

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, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th 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.

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

Please Explain

I believe setting goals and working to reach them is a sensible approach for local schools and districts, but the goal-setting and the decision-making should be at the community and parent level locally. With the ability we have today to know what other communities, states and even countries are achieving, we can figure out at the local level what our goals need to be for our children in our communities in order for them to be successful in the larger world.

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

I think it's important to find out from employers, post-secondary training programs, colleges and universities whether our graduating students are prepared when they leave high school. What are the gaps? Where are we doing it right? These measures of how well a student can succeed after high school would be excellent indicators of school quality/performance.

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.

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

Students who graduate aren't necessarily prepared for their next pursuit. For example, often students must take zero-level courses in college that don't count toward their degrees because they weren't adequately prepared in high school.

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

1) Alaska Middle College which allows students to get an associate degree through UAA by the time they graduate from high school 2) The support for homeschool programs: Twindley Bridge Charter; Mat-Su Central (the largest school in the district).

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

I have not heard from parents and families about problems with our local district. I did hear from a middle school teacher that absenteeism was an ongoing problem.

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

I am not aware of what could be done legislatively to assist with solving the problem in #6.

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

Prefer decisions be made at the local level - with the school board.

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

I believe the expenditures listed above are synergistic and based on opportunities and timelines, we have to make annual decisions about all of them, weighing in numerous factors. It would be a detriment to Alaska to set a strict list and adhere to it year after year.

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

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?
(if yes, skip to Question 16) Yes No

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

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.)

If the revenue picture were brighter, it would be a different story. When we have to use savings to help fund the departments of our state government and provide for local schools, and those savings are limited, we are in a place where we must reduce the state budget overall. Until we begin to see a more substantial uptick in oil production, and until we realize revenues from a completed gasoline, we have to tighten our belt. I am not stating here that we should slash all items in the budget equally, and I would advocate that education is a vital investment that helps makes our communities strong and healthy, as well as families and individuals, but the next decade is going to be a lean one, and it is unrealistic to think that we can substantially increase education funding steadily, year after year, at this time. We should make education a priority and do the best we can, but it would be irresponsible for me to commit support for annual increases considering the revenue climate were in and the forecast ahead. My children all attended public schools, so I am not at all pushing for their demise - I want the opposite, in fact. I want our schools to be among the best in the nation and to thrive. Teachers are some of the best people in our communities, and I want every Alaskan student to do well and have excellent opportunities after they graduate because they are extremely well-prepared. It is going to take creativity and out-of-the box problem-solving, but I believe we Alaskans are up for the challenge.

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

Shelley A. Hughes