



2018 Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire

AFT Michigan is a union of PreK-12 teachers and support personnel, university faculty, staff and graduate employees, community college instructors and administrative employees and credit union employees. The mission of AFT Michigan is to strengthen worker voice, advance the education institutions in which our members work, and build a progressive movement committed to achieving these goals.

The AFT Michigan Administrative Board is considering endorsing a candidate for governor prior to the 2018 primary elections. Responses to this questionnaire will be shared with our local leaders and members, in addition to being posted on our website.

The deadline to submit the questionnaire is December 12, 2017. Completed questionnaires should be emailed to jrowe@aftmichigan.org.

AFT Michigan invites candidates who return this questionnaire to join us at our Leadership Summit on January 13, 2018. The forum will be held 12 p.m. - 2 p.m. with local leaders from across the state.

If you require additional space to answer questions, please attach additional documents. If you have questions or would like clarification on any part of the questionnaire, please contact Julie Rowe at jrowe@aftmichigan.org or (734) 735-8780.

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Candidate Name: Gretchen Whitmer

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Website: GretchenWhitmer.com

Candidate Signature:

Date: December 12, 2017

Please briefly describe your background (including whether you have ever held office, worked in public education, or been a union member).

I am a proud product of Michigan's public schools, from kindergarten through law school, and am the proud mom of two Michigan high school students. A former legislator and County Prosecutor, I've served as both a state Representative and Senate Democratic Leader, where I fought for our rights to collectively bargain and for our kids to get the education they deserve.

I've taught at two of our great public universities, Michigan State University and the University of Michigan, and am an inactive member of the Lecturers' Employee Organization at the University of Michigan.

PreK-12, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

YES	NO	Would you restore funding and increase investment in our public schools, colleges and universities?
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How would you approach tax policy to provide increased investment in education?

Michigan will be facing budget shortfalls and tough economic times in the coming years. The next governor of the state must be forward thinking and shield our still fragile state economy from the storm that is coming. Taking a holistic approach to reviewing our state's revenue system will be imperative to ensuring a 0-14 public school system that is well-financed and supplying our workforce talent pipeline. My greatest goal as Governor would be to have top quality, well-funded, high performing public schools as the leading reason new residents flock to our peninsulas and clamoring to call Michigan 'home.'

For K-12, Prop. A is nearly a quarter of a century old. The school financing system it created has proven antiquated. Governor Snyder's massive education budget cuts that paid for a \$1.8 billion business tax cut and the state population declining after the Great Recession caused tight district budgets, many with deficits. In addition, since 2013 Gov. Snyder has signed at least 27 bills that cut the School Aid Fund (SAF) by hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue. These school district financial problems could have been avoided had schools had a watchdog ally with the state legislature and not the hostile state policymakers they did have, policymakers hell-bent on creating unfairly advantaged competition and the privatization of the education service market. We absolutely should consider all alterations and alternatives to the 1994 law to ensure sufficient funding for a modern school system.

Community colleges and universities have seen a seismic shift in how they are funded, with state funding being slashed over decades. This has resulted in higher tuition as costs increase. Higher tuition results in less accessibility. This must be reversed.

To provide our students with the education they deserve we must change our state's tax policy. We must adopt real solutions that create fairness in the tax code to fund the things that will make Michigan the state people want to move to again. Any investment tax credit should be tied to creating good-paying jobs.

Also, alleviating some of the limitations on K-12 school financing, such as the restrictions on sinking funds, is one example of how state laws could ease constraints on district budgets until greater changes can be implemented.

How would you make education funding at all levels fair and equitable?

We can commit to fixing the broken and outdated school funding system we have now and assure that any new one is fair and equitable for all students, no matter what zip code or family they are born into.

Our school finance system needs to account for the fact that not all students have the same needs. We need to move toward equitable funding, which starts by acknowledging some students cost more to educate than others. Secondary pupils come with additional costs compared to their primary counterparts. Our school finance system needs to account for the fact that not all students have the same needs. We need to move toward equitable funding, which starts by acknowledging some students cost more to educate than others. Secondary pupils come with additional costs compared to their primary counterparts. Pupils in traditional brick and mortar buildings have greater per capita overhead costs than pupils enrolled in online schools. At-risk pupils require higher education expenses than their peers who are not at-risk. Illiterate at-risk pupils have higher expenses than literate at-risk pupils. The larger a school's percentage of at-risk, special education, English-language learner, and illiterate pupils is, the higher their costs are going to be.

Special education must be fully funded by the federal and state governments. Today in Michigan, districts take \$700 million from their general funds to subsidize special education.

Additionally, traditional public schools have always had greater costs than their charter counterparts due to required payments made to the Michigan Public School Employees' Retirement System. Although the 100% defined benefit MPERS has been, foolishly, closed, traditional public schools will still be paying legacy costs created by incomprehensible state policy, including privatization which reduced the number contributing to the pension fund. The state must provide financial assistance to districts to pay these costs. Districts cannot avoid the retirement system by privatizing services and charters cannot avoid the retirement system by contracting with private companies.

As Governor, I would propose budgets that provide adequate pupil funding, recognize appropriate circumstantially required supplemental funding for certain students, and protect districts from unnecessary increases to their MPERS legacy costs.

Similarly, for community colleges and universities, state funding must consider the populations these institutions serve.

How would you make our public education systems more holistic and cohesive, from early childhood to university?

Michigan needs a reimagined, more comprehensive, public education system. The 'K-12' scheme is outdated and will never get us to being a Top 10 state for education in the U.S. We advocate a '0-14' system, understanding that best practice mandates this.

The first 1,000 days of a child's life set the stage for his or her intellectual and social development and lifelong physical and mental health. Research concludes that the social rate of return for investment in high-quality early education is 13 percent. This investment is not only the right thing to do; it is the fiscally responsible thing to do. Michigan currently has the lowest eligibility requirement in the nation for the federally-funded childcare subsidy. Not only does this requirement deny families access to high-quality care, it foolishly leaves federal dollars on the table. High-quality childcare, as measured by the state's Great Start to Quality program, must be accessible and affordable in all of our communities.

Early identification of developmental delays can lead to early intervention. Early intervention is more likely to mitigate issues and, again, save the state money in the long run. We must establish a state revenue stream for Michigan's Early On program so that every child 0-3 years old can access the services and benefit from early intervention. The federal government currently partially funds this effort, but the State provides no support, leaving districts to carry the bulk of the load. Nearly 40 percent of Michigan's Early On participants do not require special education services during K-12, saving the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in special education programming. But two-thirds of Michigan's elementary aged special education pupils never receive Early On services because of inadequate and inconsistent funding for the program.

The benefits of learning before kindergarten are abundant and well documented. Michigan's publicly-funded commitment began in 1985 and led to what has become the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), a free to low income 4-year-olds state program. GSRP is just the first step in ensuring that all children 0-5 have access to high-quality learning opportunities. As Governor I will work to create our state's first universal preschool program, opening GSRP to all four-year-olds in Michigan. We can get there in three years.

The next governor of Michigan must fight to provide every Michigander with the opportunity to obtain the skills or education they need to support themselves and families. While college isn't for everyone, education is. Having a skill that commands a good job is imperative for every working Michigander. I will work to provide every resident the opportunity and the means to obtain such a skill. This means supporting high-quality Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that prepare students for employment.

The move to a 0-14 system is critical. Given limited resources, we must focus on our most vulnerable children and expand the system in a coherent way, carefully investing our tax dollars to yield the highest return.

How would you protect students, faculty, and staff from discrimination and harassment based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, religion, national origin, race, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender expression?

I sponsored anti-bullying legislation in the Michigan Senate, and championed the policy as good for pupils as it was going through the legislative process. However, when Republicans made changes at the eleventh hour to punch holes in what would become Matt’s Safe School Law, I was appalled. I warned my fellow legislators of how these obviously partisan exceptions they were creating would render the policy ineffective as to protecting students. Every student should have a right to a safe learning atmosphere, and the state’s laws should be conducive to that end, not the obstruction that it currently is. I want every Michigan pupil to be excited to go to school, to be in a classroom, and to learn in a collaborative environment. I will be proud to work to close the loopholes in our state’s anti-bullying laws.

Schools also need the resources necessary to have effective pupil protection and anti-bullying policies. My administration would work with districts to ensure schools are safe places for all pupils. I believe government budgets are a statement of our collective values, and I value diversity, understanding, and acceptance as strengths for Michigan. You will see my values reflected in the state budgets I would propose as Governor.

I have long advocated for expansion of the state's Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to cover the LGBTQ community and would continue to fight for this change as Governor. Expanding our civil rights laws to LGBTQ individuals would allow the state’s Department of Civil Rights to investigate discrimination claims against the protected class and enforce the law against employers who violate it. As Governor, I would appoint members to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission who value community and diversity, and a Department of Civil Rights Director who will enforce the Commission’s rules and decisions.

PreK-12 EDUCATION

YES	NO	Would you provide necessary funding to expand access to quality early childhood education programs?
YES	NO	Would you support mandatory full-day kindergarten for all students in Michigan?
YES	NO	Would you actively oppose all private school voucher proposals and other plans intended to divert taxpayer dollars from public schools to private schools?
YES	NO	Would you support legislation that would provide funding for local school districts to reduce their class size, particularly for schools serving high numbers of disadvantaged students?

YES	NO	Would you support policies to reduce the amount of standardized testing required for Michigan students?
YES	NO	Would you support policies to fully involve paraprofessionals in the development of students' Individualized Education Plans?
YES	NO	Would you restore the right of school support staff to bargain over privatization of school services?
YES	NO	Would you support requiring full financial and academic transparency of the education management organizations that run charter and cyber schools in Michigan?

What measures would you take to address the current educator shortage in Michigan?

If elected Governor, you will see me in schools thanking educators and school staff for the hard work they do. The public will see the Governor of Michigan commending educators, promoting the work they do, and highlighting the importance of their service.

The responsibility that educators have – educating the next generation of society – is arguably the most important job there is. In spite of this, the profession has not been held to the high level of respect it deserves by policymakers in Lansing. State government will undergo a fundamental change in this regard under my leadership from the executive office.

First, we must restore respect for the profession. This is a must if we ever expect more individuals to choose education as a career. This means ending attacks from Lansing on teachers and all school employees including respecting their voices by returning bargaining rights that were stripped away. This means no longer wasting taxpayer dollars on a lawsuit against educators and returning the 3% of their pay that unlawfully took \$550 million from teachers and school staff between 2010-2012.

We must also recruit and retain talented professionals. We should not weaken credentials or lower the expectations for those who wish to educate our children. Instead, we must ensure that there are quality education programs in colleges and quality professional development and mentoring programs for those already in and entering the field. This means reforming counterproductive educator evaluations. Currently, educator evaluations are either aimed at punishing teachers or seen as a bureaucratic hoop for districts. We need an evaluation system that focuses on promoting student learning through professional growth and development. Evaluations that have attached an educator's livelihood to standardized test score performance have narrowed curriculums and pushed educators towards a high stakes culture that often forces educators to focus more on testing than on learning.

Finally, we will recruit and retain educators when we show them that we value the work that they do. This means investing in their careers by increasing educator compensation.

How would you address the achievement gaps between groups of students based on race and socioeconomic status?

Michigan has a long way to go in this regard. In fact, a recent study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that African American students in Michigan fare worse than in any other state. All students can learn, and we must hold all students to high expectations. We must hold districts accountable for educating all students. We also need to stabilize the public education systems in communities of color, where uncoordinated charter school expansion has led to underperformance across the board and negatively impacted the resources available to many students.

Poverty is the most severe obstacle to student achievement. It impacts urban and rural communities. Counterbalancing poverty requires that our most needy students receive adequate resources and support services. Funding should be provided for schools serving at-risk populations to have wrap-around services to remove obstacles to children reaching their academic potential.

The reality is that to provide these services some students in some areas have a higher cost to educate than others. An at-risk student needs more resources than other students. A school with a high percentage of at-risk students will experience a higher expense per pupil than a school with a low percentage of at-risk students. Our school finance system has proven itself ineffective in this regard. I would work to address achievement gaps by taking on funding gaps by working towards solutions to fund Michigan schools so that we can refocus resources in a more equitable way.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

YES	NO	Would you support returning to a university funding model with the state providing the majority of university funding, allowing tuition to be very affordable?
YES	NO	Would you appoint people who support workers, and our freedom to join together in unions, to college and university boards?
YES	NO	Would you protect academic freedom from partisan attacks?
YES	NO	Would you support repealing the prohibition on allowing graduate student research assistants to unionize?

What would you do to make public college and university education affordable?

When I was the Senate Democratic Leader, I introduced the Michigan 20/20 plan that would have offered every Michigan high school student a debt-free education at one of our public colleges or universities, and I paid for it by closing business tax loopholes. As Governor, I would provide every Michigander with the opportunity at any point in their life to obtain the skills or education they need to get a good-paying job by making college tuition free for two years.

Having a skill that commands a good job is imperative for every working Michigander, and will help our state address the talent pipeline shortage that we are already facing.

I would like to see every Michigan high school student graduate with a plan. Students who have a plan for what they are going to do after high school are more likely to succeed.

How would you address the discrepancies in compensation and job security between tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty at colleges and universities?

Colleges and Universities depend on non-tenure track faculty to provide excellent education at extremely low cost. Funding must be provided so that non-tenure track faculty receives pro-rated pay as compared to tenured faculty. How a higher education institution compensates its adjuncts, and all employees, should be a factor in determining state funding support.

How would you reverse the erosion of tenure-track faculty positions?

While non-tenure track faculty are excellent educators, tenure-track faculty are the foundation of higher education. The erosion of tenure-track faculty puts the stability of the profession at risk. The quality of the institution can be affected when our colleges and universities do not make the kinds of commitments to educators that ensure academic development and recognition of scholarly performance.

How would you address the expansion of online education in higher education?

Technological developments in online education have increased access for students, but while strictly online education works well for some students, it does not meet the same needs as an educator in the classroom. What's more, traditional universities and colleges play an irreplaceable role in developing curricula and driving innovation. It's fair to say that while technology can enhance the teaching and learning experience, research demonstrates that nothing beats a high-quality teacher or professor in front of students in a classroom. To the extent that institutions of higher education eliminates classroom experiences in favor of online-only classes, then the state funding those institutions receive should account for the reduced costs of online-only learning, as well.

LABOR RIGHTS

YES	NO	Would you champion efforts to repeal existing "right-to-work" laws?
YES	NO	Would you champion legislation to restore collective bargaining rights stripped from the Public Employment Relations Act, including returning the ability to negotiate teacher evaluation procedures and PreK-12 payroll dues deduction?
YES	NO	Would you publicly affirm the importance of unions and urge employers not to interfere when workers are deciding whether to form or join a union?

YES	NO	Would you be willing to issue statements, write letters, and attend rallies supporting organizing campaigns to support the rights of workers to form a union?
YES	NO	Would you oppose legislation to further erode the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees?

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

YES	NO	Would you support raising the state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour?
YES	NO	Would you oppose state budget cuts that weaken the state's social safety net?
YES	NO	Would you support repealing the pension tax, restoring the homestead property tax credit and restoring tax deductions for children, charitable contributions, college tuition and adoption expenses?
YES	NO	Would you support paid sick day legislation?
YES	NO	Would you support creating a progressive income tax structure?
YES	NO	Do you support prevailing wage for construction work?
YES	NO	How would you work to end pay discrimination against women and people of color?

How would you work to end pay discrimination against women and people of color?

As a state legislator, I introduced bills multiple times to create a state commission on pay equity. This commission would set definitions of "comparable wages." As Governor, I would set the example for private employers by issuing an Executive Order declaring equal pay for comparable work the standard, not the exception, for all public employees.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

YES	NO	Would you support efforts to promote greater voter participation, including early and no reason absentee voting?
YES	NO	Would you support efforts to reform the redistricting process to eliminate partisan gerrymandering and bring fairness to the drawing of legislative and congressional district boundaries?