

Great Alaska Schools 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

**20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy**

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Prior Elected Office, If Any: **None**

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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](http://www.90by2020.org).

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

**Increasing graduation rates is crucial for the economic health of Alaska. But achieving that goal starts long before high school. By looking at education standards at earlier points (pre-K, 3rd grade, and 8th grade) the "90 by 2020" program has developed an approach to anticipate and address problem areas earlier on. This is laudable. We must have a set of definable, meaningful, and measurable standards in order to know our students are on the right path and our graduates are ready for success as adults. We can't become a slave to standards, however. We have to keep adequate flexibility in our assessment devices to recognize that each child develops differently. We must also avoid imposing additional levels of bureaucracy for already overworked teachers, and craft an educational environment where we do not teach to the test. While testing and standards are beneficial and necessary, I would urge caution and patience while adopting and adapting the right mix of success metrics for Alaska's children.**

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

**There are many indicators of school quality and performance. The best holistic assessment plan would include student performance data points such as those espoused in the “90 by 2020” program along with other indicators such as: average daily attendance rates, growth in attendance rates, dropout rates, earned early college credits, post-secondary enrollment and persistence rates, educator credentials, assessment participation rates, parent/community participation, and class size.**

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## **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 degree of control afforded to local school districts**

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

**Statewide, our schools are underfunded.**

**What works in Anchorage may not work (or be feasible) in Aleknagik. Alaska's diversity, from urban to rural schools means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for our schools. I would not call this a weakness or failure, rather a challenge unique to our state. We need to recognize urban-rural differences and adapt our educational system to them. I am prepared to confront this challenge and am ready to support our educators to maximize learning all across the state.**

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

**Choice. Families in the Anchorage School District have a wide suite of educational opportunities within the public system. I am especially excited about the International Baccalaureate and World Languages programs, which will prepare our young people for success in an increasingly connected global environment.**

**The diversity of our Anchorage community and resultant diversity of our student**

**body is a great source of strength.**

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

**We're underfunded.**

**I would like to see more partnership between the school district and the community. We are often guilty of seeing the school district as a stand alone system, instead of investing in its success as an important arm of our broader community. Robust community involvement and business/organizational partnerships could increase student participation in before and after school programs, which are so vital to all-around personal development. Processes for interactivity should be streamlined, making it easy for groups and individuals in the community to become part of the learning community, and thus more vested in our students' success.**

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

**Education funding that would reverse the last several years of teacher and staff cuts would be a good first step.**

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 believe that locally elected School Boards are generally better prepared to make decisions for the schools in their community.**

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 that education is the best investment for our state's future - a well-educated population is a local and renewable resource. Wisely investing in Alaska's human capital must be our highest priority.**

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## **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)

**No.**

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

**No.**

**If it was possible to allow the use of existing transportation systems for students to get to and from charter schools or private schools in a revenue neutral (or positive revenue) manner, I would consider discussing that. Having transportation assistance available to/from charter and private schools may allow families more flexibility in choosing the school that is right for them. I wish to reiterate that public education funds are a public good and should not be diverted to private uses.**

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## **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?

**No, it was not enough.**

13. Would you support an increase in the BSA of \$425 in FY16? (if yes, skip to Question 16)

**Yes.**

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.**

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.**

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.**

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.**

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.)