

# Great Alaska Schools

## 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

### 20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

|   |            |                          |
|---|------------|--------------------------|
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| Prior Elected Office, If Any: State House |            |                          |

#### 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 should work to increase graduation rates, but funding schools in a way that causes continued teacher and staff layoffs is undermining that goal

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

School staffing so teachers can teach to individual students when needed. Graduation rates and success after school are important indicators. I would keep an open mind on hearing other measures.

## 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.

In the face of continued staff reductions caused by legislative underfunding, schools have struggled not to lose ground in terms of graduation numbers. But that can't continue with more staff and teacher layoffs, and a constant underfunding of our classroom needs.

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

Continual legislative underfunding, which has led to over 600 full time teacher and staff layoffs since 2011, and the education plan passed this year that continues cuts for most students for three more years.

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

See number 3.

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

I think the Anchorage School District is doing the best with the resources it has. If anything, I would cut any unnecessary design or other frills from school construction if it enables us to hire more teachers.

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

School funding that would reverse the last few years of teacher and educator losses, and prevent more losses in the future (except as justified by declining enrollment)

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

Each has it's own role. But adequate funding is primarily a state function under the Constitution.

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

These are all high priorities. Education should not be short-funded because of other priorities, however.

## 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

I don't think so. But I'd like to hear the details of all ideas before deciding.

## 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.)

On 17 and 19, I left them blank because a yes/no answer doesn't reflect my views. 17: It depends on what the amount is that my caucus supports. I would not want to support continued staff cuts, but also would not tie my vote to my caucus. On 19, three-year funding is better than one-year funding, but predictable long term funding, that could be supplemented if needed, is better. Funding should reflect increased school costs, which are sometimes not adequately measured by inflation when, for example, insurance or health costs rise faster than inflation.

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 think students deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and funding that allows enough staff to maximize student achievement is important. Efforts to increase parental involvement, and voluntary pre-k are also important, and are an adequate number of guidance and career counsellors and other important staff. I also think principals and teachers of excellence should be attracted and hired, as they often are, as they help transform schools.