

Florida PTA Candidate Questionnaire

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Andrew Gillum

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?

As the son of two working class parents, and the first in my family to graduate from high school and college, I know firsthand what it means to see intergenerational poverty interrupted at the hands of a high quality education. I wouldn't be where I am today without the profound influence of my teachers — and my parents. Public education is a cornerstone of the compact between a government and its citizens, and we must do all we can to strengthen it. But for decades, Florida's leadership has criminally underfunded public education, in violation of our state Constitution. Reform-minded lawmakers have stripped control from local school districts in pursuit of privatized education, high-stakes testing, and diverting public funds to unaccountable alternatives. As Governor, I will ensure we pay teachers what they're worth, invest in our schools, end the toxic culture of high-stakes testing, and develop the potential of all children. It's our moral obligation.

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?

I'm proud to be the only candidate for Governor with a plan to invest \$1 billion into public schools — and a plan to pay for it. My "Fair Share for Florida's Future" plan would adjust the state's corporate tax rate to recoup \$1 billion for investment into education, including new teacher starting salaries of \$50,000, raising veteran teacher salaries to the national average, and rebuilding our crumbling public school infrastructure. As a Mayor, I also believe that the best decisions are made at the local level. That's why I would empower local school districts to evaluate teacher performance, allocate resources, and unlock each student's potential through their unique skills and abilities.

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

Our society's failure to appreciate the strength in diversity is part of our current polarization. We know that students learn best when their lessons are culturally relevant to them — and we know that our state's obsession with testing isn't measuring what our children learn, but how well they take a test. By ending the practice that forces educators to teach to the test, teachers can once again devote attention to multicultural approaches, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, faith, and family, that engage and motivate students and close performance gaps — a priority I'll direct Florida's Department of Education to support as Governor.

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

Studies have found that limited English language skills remain a barrier for students, in part because schools and teachers don't have the resources and training they need to help these students achieve academic success. With nearly 300,000 English Language Learners in Florida, we must get this right for their futures. By increasing investment in our schools, we can offer additional developmental language classes and ESOL coordinators in school districts across the state, and ensure that assessments are fairly measuring students' growth — not punishing them.

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

As an elected public servant for 15 years, one of my highest priorities has always been the development and success of our children. As a City Commissioner and Mayor, I spearheaded a program that provided technology and training materials for parents and their middle school students, founded the Future Leaders Academy to provide skills training for high school students, and launched the 1,000 Mentors program to recruit mentors and volunteers to work with students and Leon County Schools. As Governor, I believe we can expand partnerships like these to underscore the roles that parents, families, and communities play in helping students rise up and succeed, no matter their circumstances.

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?

Students do better when parents are involved. That becomes more difficult when many parents have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. I've seen this firsthand as the son of a school bus driver and a construction worker; full-time working class parents face economic, logistical and systemic barriers that can make it difficult to be as involved as they want.

As Governor I will work together with the Florida PTA to boost parent engagement, providing resources that help parents support their students in academics, well-being, and life. I would also prioritize early childhood education as a means to closing the achievement gap, ensuring that students of color are at grade level in reading and math. And I believe that parents can play an integral role in helping end the school-to-prison pipeline that diverts too many students of color out of education and into incarceration.

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

A safe environment free from fear is perhaps the most fundamental thing our schools can provide for our children — and our most fundamental moral failing if we don't act. While I support an increase in School Resource Officers on school campuses, and while the recently-passed school safety bill includes some steps in the right direction, we must address a root issue at the heart of too many school tragedies: the ubiquitous presence of, and easy access to, weapons of war. As long as assault-style weapons with high-capacity magazines are ever-present, our children remain at risk. That's why as Governor, I will demand universal background checks, and sign a ban on weapons that belong on a battlefield — not on our streets or in our schools.

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