have done that without NCLB with way less cost and way fewer headaches, but we probably wouldn't have done it until pushed by someone. I had a discussion with someone recently who is convinced that we spent more money to implement NCLB than what we got back. I think he may be right, and I'm waiting for him to get me the data. I think NCLB and all programs (state too) need a good review or audit from time to time to see the cost/benefit analysis figure. Those that don't provide us with a bang for our buck need to end.

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

I was a classroom teacher most of my life, even when I was a principal or superintendent. My background is science and psychology. I know that the way kids learn best is when they don't even know they are learning (when learning is fun), when we let them be creative, and when they

are doing things "hands on". That's why I enjoyed science so much. Labs and experiments were exciting. Part of my platform is to emulate what STEM and CTE do. They use technology and hands on experiences to learn. It's also a way of thinking. It's problem solving, reasoning, and critical thinking (questioning). CTE uses a method where each student learns a skill and moves to the next level when that skill is mastered, not just after so much "seat time". I think we are holding back some of our best students. I hesitate to use the term "dumbing down", but in a sense that is what is happening if the students aren't free to move on to a new skill or level and have to wait for those in the class who haven't mastered that skill. I don't know that I have a real answer on how to do this for all our students in ND, but I think with all the new technology at our grasp there are ways for highly qualified teachers to do this better. I want to explore this more, but I think STEM and CTE are sort of a pattern for other areas. I don't have the magic wand, and I haven't met anyone who does. Every child is different and learns differently, so to prescribe one way to teach or another "one size fits all" method as a mandate is not my answer. I think we spend too much time worrying about Carnegie units or seat time to get credit to move to the next level instead of the mastery of skills. I would like to see us have more flexibility here. The problem is we need to convince colleges of this too. One more problem with Carnegie units, there aren't enough hours in a day to cram in all the seat time needed in each subject. We need to be more transdisciplinary. Lots of math can be taught in science and science in math. Lots of history can be taught in science and vice versa. English can be taught in all subjects. This doesn't mean we can drop some of those subjects, but we can reinforce some of those subjects in this manner, perhaps.

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

To be honest, I really never thought that much about it until lately. It was only four years ago that I retired from the school administrator job where I had been for thirteen years, but a lot has changed since then. In our small school health curriculum was taught by veteran teachers who lived in the community, and they had taught it for years without incident. As a science teacher, I even taught it a time or two to junior high kids. We had developed our own curriculum through Walsh Pembina, and it was very traditional (local control). Now with the "common core" curriculum I'm finding there is a lot of controversy surrounding it. I have to admit that is one topic where I really need to get up to speed. I can tell you this. I am a traditional guy who thinks a lot of our curricula is written for the "one size fits all" programs coming out of Washington and really need to be screened and analyzed before being implemented if implemented at all. This goes for all curricula, not just in health.

5. What are the proper relationships/roles between ND DPI, NDEA, and NDSBA?

I'm not sure there is a "proper" relationship or role. ND DPI is a part of the executive branch of state government. As such it must follow laws passed by the ND legislature. DPI has no laws or duty to have any association with either NDEA or NDSBA (or NDCEL either) as far as I can remember without looking in a law book. NDEA is a professional association where individuals in the teaching profession pay a voluntary membership to partake of their services, go to their convention or get their insurance. The same for the NDSBA except it is for local school board members. NDCEL is for school administrators. That isn't to say that as Supt. of Public Instruction I wouldn't associate with any of them. I would expect each of them would invite me to attend their conventions and meet with them, and I would most likely do so. Also, I am aware of some boards, commissions, and committees made up of the Supt. of Public Instruction and representatives of one or more of those organizations, so there are some

professional relationships. I plan to have an "open door" policy where anyone would be welcome to discuss education issues with me including all of them plus parents, students, and others. The professional organizations are the experts in their respective fields, have their "boots on the ground", and all have some valuable insight into today's problems. I found the NDCEL when I was in the school administrator business was invaluable in bringing me the most up to date information when I wasn't able to be at a meeting in person to find out for myself. I've already met with their director as well as the NDSBA director to get up to speed on a number of issues in preparing for this race. As a legislator I've been lobbied by all, served on committees with all, and glean information from all. I know how to say "No" and when to be skeptical of their motives, too.