



The Education Trust–West

2018 Candidate Questionnaire

Office: State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Candidate: Assemblymember Tony Thurmond

- 1) Newly released graduation rates show that schools continue to struggle to support all students on their path to graduation, with low-income students, English learners, and students of color, including Black, Latino, and Native American students not graduating at the same rate as higher-income students, non-English learners, or White students. What are your three top priorities when it comes to not just narrowing - but closing - these gaps across the state?**

First, we must increase funding for public education. In the recent Getting Down To Facts II report, we learned that we will not achieve the educational outcomes we seek for all students without a 32% increase in education funding. More funding would allow us to better deal with challenges such as the teacher shortage and expand programs that have demonstrated strong success like the Freedom School, an Afro-centric literacy program that improves reading by one grade level in 6 weeks and prevents learning loss. I think that the targeted investments this year geared towards low performing students, increasing accountability, and giving resources to the California Collaborative and County Offices of Education for their role in supporting districts in need of differentiated assistance are starts, but certainly more must be done.

Second, we have to ensure that every student is starting off kindergarten on the same foot. That means investing not only in universal preschool but also quality childcare and early education for children ages 0-5. I'm committed to funding these programs, and I've introduced legislation to tax private prison companies to create a revenue stream for early education and afterschool programs. I'm also aware that in some cases we are not maximizing existing funding. I worked with the Resource and Referral Network and First 5 to successfully pass legislation that will help connect parents to childcare and ECE programs already existing in their community.

Third, as a 20-year social worker, my priority will be to increase the number of counselors and expand access to mental and physical health services in our schools. California ranks last in the nation in counselors per student, severely limiting the ability of our education system to serve students dealing with trauma, behavioral issues and more. Each session I have introduced legislation to support the health needs of our students and provide services on campus. This year my bill AB 2471 was supported by school nurses, educators and social workers. You can read more about all of my priorities at www.tonythurmond.com/tonys-plan.

- 2) California is struggling to attract and retain teachers, especially teachers in STEM fields and those who reflect the demographics of our students. While the vast majority of California's students are from**

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communities of color, 63% of teachers are white. Teacher diversity matters for a multitude of reasons. If elected, what concrete steps would you take to diversity the teacher pipeline and incentivize teacher retention, especially among teachers in STEM fields and teachers of color?

As a state legislator, I've worked on legislation to provide affordable housing to teachers, expand professional development for teachers and provide scholarships for educators in training. We have to increase pay for teachers, who are among the lowest paid professionals in the state and invest in real professional development and support systems for our teachers. I would create a teacher training program for men of color specifically and focus on increasing teacher diversity across all grades and especially the elementary grades. Over the past year, I have had my legislative staff look into what is working in other states and the steps we can take to model those programs.

I want to work with parents, districts and institutions of higher learning to create pathways that recruit young men of color in early grades and provide them with training, mentorship and financial assistance necessary to enable them to have a productive career as an educator. I look forward to closing California's teacher gap with comprehensive solutions and by working hand in hand with teachers. I look to models such as the Office of African American Male Achievement within Oakland Unified as models of what is possible.

3) While California collects a substantial amount of education data, gaps in both collection and reporting hinder our ability to know how well students are learning and progressing through school, from kindergarten to college. Currently, we have no way to see where students from California high schools attend college and how successful they are, and it's difficult to have a full picture of how well our educational systems are serving low-income students and students of color. As a technology powerhouse state, it is unacceptable that we do not know how many of our high school graduates progress to and through higher education — something 45 other states can already do. If elected Superintendent, would you support a longitudinal data system, and if so, what specific steps would you take in your first year in office to put such a system in place?

Yes, I would strongly support a longitudinal data system that will help identify best practices in our schools and share those practices across the state. For example, right now 30 school districts across the state have created pilot programs to reduce chronic absenteeism using grants provided my bill AB 1014 which shifted \$40 million from prison spending directly to schools. At the same time, our school districts are struggling to report chronic absenteeism data which could make it difficult for the results from these

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programs to be proven and applicable to other districts. In my first year, I'll take action to support school districts in improving data collection until we have a comprehensive longitudinal data system.

This is not just a place where I talk the talk but also where I walk the walk. I think that more research and data will always allow us to make targeted investments that best support our youth. Data also helps us build the case for additional resources for those who might not otherwise be so easily persuaded. The aforementioned legislation that connects families to childcare resources will also integrate state systems so we can collect better data on outcomes for children with access to preschool programs and how those programs affect their success as students. Similarly, the permanent career technical education grant funding that I championed this

year also requires schools to report back on outcomes, workforce participation and other data points for students in the courses. My record is clear in building reporting mechanisms that allow us to monitor program success and better position our students.

4) Currently the California Department of Education collects student outcome data on 15 student groups within the Asian student category. However, that information is lumped into only 3 groups when the state reports it to the public. If you were to be the next Superintendent, would you support public reporting of student outcomes, disaggregated beyond the current 3 student groups reported?

Yes, on this issue my record is clear. I supported AB 176 (Bonta, 2015) and AB 1726 (Bonta, 2016) which would both have disaggregated data in health agencies, community colleges, CSU campuses and the UC system. Ultimately the Governor signed 1726 with amendments to restrict the disaggregation to health agencies.

We know that large disparities exist among subgroups in the Asian student category, and by failing to differentiate those subgroups, we are effectively ignoring the achievement gap that exists for Asian students including Filipino and Pacific Islander students. I would support changing the policy of the California Department of Education and report data differentiated by every category as collected, just as we have done in health agencies and just as I supported doing in higher education.

5) 1 out of every 5 students in California schools is an English Learner, and more than 2 out of 5 students speaks a language other than English at home. Last year the State Board of Education passed a landmark policy, the

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California English Learner Roadmap, to better support educators and schools in strengthening English Learner educational opportunities and celebrating multilingualism. If elected Superintendent, what would you do to prioritize the continued implementation of the Roadmap?

More resources will be available to support the Roadmap because of my legislation AB 2514 that the Governor signed last year. AB 2514 establishes the Pathways to Success Grant Program with the goal of providing pupils in preschool, transitional kindergarten, grades K to 12 with dual language immersion programs, developmental bilingual programs for English learners and early learning dual language learners program. The program will be administered by the California Department of Education, so as Superintendent of Public Instruction I would ensure the program is administered properly to support the Roadmap and also I would continue to advocate for more funding for bilingual education.

I was also proud to support the \$25 million in this year's budget for recruitment of bilingual educators. I have worked to continually provide funding for bilingual educator professional development.

Finally, I think one of the strongest ways in which we can support our English Learners is to stop the over identification of English learner students as being students with special needs. I was a proud coauthor of SB 354 which would require districts to translate IEPs into a family's native language expediently so parents can more fully participate in the process, in some cases contesting the student's designation. I also proudly supported AB 2735 (O'Donnell) which prohibits districts from denying English Learners enrollment in core curriculum courses. Research shows that EL students are less likely to be enrolled in core curriculum classes than non-EL students, effectively denying them educational advancement. I look forward to helping implement this bill as State Superintendent.

6) Although California's a-g rates have steadily risen, there are still significant disparities when it comes to which students are able to enroll in and complete the coursework necessary to apply to a UC or CSU campus. We know, for example, that only 65% of English classes are a-g approved in high schools in high poverty schools compared to 76% of classes in more affluent schools. And only 29% of Black 12th graders in the class of 2017 completed the a-g course sequence. What would you do to ensure more students of color and first-generation college students have access to a-g and other college preparatory opportunities?

When I was a school board member, we expanded A-G course offerings, and as a result we saw the percentage of graduates completing A-G courses increase from 11% in 2008-09 to 40% in 2012-13. I also started a program that helped students of color apply to top colleges. I think that often educators want

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to lower the bar to improve graduation rates or test scores, but that is only setting up students of color to fail in the 21st century economy. We have to provide a highly rigorous and highly supportive education to all students, including expanding STEM educational opportunities and investing in early math literacy programs.

All too often students get put on certain tracks, where they either receive education in preparation for career technical skills or college preparedness courses. I proudly introduced AB 3188 which would have incentivized schools to provide access to both course types to students. Indeed, research shows us that students with access to career technical education and college preparedness courses fare best in higher education and career earnings. This bill was vetoed by the Governor but I look forward to continuing to fight for equal course access and maximum student preparedness.

My top priority will be advocating for the resources our schools need to be successful in preparing all of their students for college and careers. I believe my experience, both as an educator working in schools for 12 years and as a politician advancing policy and securing funding for over 10 years, uniquely qualifies me to effectively create change in our public education system.

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