

**UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
CANDIDATE QUESTIONS**

2012

1. Describe the qualifications and experiences you would bring to the State Board of Education and how they would be an asset to the work of the Board.

Born in Texas, educated in Oklahoma, and now working in Utah, I have much experience in promoting and advocating for the sciences in States with traditionally conservative legislatures. After conducting federally funded basic research at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, I returned to my hometown of San Antonio, Texas, where I conducted federally funded translational therapeutic research at the Greehey Children's Cancer Research Institute. Due to my extensive background in preclinical sciences, I was recruited as an Application Development Scientist to lead the research and development arm of a private biotechnology startup which acquired a software startup in Utah. From (5) original members to (76) now, with sites in Bothell, WA and Salt Lake City, UT, I have demonstrated successful leadership in the contract research market, despite the dire economic challenges over that same period. Additionally, I currently sit on the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) Technology Commercialization and Innovation Program (TCIP) as an expert life sciences reviewer for distribution of grants-in-aid to local innovative companies, helping to further stimulate our State's growing life science economy.

As neither an educator nor administrator, I understand fully that I have an outsiders perspective, and that under normal circumstances, my candidacy would have long-shot odds for success. Fortunately, these are not ordinary times and my platform of advocating for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects is absolutely timely and relevant to the future success of our State's educational goals and will have a direct impact on the local economy.

2. Name three key things you would like to accomplish as a member of the State Board of Education.
 - 1) Implementation of and adherence to a STEM intensive curriculum.
 - 2) Recruitment of educators with strong backgrounds in STEM-based subjects.
 - 3) More comprehensive STEM-based industry guidance for secondary educational counselors.

3. What do you think are the two biggest issues or challenges facing public education in the state of Utah? Why?
 - 1) Public indifference and general misinformation regarding STEM subjects
 - 2) Budgetary reductions for public education

Regarding issue 1), it is deplorable that with seemingly endless digital and web-based resources for immediate educational supplement and/or confirmation, educators and students still face challenges to accepted basic tenets of the natural sciences (i.e. denial of evolution, Creationism advocates, global warming deniers, etc.). This has a profound chilling effect on public discourse and consensus solutions, while confounding the ability

of higher education professionals to begin instruction from an agreeable and consistent benchmark.

Regarding issue 2), once an educational system is perceived as sub-par, it is very simple for legislators to leverage the perceptions of their constituency towards reduced funding and closure of “underperforming” schools. This negative feedback loop is becoming endemic to the public school system nationally resulting in the local privatization of educational systems, further reducing consistency in national standards.

4. Describe the efforts you would make to communicate with your constituents and bring all stakeholders (state board, local boards, legislature, educators, parents) together to enhance public education.

I have learned that having feet-on-the-ground can dictate success or failure at the business level. Therefore, personal visits to local school sites would be conducted in general and if a particular school showed success or failure, I would attempt to best identify the root causes of each. Once these issues are identified, mass communication outlets like e-mail currently allow for rapid notifications to be sent to parents via blasts and professional social media (like GoTo Meeting) now allow for some amount of structured dialogue with online analytics and tracking. Should needs require and for those areas where it makes most sense, townhall meetings and direct mailing can be initiated for discussion. Once the most important items of the working agenda have been addressed publicly and targeted for remediation, measured feedback would then be condensed into items that will have had the consideration of teachers and parents for legislative action and drafting.

5. What would you do to improve the academic preparation of students as well as their transition to higher education or other post-high-school training?

With less than 30% of the US holding a bachelor’s degree, it is imperative that all students have access to higher education and that they are adequately prepared to succeed should enrollment occur. For those students identified as scholars and verbally committed to college, meaningful enrichment should be provided during all years of secondary instruction. For those students that are on the fence regarding higher education, junior college representatives will be enlisted to help promote the benefits of a gradual transition to a traditional four year university, along with the significantly reduced educational costs usually touted by administrators (often the “cheaper” designation has the unintended effect of de-valuing the option). Lastly, for those who decide not to pursue traditional higher education, it is vital that they be given direction to vocational training outlets. At all levels, the US work force is becoming ever more dependent on labor where a strong constitution is to include a marketable skill set.