

Great Alaska Schools

2014 Candidate Questionnaire

20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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| Prior Elected Office, If Any: 28th Alaska Legislature, HD 15 (same physical district) | | |

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

Yes, absolutely. Having reviewed the website above, I would support this proposal. I do believe, however, that while we need measures of success, too much time can be spent over-thinking standards. There is no substitute for the hard work that needs to be done to get children ready for their adult years. Shifting standards every other year is not good for teachers, nor is it good for students. We need to select a credible, verifiable set of standards... and then get to work!

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

The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) is pretty highly regarded. I believe the NAEP is accurate when it reports Alaska children are 49th in the nation in about the 3rd grade, but rise to the middle-of-the-pack by the 8th grade. I believe this reflects the absolute need for universal pre-school education in Alaska. I have advocated for this and argued for it.

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.

Local control is certainly one factor. The 2014 Legislature was hell-bent on stripping away some local control. I largely oppose this (there could be exceptions, of course). Second, I believe that in our urban areas, we offer a lot of choice within the public school system.

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

First, they have suffered from a lack of funding since at least 2011. Second, while there are reasons--sometimes good ones for doing so--I believe there has been too much social promotion. Children have been promoted to the next level without having sufficient skills.

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

The ASD has embraced racial and ethnic diversity and seen this, properly, as a strength. The ASD has also developed a wide array of school choices within its framework.

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

I believe the ASD should move toward implementation of a longer school year. In 2013, I offered legislation that would require a 190-day school year. I believe that America's public schools must begin to move to a 200-220 day school year.

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

I believe, in future contracts, we need to expand the school year to 190+ days, phased to 210 over a decade. Our teachers are top notch, but they are not magicians. Many parents, while well-meaning individuals, are busy. Children are only in their teachers' care 14% of each hour of the year.

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 support local control. That is why I have some concerns with allowing a "veto" of a local district's rejection of a charter school proposal. It is also why I stood in opposition to consolidating all of the 53 school districts under one health care plan. However, there is an argument that some requirements should apply across the entire state. I would make pre-K one of those requirements.

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

This is a tougher question. I believe public safety shares the top spot with education. It must. I believe that transportation infrastructure and energy infrastructure, while vital, are often forms of corporate welfare. I did vote for the gasoline bill (SB 138). In summary, none of the things noted are of 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

No. I will resign before I vote for a vouchers bill. I oppose "Balkanizing" such a core function. I oppose corporatizing education. I led the fight on the House Floor against tax credits (HB278).

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.)

Fundamentally, public education needed an increase in the range of \$150 million in FY2015 to get us back on track. In a total budget (capital, operating, and federal monies) of \$12 billion, this did not seem unreasonable. I opposed HB 278 because of a lack of funding. I also argued that tax credits for K-12 were unconstitutional. I opposed the "veto" of local school district decisions over charter schools. I opposed an effort, potentially, to give Juneau all the power over wages and benefits. I fought teacher tenure "reform", noting that regular GGU State employees receive some "for cause" protection after 6 months on the job. Teachers now must wait 3 years and 1 day for the same protection. Fortunately, this was dropped.

What critics of public education don't understand is this: we are dealing with children. Each is different. Each has different needs. Making teachers the "whipping boy" for the failures, often, of disinterested parents, is not the fix.

We need to give teachers the tools they need. We need pre-K education. We need a 200-day school year. Then, let's talk.



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 have been a certified public school teacher since 1991. Although I have not been under contract since 1994 (Kuspuk School District), I value the certificate and honor my career in public education. I have renewed my certificate in 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, and it expires in 2017.

I know first hand how hard most teachers work. Teachers are directors, producers, choreographers, friends, mentors...the list continues from there.

I am tired of the scapegoating of teachers. I said as much on the House Floor.

I believe that public school graduates (90% of America) don't sell themselves well. It would be interesting to find statistics on how many members of Congress attended public schools. How many doctors? How many engineers? How many attorneys? The success of our public school system is taken for granted.

Andy Josephson, July 8, 2014