

# Florida PTA Candidate Questionnaire

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Name: \*

Philip Levine

Candidate for: \*

Governor

1. What are your top priorities for improving public education? In your opinion, what do we do well as a state and how can we improve Pre-K-12 education?

We will adequately fund public schools, we will pay our teachers a fair wage and a nationally competitive salary, and we will end the culture of high-stakes testing. We will not end testing, we must make sure that our children's progress is measured, but we must do so in a way that helps diagnose problems and ensure kids who need help in certain subject areas receive it. A child's grade on one test alone should not determine if they pass or fail a grade—that is not the way to inspire children to learn and grow.

## 2. How will you ensure that public schools are adequately funded and operate effectively so that all children achieve academic success and reach their full potential?

The state has a constitutional requirement to fund and administer a highly quality public education system, and we need to make it the best that it can possibly be. That means putting funds going to charter schools back into our public schools so that every child, regardless of what community they live in, can get a high-quality education. We should be investing in our public education system first and foremost. Public funding should not be used to support privately managed, for-profit charter schools.

If charter schools are looking to expand in Florida they should do so on their own dime, not using taxpayer dollars.

Many charter schools serve children with disabilities, and these are important and necessary to many families. We will prioritize investment in our public schools and work to improve them so they can fulfill their requirement of providing a high-quality education for all students.

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## 3. What efforts will you take to ensure that culturally/critically responsive instruction is the norm and not the exception?

I am committed to instruction that represents the diversity of Florida and our nation as a whole. First, I will assure that any and every appointment that I make in the field of education has this same commitment. We will also assure that the state standards for instruction enforce an accurate and truthful depiction of our history. Second, I will use the powers of the Governor's Office to build a strong Department of Education that ensures everyone understands that the number one goal of our education in the state of Florida is to make sure that our students possess the knowledge and skills to work and live successfully with and in all measures of our communities.

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#### 4. How do you plan to expand bilingual education opportunities for English Language Learners and teachers alike?

I will make funding for bilingual education available across the state—we will prioritize access to make sure that students in areas without teachers who teach certain languages can have the opportunity to learn them.

In many nations across the globe, students emerge from their secondary education fluent in two languages, sometimes more—I see no reason why we should not set our goal as the same, that every student who graduates from high school has competency in at least one language other than English. We can achieve this if we make it a priority and put our students in a much better position to succeed.

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#### 5. How can the government effectively partner with parents and families to support student and school success – especially in underserved communities?

My administration will build a partnership, a network, of education stakeholders—parents, PTA, teachers, other school staff, and more—to ensure that we are listening to the people who know the issues firsthand. Our approach will be bottom-up, not top-down, to ensure that we are incorporating local feedback to combat problems at their core.

My Department of Education will monitor underserved communities to determine which need help and the best course of action to take to remedy the issues. Communication, inclusion, and prioritization of adequate funding will help us to take the proper steps to strengthening underserved communities and building better public schools for our kids.

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## 6. What are you going to do to incorporate the voice, participation, and leadership from parents in order to close the gap in academic achievement for students of color?

I am determined in every aspect of my policies that my administration will assure local participation in decision making. I will end the practice of preemption—which is done usually for explicitly anti-democratic reasons. The Republican party has had twenty years to make progress in closing the achievement gap. Yet they have underfunded our public schools, reduced the availability of support services to students, and diverted money to private education that should be used to assure excellence in all of our schools.

So, to begin with, I am going to reverse these trends. State support for public schools will be increased, partly by ending the diversion of resources to privately-run charter schools. I will make sure that those public schools with the greatest need receive increased funding first.

I envision the creation of community based schooling where our schools become the key place for people to connect with needed services. As an example, teenage pregnancy often derails the educational attainment of talented students. We should provide scientifically accurate, age appropriate information to students about pregnancy at school to try to help students make wise choices. But we should also provide or connect young women to social services including childcare that will enable them to complete their education. Making schools places that connect kids in need to community resources cannot be achieved overnight, but it can be done with full collaboration with administrators, teachers, service providers and parents, and that is where the PTA comes in. As Governor, I will build a partnership with the PTA and other public education stakeholders to ensure that our children are being put in the best position to succeed.

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## 7. How would you ensure that the constitutional requirement for a safe and secure school environment is provided to every child?

I'm proposing a new Education Security Administration in Florida—the first of its kind in the nation—to make Florida's schools the safest in America. The ESA will replace the Office of Safe Schools, and will protect places of learning with focused, cost-effective school hardening initiatives. These include:

- At least one safe school officer for every campus across the state.
- A trust fund dedicated to school hardening infrastructure improvements.
- Comprehensive anti-bullying and mental health services in every school.
- And a network between ESA officials and school districts to ensure best practices, including the kind of communication and intelligence sharing that can stop a bad situation from becoming a tragic one.

No money for this initiative will be taken from general education monies, but from a fund whose sole purpose is to keep our children safe. Not by arming our teachers, but securing our schools. No matter what neighborhood you live in, our kids must feel safe going to school.

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