

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

We absolutely need to fund education to cease the layoff of educators and staff in order to meet this goal. The current funding patterns won't get us to 90 by 2020. The more our community, which includes parents and teachers, works as a team, the better our chances - but we must fund adequately.

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

I know that graduation rates are definitely indicators, but a child's success also can be perceived in the level of (or lack of) frustration a child encounters both academically and emotionally. We know that performance indicators can also include attendance rates, completed portfolios and canvassing of the shareholders - students, parents, educators. I believe that while I am a retired educator with classroom experience, we as legislatures must include the education profession and the local and state communities when seeking or designing solutions that work.

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.

The public schools always seem to land on their feet when tossed immeasurable odds. 1. They integrate students from different cultures and those speaking multiple languages in all grades. 2. Public schools are the front line to homelessness, substance abuse, physical abuse and more.

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

Definitely the major weakness is our current funding. Not only do we under fund public schools, we also create major obstacles for local districts who are trying to plan for the future. Districts should know what funding is coming so they can make comprehensive plans for their programs.

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

I think Anchorage has been successful in creating a strong variety of optional programs. I also believe their teachers have helped students reach dreams and become life-long learners due to their dedication to the profession and their clients, the students.

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

Budget cuts have created difficulties - even in areas one might not consider, such as support staff and custodial staff. Poor funding also creates limits on services and building use. Losing the career counselors at the high schools was another student service victim to low funding.

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

Start with funding amounts to encourage comprehensive local planning. Fund to catch up with the past decade of losses then create a sensible plan to account for inflation and enrollment changes. Work in tandem with districts rather than holding funding to an annual crisis.

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

While I believe many spending priorities must rest in local hands due to unique conditions, I would welcome discussion regarding reducing class size by grade and a statewide pre-K plan at the Legislative end. HOWEVER - the legislature must fund these decisions. We know class size increases student-teacher interaction and that is going to be key to reaching 90 in 2020. Pre-K is the proven foundation for our kids (and it helps their parents learn 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?

I don't consider any of these to be a higher priority, as they all are important. HOWEVER - a strong education system is what will enable us to build, maintain and innovate for the future. Strong education to include Pre-K is proven to reduce likelihood of crime, homelessness, joblessness and substance abuse. We must see education as equal or higher.

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

Private schools have always been privately funded. It's a choice. I am always ready to listen to ideas and opinions, but I just can't see where I would change my position on this.

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? Yes No
(If yes, then skip to Question 20)

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.)

17 - I am guess that depends on what the caucus is supporting. I am not bound by the caucus, but I would respect and listen to their reasons. I won't allow my votes to all be attached to a caucus vote if I have different positions on the bill. I am not sure what consequences would come other than a discussion.

I also support funding our universities and programs that work with the local schools.

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 only want to share a vision. I believe we should continue to more forward to support and allow innovation within our public schools with the goal of one day hearing, "We should take a lesson from Alaska. They have the strongest education system in the country."

Thank you for this opportunity.

Gretchen