

CEA 2022 Secretary of State Candidate Questionnaire

NAME: **Stephanie Thomas**

PARTY: **Democrat**

PAST AND/OR CURRENT ELECTED OFFICES HELD: **Current: State Representative, 143rd District, Norwalk DTC**

OCCUPATION: **Nonprofit Fundraising Consultant**

A. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

1. Collective Bargaining

Background: The right to be a union member is a fundamental employment protection under state and federal laws. America's labor unions have led the fight for working families, winning protections such as the 8-hour workday and the 40-hour work week, overtime rights, and access to health care and retirement security. Today, the fight continues to retain these vital rights and to ensure safe and healthy workplaces. Following the 2018 Supreme Court decision in the case of Janus v. AFSCME, Connecticut must be a leader in protecting union rights. For teachers, collective bargaining allows their voices, ideas, and advocacy for students to be heard without fear of reprisal.

CEA Position: CEA opposes any legislative proposals to weaken or eliminate collective bargaining rights for teachers and all other public employees. I will oppose any legislation weakening collective bargaining for teachers, including proposals to limit bargaining on salary, benefits, or conditions of employment currently permitted under law.

[X] Agree with CEA's Position [] Oppose CEA's Position

B. EDUCATION FUNDING & EQUITY

2. Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grants

Background: A Connecticut Supreme Court decision, Horton v. Meskill, requires the state to equalize funding for school districts based on each district's ability to pay. Adequate education funding for all districts is essential to a well-prepared and growing workforce in Connecticut. For Connecticut to honor its obligations to children and enhance its economic competitiveness, it must meet its financial commitment to fund schools equitably and appropriately. This commitment is even more important because of the COVID-19 crisis, which magnified inequities in resources across school districts. The deficiencies that exist in funding resources to address student trauma and promote social-emotional learning are exacerbated due to the pandemic. Inequities in access to technology and remote learning tools continue to persist, negatively impacting children in every district in the state. These needs intensify during economic downturns requiring schools to expand services for students.

CEA Position: ECS funding must be given the highest priority, even in difficult budget years. Cuts in educational funding harm children, negatively impact teaching and learning, and can increase local property taxes. I will not support any reductions in the state's commitment to ECS funding and will work to enhance funding of school districts wherever possible.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

3. Smart Fiscal Policy

Background: CEA believes that the state's current system of taxation, especially the state's over-reliance on local property taxes to fund our local schools, lacks fairness, increases income inequality, and fails to provide adequate resources for critical services. Year after year, the state faces projected budget deficits and municipalities face uncertainty as to the level of support they will receive for public education in the form of ECS and other educational grants. Connecticut's tax system must be reformed to meet the current and future needs of the state, and to create a dedicated, sustainable revenue stream to fund public education.

CEA Position: CEA supports a more reliable, non-regressive tax system that includes a statewide revenue stream specifically dedicated to fund public schools. I support tax reform that will enhance critical services for our state and dedicate revenues for ECS and other educational programs.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

4. Privatization of Public Schools

Background: CEA believes that public dollars should support public schools. No public money should be diverted to privately operated schools through public tax credits for individuals or businesses, or through vouchers, direct payments, "money-follows-the-child" schemes, or any other means. Public money should also not be used to fund charter management organizations (CMOs), which are privately owned operators of chains of charter schools. The state's growing expenditures in support of the expansion of CMO-run schools is troubling and sets up a costly parallel system of schooling that diverts funding from traditional schools. In addition, CMO-run schools present serious issues of transparency and a lack of properly certified educators. Proposals to further divert funding by way of schemes like "education savings accounts" (ESAs) or vouchers that redirect tax dollars to fund elite or religious private schools would do further harm. Some proposals do this through a personal income tax-credit; others by directly funding debit cards to be used as a voucher. Proposals that divert funding from neighborhood public schools ultimately short-change students in schools that are already starved for adequate resources.

CEA Position: CEA opposes legislation that diverts funding and resources from traditional public schools and opposes the continued expansion of CMO operated schools at the expense of public education. I will oppose any funding that diverts funding away from traditional public schools or expands charter schools at the expense of public school students.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

5. Opponents to Public Education

Background: In recent years, extremely well-funded organizations seeking to undermine various aspects of public education have proliferated. There are groups like ConnCAN, 50CAN, Families for Excellent Schools, Achievement First, Democrats for Education Reform, and others that promote an overreliance on standardized testing and the expansion of privately operated schools (including CMO-run charter schools) at the expense of local public schools. Some like the Yankee Institute threaten to undermine the teaching profession by seeking to do away with fair retirement plans, collective bargaining, and public employee unions altogether. Others like the American Legislative Exchange Council (aka ALEC), the State Policy Network, Americans for Prosperity, and the Walton Family Foundation want to do all the above. Together, the direction advocated by these organizations dilute resources available for public schools, weaken teacher advocacy for students' needs, and narrow the opportunities available to all children to learn.

CEA Position: CEA believes that the organizations noted above pose a threat to public employee unions and the core mission of our public schools to provide fair and equitable opportunities for all children to maximize their learning.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

C. VOTING & REGISTRATION

6. Voter Registration in Schools

Background: As outlined in state statute, registrars of voters shall hold one voter registration session in each high school in every town between the first of January and the last day of the school year. In the past, these efforts have resulted in roughly 30% registration of voting age seniors.

CEA Position: CEA supports this important piece of the voting process as well as additional attempts to expand these efforts and include as many voting age students as possible in the political process.

☒ Agree with CEA's Position ☐ Oppose CEA's Position

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to provide any comments or explanations from your questionnaire responses.

Although some of these policies fall outside the scope of the Secretary of the State role, I am aligned with your mission. My ability to get a good public school education was life-changing and I would not be in this role today if that had not been possible. My mom had a GED and my day was illiterate, and we were very poor. If we had lived just two towns over, my life chances

would have been very different. A society that does not invest in education for everyone is writing its own epitaph. One of the joys of serving as a State Representative and now as the endorsed candidate for Secretary of the State is that I get to be an example of what can happen if we invest in our BIPOC community. We are all gems and if we don't shine, it's because the education system has failed us.