

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

If we don't have standards, we don't know what we are striving to require children to attain. And when you set high standards, children can indeed reach them, and improvement occurs.

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

Satisfaction of families with their child's school, graduation rates, attendance. Happy children WANT to attend school and their attendance will be better if they are happy at school. Ability and willingness of schools to work with young people who are having trouble meeting graduation requirements results in improved graduation rates. This does however require proper staffing, particularly in the counseling area.

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 through locally-elected school boards means programs provided according to local family desires.

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

Inability of very small rural schools to provide solid education in all subject areas, but this is not their fault. It's very difficult to hire enough highly-qualified teachers in every subject area when your school size limits how many teachers you can have. Lack of preschool in many areas too.

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

The success of optional programs, language immersion programs, child-centered programs, and other optional and alternative programs as well as charter schools: Anchorage families already have lots of choices.

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

I think optional programs should match teaching styles to the learning styles of students. Using the lottery system doesn't do this very well. Optional programs should be expanded according to what children need to succeed. Waiting lists are too long. Charter schools should be provided facilities just like regular schools, and at no charge.

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

Fund preschool and make it available for every child on a voluntary basis. Change the required school ages (require children to be enrolled in school by the time they turn six and to stay in school until they are 18 or until they graduate--a bill brought by Bettye Davis that never passed.

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 board should have the final say in spending, but the legislature needs to properly fund schools to keep up with inflation and to make sure there is enough funding to provide preschool on a voluntary basis everywhere.

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

There is no higher priority than education funding. All the other things cannot happen if we don't have a well-educated and trained workforce to provide them.

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 and religious schools are not accountable to the public and should not get any public funds.

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.)

17: my caucus, the House Democrats, supported a much larger increase to the BSA than did the Republican Caucus, and most of us voted NOT to support the final education bill that passed because it did not adequately fund education.

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