

Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire

Explanatory Note: Our endorsements (and sometimes donations) are generally made to people running for the state legislature, municipal and county offices, public utility commissioners, etc. If you are running for such an office, you may wonder why we are asking questions about state-wide or national issues. The reason is that local officeholders are tomorrow's senators, representatives and governors. Even if you have nothing of the sort in mind now, you may easily feel differently in a few years. We want to put people into the pipeline from, as Howard Dean once put it, "the Democratic wing of the party." We are old fashioned enough to think that the New Deal and the Great Society were good ideas and modern enough to be up to speed on all the latest organizing methods and apps. If you have reservations about answering any of these questions, please explain why.

Candidate Name: Erin Jones

Position Sought: Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Campaign Manager: Karissa Braxton

Consultant: NWP Consulting

Campaign Email:erinjonesin2016@gmail.com

Campaign Phone: 206-779-2641

Website: erinjones2016.org

Campaign Address:

Do you request the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus? Yes

Labor

Do you support raising state and federal minimum wages? To what level?

Every employed Washingtonian should be able to make a livable wage. The current minimum wage does not allow workers to live in proximity to their jobs in King County. In King County, a livable wage would have to be at least \$15/hour.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

Although I don't get to make these decisions as State Supt., I support all efforts to make organizing unions easier.

Education

What is your opinion of high stakes testing? How would you change the way students and teachers are evaluated?

I oppose high stakes testing in every form. I believe high-stakes testing is damaging to both students and teachers. I believe the purpose of testing should be to inform instruction and help educators determine areas of focus for their instruction. I do not believe summative testing should ever be used to determine if students should move on or not. I believe results should be returned quickly in order to immediately provide feedback. Testing should not take weeks of time to deliver. The focus of our time with students should be on instruction and learning. For all of these reasons I believe the Smarter Balanced Assessment itself should be eliminated. The current Every Student Succeeds Act (which replaced No Child Left Behind) requires a state-level assessment, and I believe some assessment allows us to learn about both our students and gaps in instruction. The current SBA is putting undo pressure on the sys-

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tem. The pressure on our young students, in particular, is onerous. I would like to see a greater emphasis on formative assessment (short snapshots throughout the year). In my opinion, if we could eliminate the reliance on high-stakes testing, we could eliminate the pressure for educators to "hit every standard," which is what has happened in recent years. I would like to see more of a focus in our conversations about effective instruction - helping teachers develop more effective practices, especially pertaining to serving students of color, ELL students and SPED students. In addition, I do NOT believe any student tests should be associated with teacher evaluation. More specifically, if formative assessments become our norm, looking at growth is critical, but to associate a particular range of final scores with teacher evaluation is inappropriate and dangerous and would discourage teachers from choosing to work in communities where test scores have always been low.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

I oppose the privatization of public schools, but I am in favor of innovative school models, which would qualify under the current "Innovation Zone" or Alternative Learning Environment statutes. Charter schools are not good for our state, particularly because they are not held accountable to the public. Furthermore, staff in charter schools often do not have the protection of a union nor to much-needed benefits. Although charter schools claim to better serve black and brown students, the research on the movement demonstrates otherwise. Charter schools tend to have more punitive disciplinary practices and often cannot and will not serve the most vulnerable students (ELL, SPED) well, due to limits in staffing and the practice of cherry-picking the students who are accepted.

Environment

How would you promote development of alternative energy and prevent privatization of natural resources?

N/A to OSPI; however, our schools should teach accurate information about climate change and its ramifications as well as accessible alternatives to fossil fuels. Part of my responsibility as State Superintendent will be to sit on the Department of Natural Resources Board. My goal will be to represent the perspective of an educator - that we must promote solutions that are healthy for the environment and sustainable.

What are your plans for increasing investments in renewable forms of energy production? What types of renewable energy do you favor most?

N/A to OSPI; however, I personally support the state's divesting its interests in fossil fuels.

Finance/Taxation

What would you do to facilitate implementation of public banking and monetary reform?

N/A to OSPI; however, a state bank is a desirable first step.

What solutions do you propose to fix WA State's highly regressive tax system?

Our tax system is the most regressive in the nation. It is structurally imbalanced and we must make it more fair. Corporations should not receive tax breaks if they no longer serve the purpose of creating jobs, and we must find ways to make sure the wealthiest are paying their fair share. I believe our biggest businesses should be contributing equitably into the system. Though I am not running for a position that would control sunset tax exemptions, I think this would be critical.

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Health Care/Retirement

Explain your position (for or against) Medicare for All (aka single payer health care) in terms of the effect on local citizens, service providers, and government.

As someone who was raised in The Netherlands, I definitely support access to health care for all. It boggles my mind that not all American citizens have affordable health care. In my opinion, this is a human right.

What policies do you oppose and what policies would you promote with respect to Social Security and Medicare?

I believe as state government, we have a responsibility to care for all our citizens, ESPECIALLY our most vulnerable. Our senior citizens invested in this nation with their blood, sweat and tears and deserve to be cared for now by the nation in which they gave years of service. We must be sure to care for seniors and be sure their physical needs are met.

Security/Public Safety

How would you act to stop the militarization of local police forces and establish civilian oversight of law enforcement?

N/A to OSPI. However, I believe the people of the state should be in charge of local police, not our government. Police are not the military. They should be locally hired, trained and accountable.

How would you preserve national security while protecting American's right to privacy?

I believe there is already too much intrusion into our private affairs when it comes to the use of phones and email. I believe we need to be very cautious about infringing upon the privacy of citizens.

Social media is public and, therefore, open to public scrutiny. However, emails and texts are not meant for public consumption, and every effort should be made to keep it that way.

General

Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Do you consider yourself a progressive? Why?

I consider myself a Democrat with progressive values. I believe in making sure all people are cared for - health, housing, education. I believe it is the responsibility of those in power to ensure that, particularly the most vulnerable - newly-emigrated, poor, people of color, elderly, LGBTQ - are cared for and their rights are not impinged upon. I believe if we want a great America, it will require intentionally engaging and supporting populations of people who have been underserved or mistreated. Equity and social justice drive all that I do in my life, politically and otherwise.

What parts, if any, of the [Washington State Democratic Party Platform](#) (← click link to view) do you disagree with? Why?

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There is not one plank I disagree with. However, there are several things I think we must consider in order to make these a reality, more than words on a page.

-English language learning (ELL), special education, and accelerated and remedial programs to meet the needs of all students.

I do not disagree with this plank, although I would add that ALL educators need more training on how to better support these particular groups of students.

-Opportunities to study foreign languages

I do not disagree with this plank, but I would add that access to world language instruction should come earlier than high school and not just in "wealthier schools" (I learned my second language at 6, my 3rd at 12 and my 4th at 15th).

-Music and arts as important components of school programs;

I do not disagree with this plank, although I believe funding must be provided for staffing positions in every school building.

-All public education employees, including part-time faculty, should be accorded professional development and professional advancement opportunities, and must have the right to organize, engage in collective bargaining, and strike, without fear of reprisal or replacement;

I do NOT disagree with this plank. However, what should be added is that not only should public education employees be "afforded" professional development opportunities. They should be paid to participate in these opportunities.

If this is not your first election, what other offices have you run for? If it is your first campaign, what other campaigns (candidate or issue) have you participated in? What did you learn from those campaigns?

This is the first time I have run for office. I participated in a campaign for State House of Representatives while in college in 1992 in Philadelphia. I also had the opportunity to follow Dr. Terry Bergeson during her last campaign. I learned from that campaign that running for election is very complicated. However, having been involved in this process for a year, the last OSPI race was NOT AT ALL as involved as this year!

I have devoted the last 25 years of my life to serving my community - from running free basketball camps for urban children to opening a school for my neighborhood to helping my impoverished students in Spokane (who though they had nothing to offer) open a clothing closet to clothe their community and realize everyone has something they can contribute. The "issue" I have invested my life in is ensuring that every child with whom I have contact/connection receives the highest quality education possible. I have invested my time in classroom and my own personal time in this endeavor.

I learned that "fixing" schools is not just about what happens in a classroom or a building. Legislation and funding alone cannot "fix" schools. Creating incredible environments for ALL students requires the commitment and investment of EVERY stakeholder in the community - every business owner, every community non-profit, every state and local leader, every educator, every family member and every student. "Fixing" schools is a very complicated process. I learned that most people are more interested in complaining about the problem and not taking action. I learned that I want to be a woman who takes action, which is why I am running for office.

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Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?

I have never served in a formal role in the Democratic organization. I spent most of my adult life taking care of my own children, an orphaned child (who we have now adopted), a mother-in-law who is disabled and a variety of children who were abandoned by their families for a variety of reasons. I decided to become involved in party politics once I realized I could leverage my voice to have greater impact than just in a school building or district office.

What single issue is the most important motivator for your run for office? What proposals do you have for dealing with it?

The single most important motivator for me to run for office is the continued predictability of a child's education based on their race, zip code and home language. I have spent the last 25 years working to close gaps, as a community member, a parent, a classroom teacher, and an administrator. I have devoted hundreds of hours to training those in public education, those entering the profession and anyone else who is interested in serving young people. Training people is important, but I want to take what I have learned to support the system in a way that will have greater impact.

My proposal - I believe there are 4 things we must do differently as a system to close gaps for students, wherever those exist.

1. Staff - we must consider how we recruit, hire, train and support educators differently. First of all, we must develop a concerted effort to recruit educators of color. Our state is one of the states whose education staff least reflect the demographics of the students we serve. However, we must also do a better job of supporting the educators who exist in our system already. Our state is one of the "fastest browning" in the nation - in the last 15 years, districts that were predominantly Caucasian are now predominantly students of color, often boasting more than 50 different languages. This requires different skills and processes - both to support students and the teachers who serve them and to engage their families.
2. Family/Community Engagement - we must work more authentically with families and community organizations to recognize each as an asset to the work we do with students. The families are the first teachers of students. Many of the families who appear to be disengaged in public education either come from countries/cultures in which families are not expected/allowed to engage in the formal education process or do not know how to engage. The needs of our student populations are too great to be served by schools alone. We must develop formal partnerships with community organizations to better serve the Whole Child.
3. Whole Child - we must develop structures and systems to support all aspects of our student - mental, physical, academic, social-emotional and cultural. Students are able to learn at optimal levels when their needs are met.
4. Transitions - we are losing too many students in the gaps from early childhood to elementary, from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school and from high school to post-secondary (college, tech school, apprenticeship, military, career). We must do a better job of helping students and their families transition from one level to another, because there are distinct differences between each level, that when not addressed adequately, leave students insecure and unsupported.

Are there also important secondary issues? Describe your approach to implementing solutions?

Yes, especially the secondary issues related to full funding of McCleary, developing a new assessment system,

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promoting innovation:

- Funding: It is not the role of the state superintendent to fund education, or Randy Dorn would have been fined by the Supreme Court, not the State Legislature. However, I do believe it is the responsibility of the state superintendent to provide recommendations for prioritization of funding. My top 4 priorities, in order: 1. Fund school districts adequately, so they do not have to rely on levies to pay salaries and keep the lights on; 2. Pay all educators a cost-of-living increase (the absolute minimum we should do immediately to compensate educators), 3. Provide for the capital projects that will be necessary to add the number of classrooms to accommodate schools across the state to shrink class sizes; 4. Fully fund full-day kindergarten for all districts.
- Assessments: immediately end use of SBA; work with classroom teachers and test experts (not anyone connected to a particular test company) to develop a test platform that is manageable and useful - most assessment should be done by teachers in their classrooms.
- Innovation: I do not support charter schools, but I understand the desire for innovative school models. Not every student functions at optimal levels in comprehensive school settings. I would like to eliminate any red tape that is unnecessary and creating barriers for school districts to implement innovation more easily. I believe the job of OSPI should be to tell the story of innovative models that currently exist and are serving students well in order to help other districts implement similar models in their contexts.

If you are running in a heavily Republican area, do you have a reasonable chance at winning? If not, how do you plan to use your candidacy to build ongoing connections among local people who share progressive values?

I am running for state office, and the state has a large Republican influence, especially on the east side of the Cascades. I believe I have a great chance of winning. As the first Black woman to run for statewide election, I am going to attract a different demographic to engage in the process than any other candidate. I have already been endorsed by the King County Democrats, Young Democrats of King County, the 5th/36th/38th/39th LDs, and many other organizations and individuals. There are people who are registering to vote who have never voted before. Most of these people have beliefs that align with progressive Democrat values. I am committed to doing more than running a campaign. For me this process is about starting a movement, a different conversation about education, about the political process, about our collective voice.