

TOM TORLAKSON
Seeking Position of: State Superintendent of Public Schools
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1. If elected, what are your top priorities during your term? What would you like to accomplish and how would you go about doing so? Please be specific.

My overall goal is to achieve—through multiple pathways—success for all our students. I want to help all of our students gain the skills they need, and the mind-set required, to succeed in either career or college. I want to combat and lower the disgraceful drop-out rates and close the horribly persistent “achievement gap.” To accomplish these overall goals, I will fight to:

1. Ensure California public schools are amply and securely funded so our state can have one of the very best pre-K-14 systems in the country. Our state’s current rank of 47th in the nation (and dropping) in per pupil spending is a disgrace. I will fight to bring our schools back to the top five in the nation in performance and in funding.
2. Ensure all of our public schools are safe and high quality. Many districts around California are stepping up with innovation to improve their neighborhood schools. We must encourage this and share these reform ideas with the most challenging districts and those with the greatest needs.
3. Rebuild our state’s higher education system so California will stop breaking the promises we have made to our students through the Master Plan for Higher Education.
4. Creating a competitive 21st century school environment. This includes support for: (A) more career technical education and individualized pathways to success for students; (B) using technology as a way to better engage students; (C) providing the professional support systems necessary to encourage and aid excellent teachers in every classroom.

2. How have you in the past and how will you in the future use your position to expand the presence and influence of Asian Pacific Americans in public policy and politics?

Within the first few months of my election as a Contra Costa County Supervisor, I hired Gloria Omania to be my Chief of Staff and principal advisor. The first Filipina in Contra Costa County to serve in such a role, Gloria has helped me interact with and help to mentor Asian Pacific Americans in Contra Costa County and around the state. I have helped to create political clubs, provide assistance and funding for events, and endorse candidates from the API community for elected offices.

Working with Gloria, and other members of my staff team, I have constantly sought to find opportunities to work with API community members on issues they may be facing with their local, county, or state government. I have been a member and strong supporter of the Filipino-American Democratic Caucus of Contra Costa County. I am a regular participant of numerous events of the local Filipino American associations, as well as the Chinese American Political Association. As a local elected official and a

member of the Legislature, I have welcomed every opportunity to acknowledge the dedicated contribution of outstanding members of the API community, including Mary Kobayashi, Woman of the Year. I recommended the Governor appointment of Ana Marie Bustos to the County Fair Board. I also recommended the selection of Melanie Ramil to the staff of the Legislative Asian Pacific Islander Caucus which opened doors for her as a Capitol staffer.

I will continue to focus on ensuring the API community has a voice in the public education debate at the state level and will look for opportunities to work with students and other leaders to encourage them to begin or continue careers in the public policy sector.

3. What have you done that demonstrates your commitment to and effectiveness in promoting Asian Pacific American interests in the following areas (and if you have not contributed in these areas, please discuss any area(s) in which you have made a contribution):

Education

My general belief is that we must reinvest in our educational system and take the steps necessary that every neighborhood school and offer every child a high-quality education in a safe and healthy environment.

Many of my friends in the API community have stressed to me the need for a strong educational system, not just K-12, but beginning in preschool and early childhood care.

I also believe we must do more for English Language Learners to ensure they can be successful in our schools. I believe every child must have an individual plan to suit the way they learn. I support more funding and more support services for ELL students.

My office has participated in the CAPA (Chinese American Political Association) internship program every year since it was initiated, and I have enjoyed working with the students from this program as they have learned more about the legislative process and how to serve constituents and help them with their problems and concerns. It has been my pleasure to then assist these students achieve higher education and career goals with letters of recommendation and guidance.

Health Care

The members of the API community with whom I work share many of the same concerns about health care as the overall California population: too many people do not have access to quality and affordable health care.

While I support single-payer as the best overall health care reform, I commend President Obama and the Democratic Members of Congress for overcoming many hurdles to pass the healthcare reform plan last month. While much more work needs to be done, I believe passing this bill will help children in many ways—especially the ban on denying children health care based on preexisting conditions.

I also support collecting more data on the health disparities that occur in communities

of color, since we know these communities often face higher incidences of chronic diseases, mortality, and other negative health outcomes.

I have also discussed with my colleagues in the API community, and supported legislation in Sacramento, to help address problem gambling. I have noted the commissions that have identified problem gaming as a particular area of concern within the API community as it appears it may impact more API members than the general population.

Civil Rights

I believe California's diversity is a strength and one of the reasons our state is able to compete in the global economy so successfully.

I also believe we must condemn any act of violence and prejudice. Hate crimes intimidate members of our community, create fear, and keep people from enjoying all of the freedoms and opportunities the United States has to offer.

We must not accept negative and destructive actions based on race, ethnic background, national origin, religion, gender identity, age, disability, or sexual orientation. I have supported legislation to address these concerns and also to educate community members on the reporting of hate crimes, increase awareness of our positive diversity, and improve public safety.

Business

Given my concerns over our ability to educate our children in ways that will help them have the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in the 21st Century global economy, I have taken a keen interest in the economic growth of the Asian region.

I have joined two Legislative delegations to China in 2005 and 2008. I have seen first-hand the extraordinary infrastructure investment there.

My visits to China, and discussions with API leaders throughout California, have confirmed for me that we face a fierce global competition in the sciences and trade.

Many business leaders have also expressed to me their concerns over the state of our education system. They have described how they are needing to provide remedial education at the workplace. They have told me of their frustrations and their considerations of relocating if they cannot find a skilled workforce here.

Recent cuts to our schools are harming our kids and their ability to have the skills they need to succeed on these stage. These education cuts will last a lifetime. They will not heal. These experiences and conversations are part of the reason I have voted against the recent education cuts, and why I will continue to argue we must quickly reinvest in our schools.