

Candidate Name: David Thomas
District #: 4



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 support both vouchers and tax credits.

- 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 am a strong supporter of Charter Schools. I believe that they are part of the long term solution to our educational crisis in the State. Accountability standards are important, but must be established with input from parents and local school districts.

- 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?

Public schools need to be adequately funded. However, I do not believe that merely throwing money at a problem will solve anything. The Washington, D.C. School District has one of the highest WPUs in the United States, but also one of the highest High School drop out rates. We need to target specific problem spots and direct our funding to them.

- 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?

I support differentiated pay to encourage the retention of more math and science teachers. This area is critical to the long term sustainability of our communities.

- 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 favor performance pay and believe that it should be an on-going program that is fully funded.

- 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.

We need to provide adequate resources to local school districts to combat the achievement gap. I do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to public education. Local districts need to have more say in what works for them.

- 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 think that the current system is adequate. I would oppose making the school board seats partisan.

- 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?

I am actually a proponent of smaller school districts in order to serve the needs of the local communities. Large districts sometimes become impersonal to their constituency - the parents.

- 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 oppose omnibus bills. It provides an improper mechanism to study the issues and proposals on an individual basis. There is too much room for making deals and less room for debating what proposals actually work.

- 10) What do you see as the USBE's role in working with the Utah State Legislature?
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USBE needs to provide information that is useful to the legislature and negotiate with the legislature on issues important to public education.

- 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 do not believe that the USBE has a role in tax policy. That is outside their purview.

- 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?

Class room size continues to be problematic. Utah's average class size is 23, while the national average is 16. I believe the best way to combat this trend is by providing more educational options to parents, whether that be through charter, private, or homeschools.