

# **2018 ISEA Legislative Candidate Interview Questions**

## **Quality Public Education for Iowa Students**

### **Name & District:**

The Iowa Legislature has significant control over the direction of our public education system and the profession of educators. The Legislature determines our funding and has great influence on educational programming. It controls issues like retirement systems, public employee bargaining, taxation and many other issues.

The ISEA represent education professionals who are very interested in your views on public education. We represent teachers, faculty and support professionals at our public PreK-12 schools, at 14 of 15 community colleges and at the Area Education Agencies.

### **School Funding**

Currently, Iowa law requires the Legislature to set Supplemental State Aid (SSA) 30 days after the Governor submits a budget. Previously, SSA was set a full 18 months ahead which gave school districts time to adequately plan their budgets. However, in 2017 legislation was passed eliminating this 18 month window leaving school districts at a disadvantage for budget planning purposes. Supplemental State Aid has had seven of the lowest rates in the last eight years causing over half of Iowa's school districts to be on the budget guarantee in FY2017-18 and FY2018-19. The ISEA encourages future SSA rates to be set at 4 percent or higher and to reestablish the requirement that SSA be set 18 months in advance. This will allow school districts to address the cost-of-living increases required to keep their doors open, maintain up to date curriculum and equipment, keep their class offerings stable and keep class sizes manageable.

1. Do you support setting SSA at 4 percent or higher?
2. Do you support reestablishing the law that required setting SSA 18 months in advance so schools have time to plan?
3. If you oppose setting SSA as previously prescribed by law or at 4 percent or higher please provide what programs you see as higher priorities and what changes you would make to the current law regarding setting SSA?

4. Do you oppose efforts to divert scarce tax payer dollars away from public schools in support of vouchers or other attempts to incentivize private school or home school attendance?
5. How do you intend to make sure public education is a priority in appropriating funds in the state budget?

### **Alternate Funding Sources**

An issue which must be addressed immediately is students living in poverty. Students living in poverty require supports such as dropout prevention, at-risk, special education, pre-school, ELL (English Language Learners), and child nutrition. In addition, addressing issues related to poverty along with providing basic adequate funding in the school finance formula will allow Iowa's public schools to continue to compete nationally and internationally.

6. Do you support creating a new funding source to address student poverty?
7. Do you support increasing funding and duration of programs like ELL, special education, dropout prevention, at-risk, talented and gifted and pre-school?
8. If you do not support addressing the issues mentioned in questions 1 and 2 what do you see as priorities for public education in Iowa?
9. Do you think educators should be at the table to assist in policy discussions impacting education programs (i.e. Teacher Leadership Compensation TLC, student assessments, and course curriculum)?
10. What is your top priority when addressing education? Home schooling and private schools or public schools?

## **Collective Bargaining for Public Employees**

Iowa's collective bargaining law, Chapter 20 of the Iowa Code, was dramatically altered in the 2017 legislative session causing the balance of the process to be skewed in favor of management and against public employees. This law had provided the structure through which educators and district management were able to address a limited number of issues to come to an agreement on a contract for district employees. This was a collaborative process that had worked well for 40 years prior to House File 291 being passed. The members of the ISEA would like to see the law restored and expanded. The scope of issues that can be bargained needs to be expanded as the previous law was considered very limited. In addition the law needs to address Just Cause in regards to discipline and discharge by allowing it to be bargained.

11. Do you support restoring collective bargaining rights for public employees?
  
12. Do you support expanding the topics that can be bargained beyond what was previously allowed by Chapter 20?
  
13. Do you support allowing Just Cause for discipline and discharge to be bargained?
  
14. If you cannot support the previous 3 questions please share your thoughts on collective bargaining for public employees?

## **Community Colleges**

Community colleges were established to be accessible and affordable for all students, from first generation college students to those in search of job retraining. Unfortunately, community college funding has not kept up with the needs of providing the important and vital programs of a fast paced 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. In fact, community colleges have incurred mid-year cuts in the last two legislative sessions. As Iowa touts a future ready workforce, it is obvious that community colleges should be central to the mission of making sure Iowa has a supply of high skilled workers to fill job openings. Our community colleges need increased state funding to allow affordable tuition and faculty salaries to be comparable to salaries paid in other states.

15. Do you support increasing community college funding and providing adequate, predictable increases in the future for their general funds?
  
16. Do you support direct appropriations to be used for salary improvements?

## **Education Support Professionals**

Many of our education employees who provide support services in our schools are not paid a living wage. At the same time, many of these positions now require additional training and certification. When these employees are laid off during the summer they are denied unemployment benefits—unlike their counterparts doing the same job for private businesses. A bus driver or lunchroom worker employed by a school district is denied these benefits while a bus driver or lunchroom worker employed by a private company qualifies.

17. Would you support adequate funding for education budgets to allow education support professionals in public schools to earn a competitive living wage?
  
18. Would you support changing Iowa law so education support professionals employed by a school district would qualify for unemployment and be treated the same as other employees doing the same work?

## **Area Education Agencies**

Iowa's Area Education Agencies (AEA) provide vital supports for the K-12 system. AEA employees provide special education consulting services and professional development support to districts working with federal education requirements and state reform efforts. The current funding provided to the AEAs reduces their full funding required by law for special education by \$22.5 million a year. The funds for special education provide direct services to Iowa's most needy students.

19. Do you believe the AEAs are an important part of Iowa's education system?
  
20. Would you support fully funding the AEAs which would eliminate the \$22.5 million annual reduction to special education services?

## **Iowa Public Employee Retirement System (IPERS)**

IPERS is the largest statewide retirement system and provides coverage to over 350,000 members or 1 out of every 10 Iowans. The system is a defined benefit plan that guarantees retirement benefits to retirees. The trust fund generates funds from investments and contributions from employees and employers (40 percent employee and 60 percent employer). The ISEA believes a defined benefit plan best serves Iowa employers and employees rather than a defined contribution plan (401k type plan) by allowing employers to attract and retain a high quality work force.

In addition, while the Legislature has served as an outstanding fiduciary, most retirement systems have appointed independent boards that serve this role. The ISEA supports an independent board of governors to be established as the fiduciary body of IPERS.

21. Do you support maintaining IPERS as a defined benefit plan into the future?
22. Do you support establishing an independent board of governors for IPERS?
23. If you are not able to support either of these questions please provide your rationale?

### **Taxation Policy for Iowa**

The Iowa Legislature has been addressing major tax policies this legislative session. The bills being proposed would reduce state revenues anywhere from \$1.3 billion to \$2.0 billion or 15 percent to 28 percent of total revenues. In light of the fact that the legislature has had to enact mid-year budget cuts the last 2 legislative sessions, while inadequately funding public education, it seems illogical to be enacting such revenue reductions. The members of ISEA continue to hear elected officials state that education is their top priority but when we reflect on legislative actions, it is clear that tax cuts especially for business and millionaires are the true priority.

24. Will you take action on funding for public education prior to taking action on tax policy that would reduce state revenues?
25. How would you address tax policies? What is your most important tax issue?
26. When reviewing future tax policy, would you support legislation that would require transparency, regular legislative review, adhering to progressive tax policies to help the middle class workers, and rescinding legislation passed in the last 5 years?