

Their VIEWS

Gubernatorial candidates discuss their ideas for public education

On Nov. 2, Wisconsin will vote a new governor into office. After serving two terms, Gov. Jim Doyle announced this spring that he would not be seeking re-election.

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett emerged as the top choice of Democrats and Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker received the Republican endorsement.

With the economy still recovering and many big questions surrounding public education, the new governor comes into office during a critical time.

Wisconsin School News asked both candidates a series of questions aimed at revealing their views for public education.

SCOTT WALKER



The son of a preacher, Scott Walker grew up in the small town of Delavan, Wisconsin. Growing up, Scott's family didn't have a lot. Those lean times taught him to do more with less and he believes government should do the same.

According to Tonette, Scott's wife of 17 years, he is every bit as fiscally conservative when it comes to his personal finances. Scott drives a 1998 Saturn with 100,000 miles on it and packs the same brown bag lunch before heading to the office to save money: two ham and cheese sandwiches on wheat with mayo.

When it comes to serving the public, Scott Walker puts his money where his mouth is. From 2002 through 2010, Scott and Tonette Walker have given back over \$370,000 of his salary to the county.

As Milwaukee County Executive, Scott has cut his debt by 10 percent, reduced the size of his workforce by 20 percent, and introduced eight consecutive budgets without a property tax levy increase from the previous year – even having an \$8.9 million surplus in his most recent budget.

As Governor, Scott Walker will fight to get government out of the way and lower the tax burden so the people of Wisconsin can create 250,000 jobs in our state by 2015. His six-point plan can be found at 250000jobs.org.

Biography provided by Scott Walker.

for public education

WISCONSIN SCHOOL NEWS:

Why should you be elected governor in November?

TOM BARRETT: The people of Wisconsin deserve an adult in the governor's office who is on their side and focused only on getting things done. My record of doing just that proves that I am the right person for the job. I have real and specific plans to create jobs, get our economy moving, and solve the budget deficit.

As governor, I'll bring straight talk and honest plans to the table to work for the future prosperity of Wisconsin.

SCOTT WALKER: First, I love this state and I believe in Wisconsin. I also believe that the current governor is taking this state in the wrong direction. I want to get Wisconsin working again.

The next governor should have the proven ability to take on the

political machine and fundamentally change the way government does business. I am the only candidate running for governor who has faced and successfully addressed the same types of challenges the State of Wisconsin is facing. With a \$2.7 billion budget deficit and the worst economy in generations, we need experienced and innovative leadership in Madison.

When I became Milwaukee County Executive in 2002,

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TOM BARRETT



Tom's career in public service has been marked by his integrity, his respect of diverse views, his ability to bring people together, and for his hard work. As the current mayor of Wisconsin's largest city, Tom has created, attracted and

saved jobs in Milwaukee, solved a budget crisis, substantially reduced crime, and worked to keep the economy on track. Tom will fight for a stronger Wisconsin for all of us in the governor's office. His vision for our state features a strong economy with

more good jobs for Wisconsin families and workers, and leadership that brings people together to solve the problems before us.

As the husband of a teacher and father of four children, Tom understands the complex issues that face our education system, and he strongly believes that education will be key to giving Wisconsin's future leaders the tools to be prosperous in a global economy. He has fought for Wisconsin's schools since his days in Congress and has continued to prioritize schools as mayor. Tom's passion for education will continue as governor, and protecting education will be an urgent priority in the Barrett Administration.

Biography provided by Tom Barrett.

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"I want to allow local school districts to change compensation to pay for performance."

— Scott Walker



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I inherited a pension scandal that threatened to bankrupt the county. During my tenure, I have cut the debt by 10 percent, reduced the county workforce by 20 percent, improved our bond rating, and introduced eight consecutive budgets without a property tax levy increase from the previous year — we even had a multi-million dollar surplus in my most recent budget. At the same time, we preserved services, including reducing the waiting list for long-term care and improving our parks system, which was recognized in 2009 with the national gold medal.

In short, I've done it before and I can do it again in Madison.

WSN: *As governor, how would you help school boards improve overall student achievement and narrow the achievement gap?*

BARRETT: Education is a key component to keeping Wisconsin competitive in a global economy. As Milwaukee mayor, I have worked with educators, parents, non-profits, and businesses to build strategies and partnerships that benefit students in the classroom. We worked together to increase academic perfor-

mance and solicit more private sector partnerships and resources for classrooms and teachers. I would employ those same leadership skills and commitment to education at the state level.

WALKER: I have two very important reasons to care about improving student achievement — Matt and Alex (my two sons). I believe all Wisconsin children, regardless of zip code, should have access to the best education possible. I believe the state's proper role is to set high achievement standards and then give local school boards the tools to get the job done. Too many districts, administrators and teachers are held back by micro-managing mandates from state government.

I want to restore the QEO to control wage and benefit costs.

I want to broaden arbitration so it includes comparables with public and private employers.

I want to cap state mandates and repeal unfunded mandates.

I want to allow school districts to join the state employee health plan.

Finally, I want to allow local school districts to change compensation to pay for performance.

WSN: *Since 2005-06, state general aid to school districts has been held essentially flat. In the last budget, general aids were cut and revenue limit increases reduced. Many districts are experiencing declining enrollment, further reducing the available resources to continue strong educational programs. What are your plans for school funding reform? What is the proper role of the state in funding schools and what should be the mix of state and local revenues to operate schools?*

BARRETT: Reforming how schools are funded will be a priority for me as governor. The way in which Wisconsin currently funds its public schools is not working for anyone — taxpayers, school districts, parents or students.

The current school funding formula creates camps of winners and losers, yet every child should have an equal opportunity for a great education no matter where they reside. We must find common ground with all of our educational stakeholders and bring all the ideas to the table. We must also recognize state government cannot address each school district's unique qualities with a one-program-fits-all mentality.

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"I will bring community and education stakeholders together to create meaningful school finance reform that works on the local level."

— Tom Barrett

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WALKER: Clearly, our education funding formula needs to be replaced with a fair system that ensures all students receive a high quality education. More importantly, we have to help school districts bring their expenditures in line with revenues and restore balance to the collective bargaining process. Restoring the QEO, tying it to revenue caps, and reforming the mediation/arbitration rules to allow for the weighting of local economic factors must be top priorities.

WSN: Last session, the governor and Legislature repealed the qualified economic offer (QEO). However, the disparity between revenues and expenditures continues. Do you support aligning teacher compensation increases with revenue limit increases in order to maximize resources for students? What specific proposals will you offer?

BARRETT: The fact is that the QEO still saw property tax increases during the time that it was in place, and we are seeing decreases in contract negotiations since its been repealed. I believe in honest and fair bargaining that respects local economies.

WALKER: I support aligning teacher compensation increases with revenue

limit increases. For too many years, districts faced a ratcheting effect of personnel costs increasing faster than allowable revenue. With the repeal of the QEO, these problems have only gotten worse. I will restore the QEO and tie it to revenue caps to bring expenditures in line with revenues.

WSN: With the state facing a projected \$2.7 billion shortfall in the 2011-13 budget cycle, how would you give local school boards the flexibility to prioritize the needs of students and maintain quality programs with limited revenues? Are there particular state mandates that you would propose to eliminate or relax?

BARRETT: Community members are in the best position to run their local schools. The state's current public school funding is an unsustainable one-size-fits-all system that simply doesn't work for every community and its local property taxpayers. Raising property taxes is not the solution — we need to find a fairer way to equalize funding to our school districts that still respects local control.

As governor, I will bring community and education stakeholders together to create meaningful school finance reform that works on the local level. School boards must find more

efficient ways of providing administrative and non-instructional services, including collaboration amongst school districts to provide similar services like school administration, human resources, and purchasing.

WALKER: As governor, I will put a cap on state mandates and will repeal unfunded mandates. This includes everything from the 180-day mandate to requiring physical education for varsity athletes.

WSN: How would you help school boards further integrate the use of technology in K-12 education? What is your vision of the future of public education in Wisconsin?

BARRETT: Wisconsin's future workforce will need to be able to adapt quickly to the fast-paced and constantly changing marketplace. Our whole education system — from kindergarten to technical schools and colleges — needs to empower the people of our state with the skills to be competitive in a global economy. Wisconsin must invest in world class research and development initiatives that improve quality of life with groundbreaking advances while also harnessing cutting-edge technology to create the jobs for a 21st century economy.

WALKER: We have to make sure that our students are learning the 21st century skills they will need to succeed. I believe a more equitable bargaining process will free up funds that can be used to pay for computers and other technological upgrades.

Advancing technology in our classrooms will help further our state's long time goal in education, which has been to provide a high quality, equal education to students regardless of where they live. We are at the beginning stages of innovative uses of technology in education and need to aggressively push for innovative options. Online learning can customize curriculum for individual students and track their specific progress more efficiently. Technology will open up a new world of learning opportunities for students that they may not be exposed to otherwise.

WSN: *Do you support expanding the use of vouchers for students to attend private schools using taxpayer dollars? If so, what might this expansion look like?*

BARRETT: The accountability measures passed in the last legislative session, which I supported, have made expanding voucher limits unnecessary at this time.

WALKER: I support lifting the enrollment caps for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Parents should not be forced to send their children to failing public schools in Milwaukee. We should encourage alternatives like choice and charter schools to give every child an opportunity to succeed regardless of where they live.

Moreover, the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates that most districts around Wisconsin stand to lose revenue, not gain it, if this program were eliminated (because the Milwaukee Public Schools spend close to \$14,000 per student while the voucher schools

get less than \$6,500 per student).

Expanding choice will put more money back into state school aid. This will help school districts all over Wisconsin such as Wauwatosa where I live, or Delavan-Darien where I grew up.

WSN: *The cost of providing health insurance in many Wisconsin school districts is excessive and reduces school boards' ability to offer appropriate salary increases. Would you support giving local school boards the authority to offer their employees the state health insurance plan, or a plan deemed comparable by the state insurance commissioner, without negotiation? Or do you have another plan for addressing school districts' rising health care coverage costs?*

BARRETT: I support the formation of larger purchasing pools, and I have offered a plan to include local government employees into the state program. Furthermore, I support continuing the current ability of local school districts to opt into the state health insurance.

WALKER: I have already announced my plan to allow school districts to enroll their employees in the state health plan without subjecting the choice to collective bargaining. Our research indicates this could save school districts \$68 million per year and possibly more. I also think districts should have the flexibility to switch to another private plan if it provides similar benefits for lower costs.

WSN: *Do you support school boards' efforts to allow the use of student achievement data as measured by state assessments as one component in evaluating teachers? Why or why not. Would you support school boards' efforts to more easily remove ineffective teachers from the classroom? Why or why not.*

BARRETT: I believe student achievement data should be used as one of the criteria in state assessments, and having effective teachers in the classroom with the necessary resources is crucial to students' success.

WALKER: We have to have a student-focused education system and we can't have that if we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that teacher performance impacts student performance. I support the use of testing data as one factor in evaluating teacher performance.

Overall, I want to give local school districts the ability to reward good teachers, mentor those who need it and replace those who are failing to teach our kids well. Everywhere else in life we pay for performance. It is time we did it in education, too.

WSN: *What do you believe is the state's role in governing public education? What do you believe is the local school board's role in governing public education?*

BARRETT: Local control is important in public education, as is the state's role of setting standards. The state must ensure that students receive an equal education that prepares them to compete in a global economy regardless of what school district they attend.

WALKER: I believe the state has an obligation to ensure adequate funding for all students, regardless of the relative wealth or poverty of any individual school district. I also believe that with this funding comes a demand for accountability and transparency. Local districts must then be charged with achieving these high standards in a manner consistent with the values and priorities of each individual community. Working together, the state and local districts can ensure every student receives the opportunity to succeed. ■