

Superintendent of Public Instruction Who Supports Gifted Programs?

The June Primary has come and gone and left us a bit up in the air over the next Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI). The results from this month's primary election have thousands of other reform-minded voters wondering which of the two candidates left in the race will be willing and able to take up their demands.

The issue could be critical because supporters of state Sen. **Gloria Romero**, who ran a close third in the primary, may end up deciding the November election between former district superintendent **Larry Aceves** and veteran legislator **Tom Torlakson** – both of whom have shown little interest in the kinds of changes people like Los Angeles parent reformers and charter school advocates want to make. Likewise, neither has made gifted education a priority, beyond expressing general support.

Aceves surprised most pundits with his narrow victory in the June 8 primary. But also stunning to most election observers was Romero's third place finish despite her high name recognition after years in the Legislature and her backing by "reform" groups embracing aggressive turnaround strategies that are being advocated by the Obama administration. But Romero, who ran a curiously quiet campaign, ended with just 17 percent of the vote. Aceves, the least-known of the top three candidates and by far the one with the least amount of money, won with slightly more than 19 percent of the vote. Torlakson, who has the support of the teachers unions, ran second with slightly more than 18 percent of the vote.

Both Torlakson and Aceves will need to undertake a "complicated political calculus" before deciding how far to go to attract Romero supporters. Perhaps the key issue for the two remaining candidates revolves around the school restructuring agenda emanating from U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Duncan's Race to the Top competition offers state's big grant money in exchange for making a long list of changes such as linking teacher pay to student performance and shutting down chronically-low performing schools. During the primary campaign both Aceves and Torlakson opposed legislation authored by Romero aimed at bringing about some of the Race to the Top changes. Although both men said last week that they were not opposed to making vigorous changes to how schools operate. That leaves plenty of room for GATE supporters to press both to include services to gifted students in their proposals.

It is important to note that roughly 1.7 million voters, or 45 percent, cast their ballots for one of the other nine candidates all of whom had virtually no name recognition statewide and ran almost no formal statewide campaign. Turnout was also low. The head-to-head contest for State Superintendent in November will leave us with one of these two, neither of whom had truly substantial support in the first round. This down-ticket race will likely have limited voter participation.

Help us identify the best SPI candidate for CAG supporters before election day.

It behooves all CAG members to get to know both candidates and impress on them your interest in seeing gifted education as a priority. If you see SPI events in your local area be sure to attend, mention your CAG affiliation and ask questions about their positions on GATE. Whoever wins the seat needs to know gifted education is on the minds of Californians and that they will be held accountable for improving services for our kids.