

Underly, Kerr to face off in general election for state superintendent

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Pecatonica School District Superintendent Jill Underly and former Brown Deer School District Superintendent Deborah Kerr won the top two spots today in the state schools superintendent primary, moving on to face off in the April 6 general election.

According to unofficial returns, Underly edged out Kerr as the two advanced out of Tuesday's primary. Underly had 27.3 percent of the vote, while Kerr had 26.5 percent.

Assistant State Superintendent Sheila Briggs came in a distant third with 15.6 percent.

Behind Briggs, Shandowlyon Hendricks-Williams took fourth with 11.3 percent followed by Troy Gunderson with 8.4 points, Steve Krull with 6.3 points and Joe Fenrick with 4.5 points.

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Underly said in a statement, "We now face a choice: elect someone who wants to make sure every student has a great school and real opportunity, or someone who wants to divide us, waste our precious resources and pick winners and losers among our students. I am the candidate that is firmly on the side of children in our schools, our students' parents, and our educators."

Kerr told WisPolitics.com her primary focus leading up to the election will be on creating a plan to open schools safely and figuring out how to get schools more funding to help with implementing that plan.

"We are experiencing tremendous learning loss because of the pandemic and now

we have got to deal with all the trauma and the mental health issues of our children moving forward,” Kerr said. “I want to start leveraging at the federal level so it frees up funding from the state level because our schools and our school boards are going to need extra help to make sure that we can reopen sensibly and safely.”

Underly snagged WEAC’s endorsement ahead of the primary, and the PAC for the state’s largest teachers union gave her campaign \$18,000. The liberal A Better Wisconsin Together also did a \$78,000 digital ad praising Underly and saying she would “fight voucher schools that deprive public schools of resources and put our children first.”

Kerr was viewed as one of the most pro-voucher candidates in the race, and she attracted support from Republicans and school choice supporters even as she declared herself a Dem in the final forums ahead of the primary. Kerr pumped at least \$50,000 into mail and other ads, while she did a small TV buy in the closing days in which she promised to work with all districts and stakeholders in Wisconsin and proclaimed there was “no room for politics in education.”

See Underly’s statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2021/underly-campaign-dr-jill-underly-advances-to-the-general-election/>

See Kerr’s statement:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2021/kerr-campaign-dr-deborah-kerr-wins-in-primary-election-for-state-superintendent-advances-to-general-election-in-april/>