

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

It takes a community to educate a child. As Treasurer of the Anchorage School District Board, I worked on an exercise we called "Acknowledgement, Beliefs, and Commitments". One thing we all acknowledge is it takes on average five adults to raise a child. Under our beliefs we knew the ASD can make a difference through making strong connections with students and we made a decision to commit to doing so.

It is wonderful to see our community come together for increasing our education standards.

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

Teacher recruitment and retention. This is an important factor to the quality of our education system.

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.

Diversity of students. Passionate parents and students.

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

Unsatisfactory funding of public education. The small population densities separated by huge geographical areas.

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

Diversity of school choices in ASD. King Career Center. Graduation alternatives to make sure everyone has the opportunity.

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

We need to have more consistency in education from one school to another. There are a lot of transient students who fall through the cracks when they move into another school. Lack of pre-k programs for all students.

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

Fully fund Parents as Teachers program. I lead the charge for this legislation to pass and the governor has been shrinking the funds for it. It is the most cost-effective way to deliver Pre-K throughout the state.

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

Both. We should share the vision of our local districts by giving them dependable resources they can use to best serve their students and teachers.

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

The most important expenditure would be to audit the oil industry to make sure we are not being cheated from having the necessary resources for our schools.

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

Public money should go towards public schools. No exception.

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.)

On question 17, sometimes the question doesn't make it to the committees I serve or onto the floor for a vote.

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

Unfortunately over the last few years, Alaska has gone from savings to deficits, and our schools boards have gone from innovating to laying off teachers.

While serving on the Anchorage School Board, we began opening the King Career Center for summer school as electives. The first summer we were jammed packed so the next year we offered two sessions. We were jammed packed again so we offered three sessions and were still jammed packed. Students were willing to take classes in the summer to get this training. Unfortunately, this program no longer exists due to shrinking budgets.

The job of teaching never ends. We need to stop cutting teachers and start building the potential of our future generations. That's why I will always fight for our fair share of our resource revenues and make sure it goes towards increasing the per-student classroom funding.