

# deaeyc Early Childhood Education Candidate Questionnaire

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Answers Submitted By: Dave Sokola

1. What are your views on the needs of young children (birth to kindergarten) and what specific steps would you take to address these needs?

I participated in the Study Group that studied high performing systems in the US and around the world and presented the "No Time To Lose" report to the National Conference of State Legislatures in 2015. Element #1 in that report was "Children come to school ready to learn, and extra support is given to struggling students so that all have the opportunity to achieve high standards." Successful systems always make sure that children arrive at school ready to learn. We need to expand high quality pre-K programs, with an emphasis on making these programs available to low income and special needs children.

2. What are your views on the ways in which we can close the education achievement gap with a particular focus on the early years?

In the same report referenced in the first question, we found that all systems that made significant improvements around the world made the greatest gains with the student sub-groups who previously were the lowest achieving student groups. While even the highest performing students improved, the achievement gap was narrowed. An important part of this is to ensure all students have equitable access to high quality professionals in all grade levels. The teaching profession was improved by research based training and professional development programs. Career ladders and leadership opportunities were developed that allowed top performers to stay in the classroom and gave them opportunities to better support their colleagues and students. Probably the most important part of being successful in this goal would be to emphasize improvement in early literacy.

3. What is the role of the state/city/federal government to provide for programs that will be addressing the socio-emotional and mental health issues young children will experience in the coming weeks and months resulting from the disruption in their lives brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic?

We need to be open to learn from other cities, states and countries about what works and what does not work. This is a new situation, and mistakes are often made, even by well-meaning professionals. Since this pandemic started earlier in other parts of the world, we need to use what others have learned and try to

improve the lives of our young children. This matter will not be over at the end of the year, when CARES Act funding may run out, so we need to get the flexibility to retain unused funds, and will still likely need another round of support. The role of the State is to ensure best practices, and actively monitor results.

4. What steps would you take to attract, and retain quality educators in the early childhood education field?

In order to retain quality educators we need to make sure their training is appropriate and research based, their pay is adequate, and the work environment will allow for success. Smaller class sizes and available wrap-around services where needed can be critical to success.

5. As an elected official, what would be your top 4 priorities in the first 100 days in the position?

As a member of the DE Financial Advisory Council, the State finances will likely be my top priority. This may change depending on the course of the pandemic.

Education finance is my second priority and the lawsuit which involves public education may impact the direction. The court has already decided that our property tax system is unconstitutional, but there is not yet a remedy, or a timeline on changes to the property tax system. Reassessment is essential, but may not be sufficient. The other part of the lawsuit has equity and adequacy components that will likely need to be addressed.

There is a lot off case law on equity and I do not think Delaware will look good in this area. There is not a lot of case law on "adequacy", but the Abbott case in New Jersey did address it, and it appears that there are some improvements that we can already learn from to develop a path forward. Areas like Union City, NJ significantly expanded early childhood education and they already are having very positive impact on early literacy among children in poverty.

Third I plan to reintroduce legislation and co-sponsor other parts of a package of reasonable gun control measures. These were sidetracked by the pandemic and other factors that should no longer be an obstacle.

Fourth, this will be my fourth time going through legislative reapportionment. I have never felt that this was a good use of legislative time and have previously supported Bills to establish "Independent Commissions" for this responsibility. With all the measures that got held over last year, legislative redistricting would be even more of an unnecessary distraction.

6. How would you improve the economy of your city, our State and/or our nation?

Around the world, the countries that are getting their economies going back closer to normal, are the ones who have addressed the pandemic the best. There are important items that are already being addressed even under these unique circumstances. Our Port expansion process has started, and the Container Port proposal at Edgemoor is at the next phase involving public notice and comment. If that proceeds, then there will be a large number of temporary construction jobs, followed by a good number of ongoing good jobs that will benefit New Castle County and the State. I will also support significant increase in the renewable portfolio standard with specific increases in solar. We should also partner with mid-Atlantic states on green energy including off-shore wind projects that are already at various stages of the process. These construction and maintenance jobs, associated with clean renewable energy are the future. We should continue the rebuilding of our roadway infrastructure to the extent possible. The Transportation Trust Fund has been impacted by loss of revenues, but we have taken advantage of the reduced traffic to expedite a number of projects such as the Newark Main Street rebuild and the Paper Mill Road culvert. Both of these were done early and at reduced cost due to the ability to completely shut down arteries and save related contractor costs. Delaware should be well set to continue to lead in areas such as Biopharmaceuticals, Legal and Finance. I have had various roles in each of these areas in the past, and will continue to work to make sure Delaware is a great place to live, work, raise a family and run a business.