

# deaeyc Early Childhood Education Candidate Questionnaire

---

Answers Submitted By: Spiros Mantzavinos

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?

Early childhood is the most important developmental period of a person's life. The investments we make in children during these formative years have huge payoffs for our state. On the education front, I support universal pre-K and increased funding for early childhood for working families who need it most. As part of those programs, we must do more to promote literacy for our kids, while also expanding foreign-language immersion programs, which are proven to have huge long-term cognitive benefits. We also need to do more to provide pediatric health care to those who lack access to it. Further expanding Medicaid's dental coverage and increasing access to mental health professionals at the elementary school level are two scalable proposals I would support.

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?

As I mentioned, these formative years are critical for long-term development. Fundamentally, we must confront the achievement gap by bringing new resources to bear that will make our entire education more equitable. I support comprehensive reform to do just that and

Our first priority must be to improve childhood literacy rates through more reading specialists, instructional materials, enrichment opportunities and interactive take-home tools. We cannot expect that basic instruction will be enough for every student, and we cannot allow learning to cease whenever a student is out of school.

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?

Children are resilient and the experts in child behavioral health I know all say the most impactful variable is having consistent, compassionate, and caring adult influences in their lives. Expanding paid family leave is one way to ensure that for more of our kids.

But we also need to look at the big picture. While COVID is scary and has sown an enormous amount of uncertainty for so many, its also an opportunity for increased screenings that can help our kids understand the importance of their physical health long-term. But more than anything, we absolutely must increase the number of mental health counselors in our schools, so kids have the support they need, and so that responsibility doesn't fall on educators. Many of our children hail from families with a higher risk of COVID, or could be returning to school after losing a loved one to the virus. We need to be aware of the trauma many of Delaware's young children may be facing and prepared to assist with any social or emotional difficulties they may face.

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

Investing in education pays dividends — and that starts with better compensating our educators. It didn't take a pandemic to convince me that our educators are underpaid, but now more than ever, we can all see just how dedicated these professionals are to their jobs and to their students. Teachers are bending over backwards to not just accommodate remote learning requirements, but to thrive in this new environment. Our educators are resilient, creative, and adaptable — willing to risk their health and safety when it comes time to return to the classroom.

We must increase the base salary for our educators across the board, not merely through “alternative compensation” methods that could inadvertently penalize teachers for factors beyond their control. There are already a number of factors working against ELL, low-income, or special education students — one of which is difficulty in retaining teachers who work in our Title I schools. If we separated a teacher's worth from their students' success, and if we separated a student's worth from his or her test scores, our schools would all have much more diverse, inclusive, and enriched environments.

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

I'm running to fight for working families and to ensure that we use this pandemic as a catalyst to reimagine an economy that works for everyone. Medical bills and prescription costs continue to bankrupt people — especially seniors living on a fixed income — so we must work to lower the cost of healthcare and continue to expand access. Whether that's through expanding Medicaid or some other measure, this is an important priority.

At the same time, we must work to raise wages — including raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour — so working class Delawareans are not left behind as our economy recovers from the pandemic. The wealthiest Americans have actually gotten richer during the pandemic, while unemployment soars. That's unacceptable.

I also believe it's critical we make significant steps forward on police and criminal justice reform issues. Black and Brown people have waited far too long for us to kick the can down the road any further, and I look forward to having actionable legislative proposals from the Law Enforcement Task Force that includes more unified use of force standards and universal, mandatory body cameras for all our police agencies.

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

This pandemic has laid bare our economic challenges and the inequality that is so central to it. We've seen exactly who our essential workers truly are, and we've seen that too often they're people forced to live on an inadequate minimum wage. I support raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour so more Delawareans can meaningfully participate in our economy, and so we can reduce corporate welfare for businesses like Amazon who criminally underpay their workers while banking millions.

We also need to do more to attract the industries of tomorrow by aggressively pursuing green industries that can produce the carbon-neutral energies of tomorrow while creating good-paying union jobs.

But more than anything, we need to do everything possible to make Delaware a place young families want to live, work, raise families, and invest. Improving our public schools, investing in our infrastructure, and expanding paid family leave are all things we can do to make Delaware more attractive to the best and brightest minds who will help make our economy hum through their own innovation and entrepreneurship.