

# Great Alaska Schools

2014 Candidate Questionnaire

## 20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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### High Standards For Quality Alaska Schools

**Background:** Great Alaska Schools is committed to the achievement of high quality public education for every Alaska child. To reach this goal we believe Alaska must focus on specific outcomes, and set high standards for schools and teachers. One such set of standards has been established by the Anchorage United for Youth partners with their "90 by 2020" program. They specifically advocate tracking, among other things, whether Alaska children are ready for kindergarten, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency, 8<sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency, and high school graduation readiness as measures of educational success. More background information on their efforts can be found at: [www.90by2020.org](http://www.90by2020.org).

1. Do you support efforts like the 90 by 2020 partnership to establish education standards? Yes  No
- Please Explain

Tracking student performance as soon as a student is admitted in to a the Alaska school system is important. We must also be mindful of so many students who attend rural schools, then come to a city. These very good metrics that are universal in many states and other industrialized nations.

2. Are there other measures that you would consider better indicators of school quality/performance? If so, what are they?

Aside from actual test scores, many students have other gifts like art, writing or athletics. While schools can't perform such a grand battery of tests, students who excel in other areas should be commended, supported and encouraged.

## Assessment of Alaska's Public School System

3. Please describe what you consider to be one or two strengths (or successes) of Alaska's public school system statewide.

I am a product of the public school system. The greatest strength is that we have some of the best teachers who love their jobs and their students. We must continue to grow the best teachers for our kids.

4. Please describe what you consider to be one or two weaknesses (or failures) of Alaska's public school system statewide.

The biggest problem is the failure of the legislative leadership to understand that education is expensive, but ignorance is even more costly. While we were able to make great gains in the cuts of the 90's, we have flat-funded education for three straight years. This is moving our children once again to the back of the line and is plain wrong.

5. Please describe what you consider to be one or two strengths (or successes) of your local school district.

My teachers were my mentors and inspiration growing up here in Fairbanks. I could name just about every teacher by first name.

6. Please describe what you consider to be one or two weaknesses (or failures) of your local school district.

There are very few weaknesses in our school district. However, this last year, I wish they would have pushed harder and more forcefully for education spending. Instead, they allowed the dialogue to be controlled by the lawmakers who were opposed to a BSA increase and also in favor of vouchers.

7. Please describe one or two actions that the Legislature might take that would address a weakness you identified above.

We need a new legislature that values public education as much as I do!

8. Do you believe decisions regarding education spending priorities (e.g., technology, school safety, Pre-K, classroom size, etc.) rest primarily with the Legislature or locally elected School Boards? Please Explain

I think that the spending priorities should ultimately rest with local school boards. And I definitely listen to my local board. However, the legislature must be proactive in supporting the things that will work across the state, including statewide, universal voluntary pre-K, class room size mandates for K-3 (funded by the legislature) and school technology grants. I have proposed by bill and action each of those in the last few years.

9. Which state expenditures (e.g., transportation infrastructure, energy infrastructure, public safety, gasoline, etc.) do you consider a higher priority than education funding?

A public education system is a guarantee in our own State Constitution and should not be diminished.

## Public Funds for Private Schools

10. Do you support placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot that would allow public funds to be used to fund students' education at private and religious schools? Yes  No   
(If yes, skip to Question 12)

11. If no, are there any restrictions or requirements that could be put into place that would change your position on Question 10? Yes  No   
Please Explain

I am soundly opposed to vouchers, have fought them in the legislature and will continue to fight them in the future.

## Education Funding

**Background:** Between FY2011 and FY2014, the Base Student Allocation (BSA) was unchanged by the Legislature. Over that period, as a result of this inaction in the face of ordinary inflation, the BSA lost over \$400 in purchasing power. During the 2014 Legislative Session, Great Alaska Schools advocated for an increase in the BSA of \$400 in FY2015 and, as a temporary alternative to inflation-proofing the formula, scheduled increases of \$125 in the following two years.

The 2014 Legislature voted to increase the BSA by \$150 in FY15, \$50 in FY16, and \$50 in FY17. In addition, they appropriated funding "outside" the BSA (using the same distribution formula as the BSA) in an amount equivalent to a BSA increase of \$72 for FY15.

Assuming no funds are appropriated outside the BSA in FY16, the BSA would need to be increased by \$425 that year to return to the purchasing power of FY11.

12. Do you support the actions of the 2014 Legislature regarding the level of education funding provided? Yes  No

13. Would you support an increase in the BSA of \$425 in FY16? Yes  No   
(if yes, skip to Question 16)

14. Would you support any increase in the BSA in FY16? Yes  No   
(if no, skip to Question 16)

15. What is the maximum increase in the BSA in FY16 that you would support?

16. Would you introduce a bill to effectuate your desired BSA increase? Yes  No

17. If a majority of your caucus did not support the level of BSA increase you supported in your response to Questions 13 – 15, would you still vote to approve such a BSA increase (regardless of the consequences within your caucus)? Yes  No

18. Do you support inflation-proofing the BSA amount going forward to provide durability and stable purchasing power for Alaska's education funding? (If yes, then skip to Question 20) Yes  No

19. Do you support continuing the practice of scheduled increases to the BSA going forward at least three years to provide predictability to education funding? Yes  No

20. Would you like to explain any of your answers to Questions 12 – 19? (Please indicate which answer you are explaining.)

Inflation-proofing has it's problems as some districts have higher inflation than others due to simple things like utilities, infrastruction improvements, enrollment, etc. I support some sort of an inflation factor as school boards need to know how much money that they can expect from year to year.

Please use the space below to expand on any answers for which you need additional space. (Please indicate which answer you are expanding on.)

I am a big fan of the Great Alaska Schools and all the volunteer hours, special meetings with key lawmakers and communication back to the parents. It was a tough fight last year. I am hopeful that we can break the supermajority in Juneau next year so that more lawmakers can vote their conscience and vote to fully fund education. I will continue to boldly stand up for my education that I received right here in Fairbanks and for all the children in the future who deserve a good education.