

Mississippi Professional Educators: 2019 Lt. Governor Candidate Questionnaire

While MPE does not endorse political candidates, we encourage our members to be actively involved in the political process and to exercise their right to vote. MPE sent the following ten questions to the two leading candidates for Lt. Governor of Mississippi. Candidates' responses are below. Primary elections will be held August 6, 2019, and voters will return to the polls on November 5 for Mississippi's General Election.

	Delbert Hosemann	Jay Hughes
1. <i>What qualifies you as the best candidate to serve as Lt. Governor of Mississippi?</i>	My record is what best qualifies me to serve as Lieutenant Governor. I have experience drafting and implementing meaningful legislation, like the autism bill and Voter ID, and a history of bringing Mississippians with many different perspectives together to solve a problem. I keep my promises. We need the same commitment and “collective intellect” approach here. Educators will be at the table when legislation impacting them is addressed.	I am absolutely tireless, authentic, passionate, and respectful, with a lifetime of experiences that hard-working and high-poverty Mississippians deal with daily. I’ve gone from signing the backs of paychecks to the fronts of them, and I owe it all to public education. Instead of big campaign donors, I will answer to one group: the people of Mississippi. I respect that public education is the single greatest economic investment we can make to lift Mississippi higher in all areas.
2. <i>What do you see as the biggest challenge facing educators today? How will you address this issue?</i>	After meeting with hundreds of educators across the State, it is clear they face many significant challenges: budget shortages, low pay, overwhelming state/federal regulations, testing requirements, and achievement barriers like systemic poverty. I have committed to moving toward alleviating funding shortfalls, supporting pre-K programs, and valuing our teachers, our No. 1 education resource. This will take funding, and we are working on securing resources, some of which will come from the reorganization of state government.	Respect. Too many politicians who have never attended a public school or taught think they know better than educators. All members of the education committee would have to agree to shadow teachers for one full day in an “A,” “C” and “F” district. We would then focus on proper funding, reducing standardized testing, adjust the accountability model; away from focusing on a single test, and apply for an ESSA waiver to move to ACT and Work Keys.
3. <i>What is your top priority for strengthening and advancing public education in Mississippi?</i>	My top priority is getting our teachers, our No. 1 education resource, the funding support they need to help our students succeed. We entrust our children to our teachers for eight or more hours a day. For this great responsibility, they should be paid as professionals. We also have to address our critical teacher shortage with innovative solutions, like incentivizing retired teachers to return to the classroom.	Proper funding. The M.A.E.P. should be adjusted to properly take into consideration Special Education, ELL, and high-poverty. Then, it should be fully funded. There should be greater flexibility in achieving growth of students, as they have in innovative districts and charter schools.
4. <i>Do you believe local communities should be responsible for a greater portion of education funding in our state?</i>	When all of our public schools succeed, and more of our people are educated, our entire state benefits from more resources for basic taxpayer needs like solid roads and bridges. There are significant disparities among communities, however, as it relates to a tax base and sustainable income. For this reason, while it is important for local communities to play their part, we must start with a solid base of funding from the state.	Absolutely not. That is exactly why we have a vast disparity in educational resources from district-to-district. Students are students. The quality of their education opportunities shouldn’t be restricted by the tax base where they live.

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<p>5. <i>What is your solution for Mississippi's teacher shortage?</i></p>	<p>We have to look to success stories in other states and innovative solutions to address our teacher shortage, which is impacting a significant number of Mississippi school districts. We must examine the merits of legislative changes to allow us to incentivize retired teachers to return to our classrooms and evaluate our alternate route programs for effectiveness and classroom outcomes. We also must value our teachers, both in terms of pay and non-monetary support.</p>	<p>Respect. Letting them teach. Veteran teacher mentoring of 1-5 year teachers. Offering children of current and retired teachers free tuition at community colleges and reduced tuition for state universities. Increase the pay so it is competitive and enough that they don't need part-time jobs. Give them a voice in the legislative process and an opportunity to vet and comment on all bills in the senate education committee. Student loan forgiveness for high-need certifications and areas, like dyslexia and autism therapists.</p>
<p>6. <i>What is your solution to the concerns regarding state testing that will still allow Mississippi to meet federal guidelines and still assess state standards?</i></p>	<p>Dozens of educators have shared with me their concerns about testing. Based on what I have learned, my greatest concerns relate to the amount of time spent testing (taking away from classroom instruction) and technology problems, particularly on the part of the vendor. All solutions are on the table, including the possibility of moving to a different test or vendor. Solving any technology deficiencies for our schools must also be a priority.</p>	<p>Apply for an ESSA waiver to allow the ACT to be used in lieu of the end-of-course exams and remove the tie between it and graduation (most states do not tie the two together. Change from the problematic Questar and move to Aspire and Work Keys. Change the accountability model from A-F and tied to funding, to one of a set of numerical scores in different areas, from growth to graduation, etc.</p>
<p>7. <i>Do you support the diversion of federal and state funds from public schools to nonpublic schools, home schools or virtual schools via vouchers, tuition tax credits, scholarships, individualized education funds (IEFs), or some other means? Please explain your position.</i></p>	<p>No, diverting more funding from public schools is not an option. Every special needs child is legally entitled to a quality education. If a school cannot provide necessary services, a child should be able to attend another public school. If another public school cannot provide necessary services, the child should be able to attend a school qualified to provide such services, provided there are accountability measures attached to state money received.</p>	<p>Absolutely not! Public dollars are for public schools. Period. Every dollar diverted from a public school is harmful to those left behind. If we were properly funding our public schools, they would have the resources to have quality educators and resources in every classroom in every district, and phycologists, dyslexia, and autism therapists. The needs of every student could be met in our public schools.</p>
<p>8. <i>What qualifications and/or characteristics will you look for in your nominees to the State Board of Education?</i></p>	<p>First, any nominee must have some professional or life experience working with public schools and a passion for public education. Other necessary qualities would include a healthy work ethic, interest in innovative solutions, history of building relationships, and strong business sense. Because teachers are our most important education resource (the one closest to our children), their input in this selection should carry weight.</p>	<p>Actual experience in public education, as a student, parent, education and training.</p>

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<p>9. <i>What is your vision for Mississippi's community colleges and universities for the next decade?</i></p>	<p>Many Mississippians will not receive a two- or four-year college degree, but all need a meaningful job for a meaningful wage. My first priority will be our K-12 schools. Our higher education community, particularly our community colleges, must become embedded in our high schools in offering dual-credit options and CTE. Higher education needs to work hand-in-hand with our K-12 schools to help lower student debt and provide practical skills useful in college or career.</p>	<p>Lower tuition in all, with one year of waived tuition in community colleges for all Mississippi public high school graduates. As proven in other states, this approach would enable these students to either get a head start on a 4-year degree or get training and skills in a certificated program.</p>
<p>10. <i>According to a report prepared for the Mississippi Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning in 2016, only slightly more than half of the people who graduate from Mississippi's eight public universities are still working in the state five years after they graduate. What can we do as a state to prevent this brain drain?</i></p>	<p>One of the most important things we can do is grow our economy, which depends on growing our educated workforce. This is not possible without great public schools. Our economic development package will focus on growing Mississippi businesses or attracting new businesses with 25 to 250 employees to create job opportunities for graduates. More job opportunities and wage growth keeps our graduates here.</p>	<p>Focus on passing laws about policy and inclusion, instead of passing laws about morals so you can get a snazzy headline the next day, and the court battles for years. We must have technology in all parts of the state, invest in development in all 82 counties. We must develop policies that make our young graduates feel they are welcome here and there is hope for a brighter future.</p>