

# Great Alaska Schools

## 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

### 20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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Prior Elected Office, If Any: State House 10 terms (1984-92, 2002-present)		

### 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

We must increase high school graduation rates and stop laying off qualified teachers and staff.

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

Ask parents and students themselves what they think of their education—the pluses and the minuses—while they are in school, then follow up through adulthood. Take their answers seriously.

## **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.

Our students by and large are making us proud—despite our failures at the state and local levels. It is we who are not giving them enough. They deserve better! So do the teachers and staff. All of them should be our top priority.

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

Underfunding education, devaluing pensions, low salaries over a period of years. We need a change in leadership—elect people who'll make education their top priority!

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

We provide a variety of educational choices. Many of our teachers and staff are so dedicated they will stay with the district longer than we have any right to expect. And the students are great. They all deserve our support.

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

We provide a variety of educational choices. Many of our teachers and staff are so dedicated they will stay with the district longer than we have any right to expect. And the students are great. They all deserve our support.

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

Better and more consistent funding, forward funding, less attempted censorship. I'd also support mandatory first aid instruction and Erin's law so children can protect themselves against predators.

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

It depends—basic standards should be set by the state, but, aside from that, decisions should be made by locally elected school boards.

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

Public safety and basic health needs, including emergency services and disaster relief, basic transportation, too, rank with education. All deserve equal prioritization. I do not support prioritization by categories.

## 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

Not that I can think of offhand.

## 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?

\$450

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.)

13-15 I'd support an increase of \$425-450 in FY'16

16. I'd support such a bill, but won't commit to sponsoring one, given my other commitments

17. This is an incomplete and improper question. Ethically I cannot and will not promise my vote or sponsorship in an election campaign. Also, there are too many unexpressed variables in the question.

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

To expand my comments above. The following represent additional views I have. They are not in any priority order. Generally, within budgetary limitations, which could vary, my positions are

1. Encourage and fund pre-K
2. Solve the pension debt issue. Return to some form of defined benefits system or at least a hybrid.
3. Restructure the focus on constant and distractive testing. Spend more time teaching.
4. Encourage choice with real options, including foreign languages immersion programs.
5. Conversely, provide more opportunities for immigrant children and those needing ESL instruction.