

## Candidates for State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Primary Election - February 21, 2017

(Two highest vote totals advance to April 4 General Election.)

Position statements in response to the question from the Wisconsin Library Association:

**"How do libraries (public, school, academic) fit into your vision for an educated and economically strong Wisconsin?"**

(In alphabetical order)

**Candidate Tony Evers** <http://www.tonyforwisconsin.com/>

As your State Superintendent, I have the privilege of overseeing both public schools and public libraries. I often note that libraries have a history in this country of being the first institutions for learning, and they have maintained that role through countless changes in our society.

Today, our public libraries have placed lifelong learning at the core of their work, and I am proud of my record overseeing this critical public good. Whether this is working with young families and children on pre- and early-literacy skills, providing places for youth to pursue their homework or their passions, or places where adults search for and prepare themselves for new forms of work, the public library staff is there in every community ready to meet those needs. WLA's focus on workforce development and readiness perfectly complements my mission for every Wisconsin student to be college and career ready.

I am very proud of our library teams at DPI and how they contribute to these goals. Our youth services program has sponsored some of the very best continuing education events I've seen. The focus on that work is developing the next generation of leaders in youth services through professional learning cohorts. These folks have dug deep into research around literacy instruction and family engagement to develop powerful programming. They have also connected directly with the Academic and Career Plan effort, creating many examples of the public library engaging with their schools and employers in communities around the career pathway process. Under my leadership, we launching new technology activities in libraries, like the coding project giving librarians the background and resources to nurture development of these skills with youth in their communities.

My library team has worked extensively with the libraries and library systems to cultivate a greater array of workforce resources on the Job Seeker web page. Combined with the Badgerlink collection which includes numerous test preparation and employability skill tools, libraries have never been more critical to workforce development efforts. Our collaborations with groups like WLA and other agencies like the Department of Workforce Development to create even better and more responsive resources are particular areas of strength. The Governor recently stated that

effective economic development is grounded in workforce development. Our public libraries are certainly delivering on that idea in our communities.

Our school library media program is also engaged in the developing students who will be productive and effective workforce participants. They have recently completed an update to the state digital learning plan based on a model called Future Ready. Combined with recent proposed changes to the pathway for the library media specialist, we believe we now have the elements needed to promote this vital role in every school across the state.

To close, I want to commend WLA for its active efforts and thoughtful community engagement. The WLA "Libraries Transform" effort is the perfect example. Ideas coming from groups like the Aspen Institute chart a path to accomplishing this goal. The current library system redesign, the review of public library system standards, and the creation of a new 5-year plan all create authentic opportunities for us to move this thinking forward. Libraries, along with public schools, are the heart of our communities. Getting deeply engaged with community leaders to identify and solve the critical issues in every community are what our library leaders must and can do. I am so proud of the strides we have made to strengthen Wisconsin libraries and their connections to learning, and I look forward to our continued efforts together.

**Candidate Lowell Holtz** <http://www.kidservative.org/>

Few among us know Wisconsinites have cherished libraries and books for twelve years longer than our state's existence. During the very first session of the Wisconsin territorial legislature, in 1836, an expenditure was approved for \$5,000 to purchase books for a library. Such a long-enduring appreciation will only remain and grow - with your collaboration - under my leadership as Superintendent of Public Instruction.

State funding for libraries varied but remained relatively flat during Tony Evers' tenure, with \$17.2 and \$17.4 million expended in 2000 and 2015, respectively. By comparison, according to recent research of the MacIver Institute, our schools' unacceptably high dropout rates cost Wisconsin taxpayers approximately \$500 million annually. This startling number comes from a combination of reduced income tax revenues, the result of decreased wages from the roughly 365,000 dropouts residing in Wisconsin, combined with increased expenditures for the subsequent incarceration and medical care payments which they incur. While the state's proportion of funding will and should never come close to rivaling local sources, with the right intentions and strong leadership, a compelling case can certainly be made to invest more.

Despite Tony Evers' best intentions, Wisconsin has maintained the worst racial graduation gap in the country for two consecutive years. *With such results, after 16 years of his direction, it's clear we need new leadership.* But no matter how great our schools' teachers and facilities are, an educator's job is most effective when partnering with families - parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles - who maintain environments at home conducive to learning. Of course, where schools have failed disadvantaged communities for over a generation, we must collectively acknowledge that shortcoming and find ways to inspire family leaders to restore a passion for reading and learning. In this fashion, libraries can play incredibly important roles in our communities, while also stopping the frustratingly steady decline of visits since 2009.

Libraries are a seamless extension of our K-12 school system - before pre-school is commenced, throughout the calendar year, and after diplomas are earned. The staff and professionals operating our libraries are equally ready to help accelerate reading for early learners as they are to support current student needs, or retool career-changing job seekers. Alongside our K-12 schools, *Wisconsin's library system (public, school, and academic) is unavoidably central to our state's economic success and continued workforce development.*

While I look forward to hearing your members' innovative ideas for engaging our neighbors and their children, a few initiatives I envision would include:

- Self-funded community reading events. Partnering with businesses and community leaders to engage our neighbors in thought provoking reads and debate. The Big Read programs of UW and the NEA can serve as fine examples and offer resources.
- Revisiting past early learning initiatives. Analyze results for best practices and redeploy.
- Continuing ED project. Leverage library resources and the goodwill of retirees and other volunteers to embrace and mentor our neighbors seeking GED and HSED certificates.

Ben Franklin recognized the power of "making reading fashionable". As educators and librarians, it is incumbent upon us to accomplish the same. A few decades ago, a struggling single mother, with no high school diploma, forced a son to read two library books and write a report each week. Over the period of a year, that son moved from the bottom of his fifth grade class to the top in sixth grade. A revered pediatric neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson is now nominated to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and his life - and those of his patients - have never been the same.

I look forward to earning your vote and working together to make similar differences all across Wisconsin.

**Candidate John Humphries** <http://www.humphriesforschools.org/>

My vision for an educated and economically strong Wisconsin starts with a literate population. Wisconsin's rank among states in 4th grade reading has dropped from 6th in the nation in 1998 to 30th in 2013. The decline was not correlated with reductions in funding, increases in poverty, or changes in state government. Instead, we have lacked statewide leadership for literacy from the office of the State Superintendent. In contrast, the state of Florida, with higher levels of poverty and lower spending per student made tremendous progress in elementary literacy, going from 35th in the nation to top ten during the same years as Wisconsin's decline. Florida created a Center for Reading Research to identify effective curricula, interventions, assessments, and practices that could be used in schools. With great effort, they provided widespread training and monitored progress. Without a literate society, any vision for our collective future is bleak. Starting with our youngest children, Wisconsin must do better to create literate communities.

Unfortunately, we contribute to our own failures with a variety of poor decisions. Too often, we fail to adequately support collaboration between library/media specialists and classroom teachers to maximize the use of diverse instructional materials. Our library systems also collaborate too infrequently, working in isolation rather than in concert. We limit access and exposure to

materials for differentiation and from diverse populations. Finally, by requiring certification as a teacher in order to be licensed as a library/media specialist, we limit the supply of skilled professionals in schools. My vision for our future includes fully literate communities, vibrant libraries, healthy businesses, and thriving schools. Please help me work to improve literacy and libraries for every citizen in Wisconsin.