

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

Candidate: Tracy Potter

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 mostly around the edges in school policy in North Dakota. The state legislature sets the broad policy and even mandates some very specific things to be taught within that curriculum, and it recommends even more. Mostly the phrase is used to oppose post-Labor Day school opening legislation. But responsible local control is a more important concept than that, and not just local in terms of school districts, but local in terms of individual families. The state has an obligation to insure each child has, as much as possible, an equal opportunity for a great education, but after that, the family is the essential unit of local control over where and how that education is delivered.

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

I do not believe NCLB has been a success. Evidence that it has not is stark when you look at graduation rates and college entrance statistics from reservation schools. But it could never have been successful because its basis is wrong - judging schools and teachers on the test scores of their students is wrong. It is a natural impulse to want some form of accountability, but NCLB and Race to the Top and merit pay, etc., all share the mistake and provide the wrong incentives, driving schools to narrow the curriculum to things being tested, they encourage teaching to the test, and even well-publicized incidents of cheating by so-called educators.

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?

The Superintendent’s principle ability to influence education is as an advocate for our kids, using the office’s “Bully Pulpit” to suggest, inform, and encourage school administrators, teachers and parents about the best tools and methods available to prepare our students for college, and work, and life.

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

My only familiarity with the health curriculum is in reading the department’s recommendations. As bullet points, they seem necessarily vague. As Superintendent I will be asking the originators of the recommendations for details and background on their reasoning. My own view is that hygiene, nutrition and exercise information is very valuable.

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

The state agency represents the public. It is a tax-funded, regulatory agency with limited authority but a big megaphone to encourage innovation and build morale among the professionals in the teaching profession, many of whom are represented by NDEA. The school board association and the NDEA are like siblings - they battle with each other inside the house, but present a united front in supporting the broader cause of education. The Superintendent should work with them, but not for them.