



2022
American Federation of Teachers
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

*for Candidates for the U.S. Senate
and U.S. House of Representatives*



A Union of Professionals

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Reclaim Our Future: Fighting for the Promise of a Better America

The American Federation of Teachers fights for a better life for all and for the next generation to do even better. We fight for good jobs and the right to a union; for high-quality and well-resourced healthcare, public services, and public schools and colleges; to counter discrimination and division; and to protect the right to vote, the integrity of elections and our imperiled democracy.

The AFT's more than 1.7 million members work every day for this freedom to thrive, and we are on the frontlines of our country's healing and progress.

- Healthcare professionals are carrying us through the deadliest pandemic in a century.
- Public employees are delivering vital services that communities rely on.
- Educators and school staff are working with families to help students catch up and recover—to support students academically, emotionally and socially. Just as they worked to safely return to in-person learning, educators are looking forward: They yearn for post-pandemic normalcy and are working tirelessly to prepare our kids for bright futures.

Our members must be respected and supported, especially now as their work is harder than ever, with increased stress, staff shortages, and political interference and attacks.

As professionals and as a union, we care, we fight, we show up and we vote. We choose hope and aspiration over fear and division. It is time to turn the aspiration that unites everyone in our richly diverse country—the aspiration for a better life for ourselves, our children and our communities—into action.

We have prepared this questionnaire to gauge your views on issues of concern to our members. We hope you will take this opportunity to share your vision for preserving our democracy, protecting our most vulnerable, and strengthening our economy and our communities. A strong democracy allows for disagreement and debate on issues, and we recognize that candidates may not necessarily agree with the AFT 100 percent of the time. ***We encourage you to use the comment section at the end of the questionnaire to share your thoughts or address any issues or concerns you feel the AFT and its affiliates should consider.***

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1. DEMOCRACY AND VOTING RIGHTS

Anti-democratic forces are working to limit voting rights, interfere in vote counting and even manipulate the outcome of elections. This dangerous activity makes clear the need for urgent corrective federal action to protect the right to vote and our democracy.

- *Do you support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore federal preclearance requirements for states with a history of discriminatory laws?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Would you support overarching legislation for federal elections that would supersede restrictions enacted at the state level?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

- *Would you support a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

2. BUILD BACK BETTER PLAN

The Biden administration's Build Back Better plan would be transformational by making investments that would help nearly every working family. Key provisions of BBB would expand accessibility to and affordability of healthcare, prescription drugs and child care; provide for universal pre-K; and invest in recruiting and retaining educators and healthcare workers.

- *Do you support the provisions of the Biden administration's Build Back Better plan, including the provisions lowering the costs of prescription drugs, healthcare and child care, and providing universal pre-K?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Do you support the investments of the Build Back Better plan to help recruit and retain educators and healthcare workers?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

3. HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

While the Affordable Care Act has successfully expanded access to healthcare, we can no longer avoid the rising cost of healthcare coverage, or the inequities of the U.S. healthcare system. More needs to be done, including expanding access and eliminating the excise tax on some employer-provided healthcare plans that penalizes working Americans.

- *Would you support legislation that moves the nation to universal healthcare coverage?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

- *Do you support lifting the restrictions for Medicare to negotiate drug costs with pharmaceutical companies?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Would you support expanding access to Medicaid coverage for people living at or below the federal poverty line?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

- *Would you support repealing the excise tax on employer-provided healthcare plans?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

4. SAFE NURSE STAFFING LEVELS

The AFT is the second largest nurses union in the country. We, and our members, have seen hospitals cut their staffing levels to dangerous levels, creating a staffing crisis that compromises patient care and is causing droves of healthcare workers to leave the profession.

- *Will you support federal action establishing minimum safe-staffing levels for nurses to ensure that patients receive the safe quality care they deserve?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

5. HEALTHCARE WORKER SAFETY

Healthcare and social service workers are nearly five times more likely to experience workplace violence injury than workers in any other sector of the economy.

- *Would you support federal legislation or Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards to ensure all hospitals and healthcare facilities have strong and effective violence prevention programs?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

Due to insufficient safety standards in healthcare facilities, more than 400,000 healthcare workers have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

- *Would you support a legally enforceable OSHA standard to protect healthcare workers against infectious diseases?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

The mental strain of healthcare workers during the pandemic is real. Since March 2020, nearly 1 in 5 healthcare workers have quit their jobs. Congress has provided short-term funding to begin to address the crisis, but the moral injury that healthcare workers experience is a long-term problem.

- *Will you support federal funding for the mental health programming and support that our frontline caregivers need?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

6. HEALTHCARE WORKER PIPELINE

The COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the nation's healthcare workforce, with people leaving the sector in record numbers. To rebuild this critical workforce, we need to increase access to training and education programs. One way of doing this is through investing in nursing programs and loan forgiveness.

- *Would you support increased loan forgiveness for students enrolled in healthcare professional training programs?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

- *Would you support increased funding for the Health Resources and Services Administration's Title VII and Title VIII healthcare workforce programs?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

7. SAFE IN-PERSON LEARNING

Educators and parents agree that being in school is essential to children's mental, social, emotional and academic well-being. Since the earliest days of the pandemic, the AFT has advocated for safe in-person schooling with layered mitigation measures. Through using best practices, we can make sure every public school is a place where parents want to send their children, educators want to work, and students are able to thrive.

- *Do you support in-person learning plans and safety procedures to minimize COVID-19 transmission in schools and provide the resources needed to keep everyone in our schools safe?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

8. INVESTING IN PREK-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

TITLE I and IDEA

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, particularly Title I, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act help ensure that the school districts serving the most disadvantaged children and communities have the resources necessary for children to learn. These programs provide funding for the hiring and retaining of educators, school nurses and guidance counselors; class-size reduction; and community schools, bilingual education, literacy programs and more.

- *Do you support increasing and ensuring adequate funding for ESEA and IDEA to help ensure that all children receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community schools are hubs of well-being and support for children, families and communities. By anchoring the schools in the daily life of the community, trust is built and obstacles are removed to get kids and families the support they need and to help take care of the whole child.

- *Do you support federal funding for an accelerated expansion of community schools to reach a nationwide total of 25,000 schools?*

☒ Yes, I support.

☐ No, I oppose.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education and child care programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool programs and full-day kindergarten increase the likelihood that young children, from birth to age 5, will have the language and literacy foundation on which later school success is built.

- *Do you support increasing federal funds to help provide universal access to noncompulsory early childhood education and care programs for children from birth to kindergarten?*

☒ Yes, I support.

☐ No, I oppose.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Our collective responsibility is to ensure that our schools are safe and welcoming places for teaching and learning—and that students can focus on learning and not the trauma of violence or avoiding violence. Investing in peer counseling, wellness programs, violence intervention initiatives and other supports is essential.

- *Do you support federal funding for community-based intervention and prevention strategies?*

☒ Yes, I support.

☐ No, I oppose.

- *Would you support funding to provide every school with a mental health professional?*

☒ Yes, I would support.

☐ No, I would oppose.

9. FREEDOM TO TEACH AND EDUCATOR SHORTAGES

Teachers and other school workers are leaving their profession at the highest rate on record. In fact, all 50 states started the school year with teacher shortages. This crisis has two major roots: deep disinvestment in public education, including compensation, and the deprofessionalization of teaching.

- *Will you support federal funding to help recruit and retain educators, including paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, counselors, bus drivers and maintenance workers?*

☒ Yes, I will support.

☐ No, I will oppose.

- *Will you support federal policies to help ensure that educators are treated as the professionals they are, with a real voice and agency benefiting their profession?*

☒ Yes, I will support.

☐ No, I will oppose.

Parents and educators agree: We want our kids to have an education that imparts honesty about our nation's history, both the good and the bad. Unfortunately, there are politicians who are stoking fear about our schools and have even passed laws in some states restricting an educator's professional responsibility to teach honest history.

- *Do you support the teaching of honest history in public schools?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Will you support efforts to give educators the resources to teach history without fear of reprisal?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

10. REIMAGINING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

We have an opportunity to rethink accountability and assessment. Let's change accountability systems so that they serve teaching and learning goals by measuring what matters, incorporating formative assessment led by classroom teachers, connecting meaningfully to standards and curriculum, and providing timely and useful information for students and families.

- *Would you support changing federal accountability and assessment practices to reflect what students know beyond standardized tests, allowing educators and school staff to respond to students' academic, developmental and social needs?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

11. "SCHOOL CHOICE" PROPOSALS AND PRIVATIZATION

So-called school choice programs (vouchers, opportunity scholarships, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts) are proven to have an adverse effect on student achievement and drain needed resources away from public schools, which teach 90 percent of our nation's students.

- *Will you oppose vouchers and/or other proposals that allow taxpayer dollars to be used for private and religious schools at the K-12 level, either as a limited experiment or as a full-scale program?*

☒ Yes, I will oppose. ☐ No, I will support.

Public charter schools have the potential to be incubators for innovation and collaborative labor-management relationships but should not siphon funding away from school districts or be held to different standards than traditional neighborhood public schools.

- *Do you support requiring charter schools to meet the same requirements as neighborhood public schools, including health and safety standards, civil rights requirements, academic accountability and financial transparency?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

12. HIGHER EDUCATION—ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

The AFT believes that higher education is a public good and should be available to all without debt. And we believe federal lawmakers should act to lift the burden of existing student debt from student loan borrowers.

- *Do you support federal incentives for states to increase their investments in higher education and to make public higher education more affordable and available without debt?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Do you support federal action for a full or partial cancellation of existing student loan debt, which is now a \$1.8 trillion drag on the economy, of which 90 percent is owed to the U.S. Department of Education?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Do you support expanding the Pell Grant program to limit college loan indebtedness for low- and middle-income students?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

13. WORKERS' VOICE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Strong unions are essential for having an economy in which everyone can thrive. All workers, no matter where they are employed, deserve a voice on the job and should have the freedom to join a union and bargain with their employers for better wages and benefits, without harassment or intimidation from management.

- *Do you support the right for all workers to join a union and collectively bargain?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

- *Will you support the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

- *Will you support the Protecting the Right to Organize Act?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

14. ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND TAX FAIRNESS

A fair and vibrant economy means everyone, from working- and middle-class Americans to big businesses, pays their fair share of taxes. For far too long, the wealthiest Americans and large corporations have not paid their fair share, leaving education, healthcare and infrastructure sorely underfunded and economic inequality skyrocketing. Comprehensive and progressive tax reform is not only the right thing to do, but a necessary step for economic justice.

- *Would you support ensuring that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, including reversing the tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations that have increased the deficit and are now threatening cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other vital programs?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

- *Would you support eliminating the cap on state and local tax deductions?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

15. SOCIAL SECURITY AND RETIREMENT SECURITY

Workers should have a right to a secure retirement with the ability to live independent and dignified lives after they retire. However, without a renewed commitment to retirement security, our nation faces a retirement income gap that will force many workers to work longer than they should. A meaningful retirement security plan would preserve and strengthen Social Security while creating a structure for all individuals to have access to a pension-like guaranteed retirement plan.

- *Would you support legislation to strengthen Social Security in a way that does not cut benefits for any current or future retirees?*

☒ Yes, I would support. ☐ No, I would oppose.

In approximately 50 percent of the states, public employees (including teachers) take part in state pension systems other than Social Security. This results in many public workers having their Social Security benefit unfairly reduced by the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset.

- *Will you support expanding Social Security and reforms to the WEP and GPO provision so that retired public servants are not unfairly penalized?*

☒ Yes, I will support. ☐ No, I will oppose.

16. IMMIGRATION

Our country's strength has always been built on the simple notion that America is a place where many become one. The AFT supports commonsense, comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform, which is long overdue.

- *Do you support a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers and their families; for the beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure; and for the 11 million undocumented immigrants?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

17. CLIMATE CHANGE AND JOBS

Americans face the dual crises of climate change and increasing economic inequality. For far too long, the forces driving both crises have created a wedge between the need for economic security and a safe living environment.

- *Do you support policies that combine an aggressive emission-reduction strategy with a sound infrastructure, jobs and community resilience strategy?*

☒ Yes, I support. ☐ No, I oppose.

18. Can you give concrete examples where you have been instrumental in helping organized labor and the broader working class in Vermont.

As a former union member and public school teacher, I personally know the power and importance of organized labor. Unions built the middle class, and now it's time we supported unions so we can rebuild it.

As Senate President, I spent the past year negotiating to reform our public pensions system, ensuring that our public employees had a solvent support system upon retirement and that they retained a strong benefits plan. It was also critical to me that teachers and public employees be partners in finding the long-term solution. In the package, we protected the benefit plans that are so important to public employees and to me personally.

This past year, I was also outspoken in my support for the University of Vermont Staff Union in its push for a fair contract, and I successfully pushed the Senate to pass a bill to give UVM and VSC faculty and staff seats on the boards of Trustees.

I also helped allocate nearly \$1 billion dollars in pandemic relief funds to workers and their families, including investments in hazard pay for frontline workers and in stabilizing our childcare and healthcare systems.

When I was Majority Leader, I helped pass a paid family and medical leave bill to ensure that no Vermonter loses their job or savings in order to bond with a new child, care for a loved one, or deal with a personal illness. Unfortunately, Governor Scott vetoed this bill.

OPTIONAL: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS