

Candidate Name: **Randall A. Mackey**
District #: 7



To help candidates provide information to potential constituents and to help voters make educated decisions, Utahns for Public Schools has created this survey about issues facing members of the Utah State Board of Education. We encourage candidates for positions on that board to complete this questionnaire and return it by September 15th. The survey responses will be published in their entirety on our website at www.utahnsforpublicschools.org. (If a candidate chooses not to return the survey, that will be noted on the website as well.)

Return survey to: lisa@utahnsforpublicschools.org.

**2008 UTPS Candidate Questionnaire
Utah State School Board**

- 1) How do you feel about public tax dollars being used to support private schools, whether religious or secular, through funding mechanisms such as vouchers and tuition tax credits?

I do not support the use of vouchers for a number of reasons. First, as an attorney and from my experience teaching Constitutional Law for eight years as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Utah, I have serious concerns about the constitutionality of vouchers. Second, in view of Utah's unique demographics of having large families, I find it difficult to justify siphoning off scarce public funds to support private schools when our public schools are so inadequately funded. I strongly believe in public schools and, in particular, public school choice. In this regard, I believe there is currently many school choice options with the growth of charter schools and the more liberal school transfer policies that have been recently implemented that provide students the option of attending different schools within a school district or in other school districts.

- 2) How do you feel about the role charter schools play in the public school system? What are your views about the Utah State Board of Education's role in regulating and/or establishing accountability
-

standards or requirements for charter schools? How do you feel about the current system for funding charter schools?

I support charter schools as part of the public school landscape. Charter schools need regulation and oversight, but many charter schools have been successful because they have eliminated red tape. Charter schools must be given sufficient support and opportunities to succeed. Special purpose charter schools are particularly effective. The Utah State Board of Education is currently responsible for regulating charter schools and establishing accountability. This is accomplished, in large part, through the Utah State Charter School Board. In many states where charter schools exist, regulation is accomplished by the local school districts. I would support this concept in Utah. In the future, I would like to see more charter schools under the oversight and regulation of local school districts. The Salt Lake School District has had recent success in following this model. Charter schools should be funded by the state rather than by requiring contributions from local school districts through increasing taxes.

- 3) The Utah Foundation recently released a report comparing Utah's public education funding and services to those of several "peer states." The research shows that Utah's current funding effort has led to larger classes, lower teacher salaries, and lower levels of pupil and staff support than what is found in states with similar demographics. How do you feel about the state's current investment in public schools and the services that school districts currently provide to Utah students?

I have reviewed the recent report by the Utah Foundation and am greatly concerned over its findings. Although funding for public education has increased during the past three years, Utah's funding effort is woefully behind where it should be. In fact, our state's tax effort in funding public education has declined during the past decade. The Utah State Board of Education must do better in educating the public about the current need for a much greater investment in public schools and the services that school districts currently provide to Utah students. If Utahns make a choice to have larger families, they must be willing to make a greater tax effort to fund public education.

- 4) In the 2008 legislative session, a bill was passed directing school districts to provide "differentiated" or higher pay for certain math and science teachers. How do you feel about this program and about "differentiated pay" in general?
-

Although more spending is required in the years ahead for teacher salaries and reduction in class-size, reforms are also necessary. For example, policies that extend the school year for teachers should be considered. Differential pay to attract math and science teachers should also be considered. Care must be taken when implementing these new programs, however, to insure that they are perceived as fair and equitable by teachers in general. Teacher working conditions must also be improved, including more effective teacher support, reduced class size, and more available teaching materials.

- 5) As a condition of receiving a share of the \$20 million appropriated for “performance pay” incentives, school districts have developed plans for the distribution of this one-time money. What is your opinion of this program, and how do you feel about “performance pay” (or “merit pay”) in general?

I am in favor of the basic concept of providing incentives for teaching excellence through a performance based compensation system to reward teachers who are successful in the classroom. However, the devil is really in the details. I am concerned how teachers will view the performance pay plans that school districts have recently adopted in response to the \$20 million appropriation. For such plans to succeed, the teachers must perceive them to be fair and equitable. For example, multiple indicators of achievement must be considered besides test scores, such as parent- student satisfaction and school climate. It will undoubtedly take time to refine performance pay plans that have the general support of parents, teachers and administrators.

- 6) Please comment on Utah’s “achievement gap” and what the Utah State Board of Education can do to provide access to educational opportunities to all of the state’s diverse populations.

The achievement gap of students with learning challenges is of particular concern in K-12 education. Policies need to be developed and implemented to close the achievement gap. To this extent, research based ELL strategies need to be identified and promoted. The optional all-day kindergarten program is extremely important in addressing the achievement gap. Moreover, teachers should be paid more who teach in schools located in low income areas with high minority populations. Summer learning programs should also be considered with respect to the achievement gap.

-
- 7) The legislature recently changed the nominating process for State School Board candidates from a more "regional" approach to one which utilizes a single, central committee. Additionally, some in the legislature have proposed legislation which would increase the number of school board members while at the same time changing the seats from non-partisan to partisan. How do you feel about the current process and the proposed changes?

I would favor reverting back to the "regional" approach where candidates for the State School Board would be selected by regional committees. Such candidates would more likely reflect the issues and concerns of the particular region where they are selected. It would be a serious mistake to increase the number of school board members or change the races from non-partisan to partisan. There are already 15 voting and three non-voting members on the school board. Most states have significantly fewer members on their state school boards. Making the races partisan would dilute the effectiveness of the school board as being perceived as non-partisan and advocating in favor of public education generally without regard to supporting any particular political party or its agenda.

- 8) Recent legislation has led to the splitting of the Jordan School District. How do you feel about the current law, and about the splitting of school districts in general?

The current law needs major revisions as evidenced by the myriad of problems that have surfaced as a result of the splitting of the Jordan School District. There should be a policy in place with respect to the splitting of school districts but the policy must be economically fair and be supported by both the citizens of the proposed new school district and the citizens of the existing school district. The costs of splitting school districts should be borne by the citizens of the split school districts.

- 9) In the 2008 legislative session, most of the new funding for our public schools was contained in SB 2, the so-called, "Omnibus Bill," that also contained numerous other education bills, including some that had failed to pass on their own. How do you feel about this particular bill, and about omnibus bills in general?
-

I am opposed to so-called "omnibus bills" and, in particular, to SB 2. I do not believe such bills would withstand a legal challenge in court. It is certainly bad policy to force legislators to vote on a bill which contains certain bills that were previously defeated in the same session. It is no wonder the public becomes at times so cynical about the legislative process.

- 10) What do you see as the USBE's role in working with the Utah State Legislature?

The proper role of the USBE is to make recommendations to the Utah State Legislature concerning legislation involving preschool and K-12 public education. There is considerable room for improvement in the relationship between the USBE and the state legislators. Greater efforts should be made for more frequent meetings and study groups involving board members and state legislators. Legislators additionally need to realize the tremendous cost of implementing the new education programs that they create each year.

- 11) What do you see as the USBE's role in promoting responsible state tax policy? Do you think the board and its members should actively oppose tax breaks for corporate interests that come at the expense of public education funding? Why or why not?

I strongly believe the USBE should actively promote a responsible state tax policy to the extent that it affects the funding of public education. To this extent, the USBE should actively oppose tax breaks for corporate interests that come at the expense of public education funding. I believe the USBE needs to be more active in opposing corporate tax breaks. Redevelopment projects need to be carefully analyzed. If the USBE is unwilling to be a strong advocate against such corporate tax breaks, what other public group would have sufficient clout to take on such corporate interests for the benefit of public education.

- 12) Utah students study in some of the largest classes in the nation. What are your views about class size and instruction, and how do you think class size should be addressed in Utah?

Large class sizes in Utah public schools are of great concern, especially in grades

K-3. Additional funding is necessary to reduce class size, particularly in the lower grades. However, additional funding is also necessary for teacher compensation in view of the large number of teachers who are leaving the profession because of inadequate pay. Thus, increasing teacher compensation is as important as reducing class size. Nevertheless, the issue is somewhat circular and complex as class size is a significant factor in teacher retention.