

Candidate Questionnaire: Superintendent of Public Instruction

WY students who scored below proficient in math and reading by family income (2008-09)*

	3rd Graders		8th Graders		11th Graders	
	low-income	others	low-income	others	low-income	others
Math	59%	39%	51%	32%	53%	34%
Reading	27%	14%	49%	29%	49%	32%



Definition: Students who scored basic or below basic level on the PAWS exam in math and reading. Low-income children are those eligible for free or reduced lunch. Those at or below 130 percent of poverty are eligible for free lunch. Students from households with incomes higher than 130 percent but at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Line, are eligible for lunch at a reduced price. Others are defined as all other students, those who are not eligible for either lunch program.

Data Source: Wyoming Department of Education. Data analysis by Wyoming Kids Count project.

About this questionnaire: Candidates were provided the above data and additional data comparing students disaggregated by race/ethnicity groups. Candidates were asked to respond in 500 words or less, total to the following two questions: **1)** As Superintendent of Schools, what measures would you take to address disparities in academic performance revealed by PAWS testing, and what would you do to advance academic success generally? **2)** The Casper Star Tribune (8/27/10) reported, according to a third-party analysis conducted by the Center for Assessment, technical problems with administration of the 2010 Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS) had little if any effect on student achievement. However, it is well-documented that the state has had significant technological and administrative problems with the PAWS exam. As Wyoming Superintendent of Public Instruction, how would you approach statewide, standardized testing for K-12 Students?

Cindy Hill

Question 1

All students matter, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, economic status or disability. Data should be disaggregated so schools can figure out what instruction works for each student. For me as a practitioner, every student has a face and this face cannot be ignored. Every student must reach his or her highest potential.

As someone who has been in the trenches working for school improvement, I know teaching kids is challenging. To be effective, the whole school needs to organize itself around successful student learning. Our work in my last school paid off: our special education population grew from 2% proficient to 48% proficient in four years. Our free and reduced students' proficiency doubled.

Practical and efficient school improvement must be fostered at the state level. This takes focus. Too often it seems that the department is out of focus. The WDE needs to highlight instructional leadership to grow every student. (continued on flipside)

Mike Massie

Question 1

The PAWS scores reflect a disparity in results between low income students and their peers. They demonstrate we are not meeting the needs of many students, particularly those who are at-risk of failure.

It is imperative that schools provide students who are not proficient in math and reading with individual attention to address their needs as soon as possible. This is particularly important for students who are considered at-risk, including many from low-income families. Tutors, instructional facilitators and classroom aides can assist teachers with this important work.

Interventions are particularly important before fourth grade. The early childhood years of birth to nine years of age are the most influential in life, especially for at-risk children. Extensive research demonstrates that effective interventions to address learning, health and family problems during these years pay lifetime dividends for the individual and our communities. These benefits include better educational performance. The returns for at-risk students are particularly high.

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Cindy Hill

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Question 2

My approach to assessments is to examine them to ensure that they meet these simple goals: (1) the redundancy is eliminated so that we do not take children away from instruction for any longer than necessary; (2) the results are reported back quickly to the schools so the timely results can be useful to positively inform and impact instruction; (3) the test itself is not biased against students regardless of ethnicity, race, socio-economics, gender and disability. To this end, I have begun a series of meetings with teachers, parents, and administrators to gather the input from those on the front lines on how these goals can be accomplished.

According to nationally recognized assessment leaders, the basic PAWS has some good elements: PAWS assesses students on learning standards, instead of measuring students against each other. (Bell-curve tests can be unfair because they stack the deck against lower performers.) Second, PAWS allows certain students with disabilities to take an alternative version. Last, PAWS measures students' thinking, not just multiple-guess or true-false.

PAWS has some problems. First, the PAWS test is much too long. Second, the on-line version is fraught with difficulties. Sometimes students are in the middle of the test when they are kicked off and have to start over. Also, taking the test on-line often means that computer labs can't be used for instruction for a whole month--a waste of good technology. Two other disadvantages are, the PAWS company keeps changing the bar every year and the data takes too long to come back to the schools.

I have begun a process to explore with teachers, parents, and experts what needs to happen in coming years. My focus is on all assessments in Wyoming to reduce duplication and redundancy and to ensure the assessments are timely and useful to positively impact instruction. Each of the problems must be addressed while keeping the strengths. In Wyoming we can put our heads together to create a just-right assessment.

Mike Massie

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Quality early interventions include reading to infants and preschoolers to develop early literacy skills and vocabulary, promoting positive social-emotional development, early screenings and services for developmental delays, identifying and addressing learning needs in K-3, and supporting community-based programs that promote children's health and family stability, such as the county nurse visitation program. Wyoming must do a better job of ensuring that children of low-income families can access these services.

As Superintendent of Public Instruction, I would pursue these and other actions to help students in all grades, remembering that educational deficiencies are often linked to other needs in life. In working in the early childhood field for the past several years, I know that Wyoming needs a more coherent system of early care and education that is family-based and effective. I will help lead the effort to better coordinate efforts in this field as well as develop individualized plans to identify and address the needs of low-income students.

Question 2

The State Board of Education (SBE) determines the standardized test to fulfill the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). However, I believe that PAWS must be replaced. It does not provide useful information about individual student learning and takes up too much classroom time.

A replacement would likely include the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) test that school districts are already using because it provides immediate and helpful information for teachers and students. Other features would need to be added to meet NCLB mandates.

I would turn to educators, parents, and the public to develop an alternative to PAWS. This would tap a great deal of expertise, especially from teachers who administer the tests, as well as build community-based support for the alternative test. This assessment would need to:

- Provide useful and immediate information about individual student learning and needs,
- Take much less classroom time than PAWS, and
- Not force teachers to teach to it.