

School Board Questionnaire, from the Eagle Forum!

The answers were originally listed as just Yes/No, but of course, many of these are complex questions, not really given to yes/no answers. I have therefore answered them a little more in-depth. I'm quite certain that the Eagle Forum will not like at least some of my answers.

1. Do you believe schools should give primary emphasis to teaching basic skills (e.g. reading, grammar, spelling, arithmetic) rather than social or psychological matters?

I believe that AT A MINIMUM students should be able to leave their primary and secondary school educations with certain basic skills, such as the ability to read at an acceptable level, and the ability to do basic arithmetic and basic algebra. But in truth, students need more than this from their education. If students are getting only the minimum out of their primary and secondary educations, then we as educators and parents have FAILED them in some way. There are other skills that should be taught in order to make our children the best future Americans possible. They should be expected to leave secondary education with knowledge of civics, with the ability to think critically, to have a basic understanding of science, basic writing skills and an exposure to great literature, and knowledge of the multicultural society in which they live. In addition to this, we must never neglect our most gifted students. We must always seek to challenge them and instill in them, as in the rest of the students, a commitment to lifelong learning and service to others.

2. Do you support the use of intensive, systematic phonics to teach first-grade children how to read?

Okay, so this one I can answer as just YES.

3. Do you support the goal that children should be able to read by the end of the first grade?

Children should be able to read by as early an age as is feasible. Certainly, there are many standards of reading ability. I believe children by the end of first grade, whose native language is English, should be able to read a book designed for someone of their reading ability, by themselves. I do not expect that this is an acceptable level of reading skills with which they can go out into the world. Reading skills must be constantly honed and practiced until it becomes second nature, and I do not believe that this is achievable in the first year of school. Students whose native language is not English must be given language instruction not only in their native language but also in English. This may require additional time at school and working with teachers, but a timeline should be clearly laid out as to the best method to "catch-up" to the other students in a finite period of time. Clearly, the degree of the child's previous exposure to English will affect this time period.

4. Do you support the teaching of abstinence as the norm for unmarried teenagers and as the only truly effective way to prevent sexually-transmitted diseases?

I believe that abstinence can be an important part of sex education, but it also CANNOT be the only part. I don't believe that this is practical or reasonable in the light of human behaviour. I agree that abstinence is the most reliable way of preventing pregnancy and disease, and I agree that sex is a

responsibility that teenagers (and adults) should not take lightly because of its physical and emotional consequences. However, I do not believe that sex should be taught as something that is bad. Abstinence education must not take on the notion that sex is a sin—that is for religions to preach. Sex education must include information on what kind of protection is out there for students who (later) decide that they are willing and able to take on these responsibilities. We are training up adults and we must give them the information they will need as responsible adults. Only in this way, by being thorough, can we hope to stem the tide of sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy and abortions.

5. Do you believe the topics of homosexuality and alternative lifestyles should be excluded from the classroom?

In a word, NO. Students are going to leave the school environment and either enter college life or the work world. In either case they need to be prepared to deal with an environment in which everyone is not going to be the same or think the same or believe the same as they do. Not preparing them for this reality, or denying its existence, is wrong. Students must understand that even if their parents tell them that “alternative lifestyles” are a sin, they must be able to show civility and tolerance toward other Americans in our multicultural society—they may continue to believe as they were raised, but they must show respect to others.

6. Do you support teaching that the use of illegal drugs and the unlawful use of alcohol are "wrong"?

As long as drugs and alcohol remain illegal in the United States, I will continue to advocate that students not break the law. While I do believe that responsible use of alcohol can only be taught to children by allowing them small amounts on special occasions at home as they grow up—dropping them into an unsupervised college environment where alcohol is prevalent is counterproductive-- this is the parent's responsibility, and not the school's.

7. Do you reject classroom instruction that downgrades American sovereignty, limited constitutional government, or private enterprise?

I am not sure how classroom instruction itself is capable of downgrading these things; however if I am to judge by the question that the questioner desires for classroom instruction to PROMOTE these values, I cannot. Schools should be in the business of explaining history, the state of our world today, constitutional origins and history and the role of business past and present in American society. Schools should be teaching our children to think critically about these values and accept them or reject them as their own values dictate. Schools should not be in the business of cultural propaganda.

8. Do you support local control of education, with accountability through the local school board, rather than federal control exercised through federal and state bureaucracies and business partnerships?

I believe that it was the Founders' intention that schools remain substantially a local concern and that the Federal government not become involved. However, local boards must not be permitted to run amok and sabotage the educational standards for their children. Local displeasure, for instance,

with the conclusions of science, should not permit local school board to reject or nullify learning by sabotaging science, cultural or historical instruction which is not to their liking. If local regions are, however, going to wrest themselves from the controls of the federal government, they must be prepared to take responsibility and be prepared to pay for it.

9. Do you reject federal control of curriculum through the Goals 2000 and School-to-Work laws?

This is obviously an old question. For information on Goals 2000 go to: <http://www.ed.gov/G2K/index.html>. For information on School-to-Work go to: <http://ici.umn.edu/schooltowork/>. Both of these are initiatives from the Clinton administration. A more appropriate and timely question would be in regards to the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. As it is grossly underfunded, it has no hope of being successful; however, I reject the notion that education can be summarized in a standardized test for more than the most basic skills. I believe this law encourages teacher to teach to the test, rather than to good scholarship, critical thinking and real learning. I believe it also serves to focus too much attention on struggling students and not enough on students that are succeeding, in turn punishing their success. I believe this legislation is fundamentally damaging to American educational goals.

10. Do you oppose the establishment of school-based health clinics, which may perform examinations, provide immunizations and medications, and dispense birth control devices and abortion referrals, without parental consent or knowledge?

I believe that the current system is ridiculous. As a high school student, I could have been suspended for carrying Tylenol or other pain killers with me to school (with or without parental consent). Instead, I was supposed to have my parent's foresee ahead of time whenever I was going to have a headache or cramps and authorize the school nurse on that specific day to dispense an over-the-counter painkiller. If I needed it unexpectedly, too bad, and my parents were not able to sign a release authorizing the nurse to provide the medication as needed. The system is broken. A more common sense approach to dealing with students is needed. School-based health clinics may be a solution. I would prefer parental involvement as much as possible; however, I also respect the desire of students for confidentiality. If students cannot obtain confidentiality, even from parents, at a school-based health clinic, students should be provided information on where they can obtain such help. Students in families where parents are not willing or able to help them, while still being encouraged to try to engage their parents, have ways around them through legal or other means. If 16 year-olds are old enough to give legal consent to sex they ought to be allowed to protect themselves from disease and pregnancy.

11. Do you oppose the collection and maintenance of data on student health, performance, attitudes, behavior, and family, as well as academics, in computerized databases?

I do not believe that personal data should ever be used without a person's consent; however broad demographic data is not the same thing as personal information. All data should be handled carefully and be used for legitimate research only. Researchers cannot tell us how we can improve the education of our students, though, with incomplete data on what factors affect them academically.

12. Do you oppose allowing the school district to deduct money from the paychecks of school employees and forward it to political funds without the annual written consent of each employee?

I am under the impression that this practice has since been changed, by law.

13. Do you believe in the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children?

If parents are going to avail themselves of this “fundamental right”, then they should be more involved and not merely hand their children over to the school and then complain when something happens that they don’t approve of. Parents are always welcome and encouraged to supplement the education of their children; however, they may not change the facts of science or history to suit their own beliefs without removing them from the system.

14. Do you support a school board policy allowing parents the right to inspect and review instructional materials and methods?

What point then is the school board if parent groups can come in and overrule board decisions? Parents may certainly direct their concerns at the school board, but ultimately, it is the board’s decision on instructional materials and methods that matter. Nor should parents be able to interfere with a teacher’s instructional methods once those methods have been sanctioned by the board or their supervisors. The more involved parents are, naturally, the more they will be involved in the process, but the burden of proof does not lie with the teacher to justify themselves provided it is not too far outside the norm. Parents who are not reassured may withdraw their child from school.

15. Do you support a school board policy forbidding psychological evaluations, testing, treatment, or physical examinations of students without prior written parental consent?

Mind altering drugs, including Ritalin, should never be given or “prescribed” by schools without parental consent, nor should schools encourage parents to have their children placed on such drugs. Psychological evaluation and testing should be permitted, but more than superficial counseling should always be done with parental involvement, unless a clear need to circumvent the parents can be shown.

16. Do you believe parental consent should be required prior to giving information and care to students regarding sexuality and reproductive health?

Outside the school curriculum and to students of a certain age, yes, but certainly beyond the legal age of consent, no. The school has a greater responsibility to keep students safe and healthy.

17. Do you oppose requiring students to answer nosy questionnaires about sex, drugs, suicide, and family behavior without prior written parental consent?

I believe that schools should obtain general consent for any questionnaire going around the school that collects demographic data for use in a study. The study would become pointless if only the

good students participated. So parents may be asked to give consent without full disclosure of the specific questions to be asked, or through the school board themselves speaking on behalf of the parents.

18. Do you support the right of parents to homeschool their children?

Yes.