

Florida PTA Candidate Questionnaire

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Name: *

Gwen Graham

Candidate for: *

Governor of Florida

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?

Twenty years of Republican rule in Tallahassee have starved our public schools and hindered the PTA's ability to fulfill its mission. As a mother, former PTA president and public school official, I am committed to restoring our promise to public schools.

As governor, I will strengthen Pre-K-12 education by ending high-stakes testing, arbitrary school grades, and the lottery shell game. It's time we reduce class sizes, pay teachers what they deserve, and put local communities and parents back in charge of education. We must stop using public funds to finance private schools.

It is this dedication to improving our public schools that earned me the endorsement of the Florida Education Association, which represents more than 140,000 Florida teachers and school support professionals. Earning the support of Florida's teachers and school support professionals means the world to me — as would support from the Florida PTA. When I am governor, our parents and teachers will finally have a voice in the Governor's Office.

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?

Florida's public schools and students have been severely hurt by the growth of charter schools and the privatization of our public school system. Tallahassee has been bought and sold by the education industry, with corporations making millions off these for-profit charter schools and high-stakes testing.

Instead of focusing on how taxpayer money can be used to benefit private schools, we need to refocus our attention on our drastically underfunded public schools. As governor, I will ensure public schools are given the financial resources they need to succeed.

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

In order to ensure our state's education system promotes culturally and critically responsive instruction, we must ensure that the ability for local school boards to include such instruction is not preempted by state politicians with Tallahassee-knows-best attitudes.

While the State of Florida should be a good partner and work closely with local stakeholders, local school districts have the best knowledge about what it takes to maximize the potential of the schools in their specific communities. As governor, I will ensure we empower our local school boards to assist with culturally and critically responsive instruction.

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

One of Florida's greatest strengths is our unique diversity. We attract new residents from all over the world, which makes it critical that we have effective bilingual educational programs. I will work with the Florida Department of Education and local school districts to enhance bilingual education opportunities and provide teachers and students the tools they need to thrive.

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

I launched my campaign for governor in Miami Gardens, after spending a full day working at Carol City Senior High. This high school has been rated a D or F for years and was starved for support.

As governor, I will fight for every child to receive a quality education no matter what zip code they live in or their family's background. I believe we need to end the arbitrary system of school grades and promote accountability that actually helps schools improve.

As a former PTA president and proud parent of three public school graduates, education will be my top priority as governor — and I will take a personal role in visiting and helping to improve schools across our state, especially those in underserved communities.

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?

All of Florida's students, regardless of race, deserve a quality education. I have held educational roundtables across Florida with parents from diverse communities, and, as governor, I will continue to listen to them for ideas and solutions to improve our schools.

When I am governor, I will direct my administration to investigate any systematic gaps which prevent students of color from fulfilling their full academic potential and determine the solutions needed to fix those gaps.

One place we can start is ending the high-stakes testing that punishes students and leaves too many behind.

I will also ensure the State of Florida provides all schools with adequate funding and access to the educational infrastructure and technology needed to help teachers and students succeed. As governor, I will work with all students and communities to provide a better academic future for Florida's children.

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

The Legislature must fulfill its obligation to provide Florida's children with a safe and secure school environment as required by Article IX of the Florida Constitution.

After Sandy Hook, I heard firsthand from teachers in my local school district who were worried that the Legislature would want them to carry guns in schools. Standing with Broward teachers at a rally for school safety just days after the shooting in Parkland, I listened to Stoneman Douglas survivors beg our state's leaders to act. Hearing this, I took action. I called on Rick Scott and the Legislature to fund school safety measures that keep our teachers and students safe.

Unfortunately, they did not do their jobs. We ended up with a school safety bill that included an extremely concerning provision that allows the arming of teachers but did not include a ban on military-style assault weapons or a requirement to make background checks universal.

To make matters worse, Rick Scott signed an education budget which adds a measly 47-cents per student increase for education. He then ignored educators who asked for a special session to increase school funding.

Enough is enough. Teachers and students deserve schools where they can teach and learn without worrying about their safety. We must do everything in our power to prevent tragedies like the one at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School from happening again.

When I am governor, I will seek to fix the flaws of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act. On my first day in office, I will sign an executive order to ban the sale of military-style assault weapons and implement universal background checks. And, I will hold the Florida Legislature accountable for full funding, which I define to include the cost of inflation and student population growth as well as any additional funds needed to ensure a safe and secure environment for Florida's students.

If the Legislature won't work with me on these commonsense priorities, I will use my bright red veto pen to reject their pet projects and bring them back to Tallahassee over and over again, until they get it right.

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