

# Great Alaska Schools

## 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

### 20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

Candidate Name: Pete LaFrance		Legislative District: 11
Mailing Address: PO Box 1555		
City: Palmer	Zip: 99645	Phone:
E-Mail: pete@petelafrance.com		Cell: 775-7844
Prior Elected Office, If Any:		

#### 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

As a teacher I understand both how important education is to the region's economy and how essential it is to have the entire community focused on ensuring educational success. These partnerships increase community buy in and direct appropriate resources towards our children. Testing to ensure our schools are serving our children appropriately is necessary and tests need to be reliable and valid. Additionally, we should have established school action plans tied to the tests that are rooted in a statistically valid understanding of the data. Finally, we must ensure that our schools have the resources necessary to improve.

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

Teachers and students are remarkably candid about the quality of their school when asked. Established accreditation processes tend to focus on these softer elements when working for improvement and they should not be discounted when building high performing schools. When coupled with valid test data this information can help us get an accurate picture of where the school is at and help target some potential paths for improvement.

## **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 think our ability to deliver education across the state, from small villages to larger cities is impressive. We have not turned a blind eye to the needs and challenges of this task. While success has not been fully realized I do feel that we have acknowledged the challenge and are trying to step up to the task. The diversity of schools in Alaska is astonishing.

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

Our statewide high school graduation rate of 71.8% (2012-2013) is appalling. Furthermore, for students with disabilities this rate is 42.6%, which is nothing short of tragic.

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

I think Mat-Su School District has done a good job of ensuring that parents have a variety of options when selecting a path for their children.

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

I think Mat-Su could do a better job of studying the different educational approaches across the district and reproducing successful ones. Using data effectively is essential - while this may be happening internally I have not see evidence of it.

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

I think our current legislature is not interested in partnering with teachers and schools to improve quality. They have taken a combative approach that is punitive in its nature and does not build on the expertise that is present in school systems across the state. We need to change this.

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

Locally elected school boards should make these decisions. Legislative grants to individual schools should go through school boards as well.

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

There are some state expenditures that I would place at the same level as education (health, infrastructure, safety, etc.), as they are very interrelated, but there is none that I would consider a higher priority.

## **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? 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.)

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