

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

I support excellence in education, high standards and business/school partnerships. Benchmarks are important to evaluate the system as a whole however they are not useful for a specific student. We need to support each individual so they can reach their potential. I believe standards should be set by the state and individual schools should have the flexibility to educate with those standards as a minimum.

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

There are many different types of intelligence including academic abilities, physical, spatial, interpersonal, etc. We need to deliver a well rounded education and let the child excel in their own field. Today's world demands people who can work well on a team, use higher level thinking skills, and have a good ethical grounding. We need to evaluate children on their social, emotional, academic abilities.

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.

The schools in the rural areas are community centers and keep families together.

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

The state has not done a good job in maintaining rural schools physical plant. Students struggle in cold schools that leak and have sanitation problems. There is high teacher turnover.

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

Anchorage is a national leader in social emotional learning, and it is helping all students prepare for success in life. Anchorage has made tremendous improvement in its graduation rates, from 63 percent in 2008 to close to 80 percent last year. We have been expanding STEM, Project Lead the Way, and Career Technology.

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

We don't do enough for students with learning disabilities. Anchorage has eliminated its summer school programs and has limited extended day activities. Anchorage has also cut counselors that were helping students stay in school and prepare for college or other career path. We have cut music, P.E., and charge students to play sports.

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

Provide adequate reliable funding that is inflation proofed. I also believe that the Legislature should provide funding for year round schools that may be used for summer schools. We should increase funding to the Education Endowment Fund and use that money wisely.

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

Education decisions are best at the local level. This year the governor and majority in the legislature made political decisions to keep funds from public schools while advocating for funds for private religious schools. The Legislature's job is to fund public education, and the School Board is elected locally to run the schools.

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

None. The Alaska Constitution states that funding public education is the Legislature's top priority. When I am elected, I will take an oath to uphold the Alaska Constitution and will fully fund public education

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

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?
(if yes, skip to Question 16) Yes No

14. Would you support any increase in the BSA in FY16?
(if no, skip to Question 16) Yes No

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.)

I believe the maximum funding for FY 2016 should consider the BSA and funding outside the BSA. I support the goal of \$425 increase, but also believe it should be increased more if funding for such items as utilities is cut. The Legislature needs to ensure that the \$425 BSA increase is new money, not just money changed from one account to another.

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

No obligation is more important than the obligation we have to the future generations. I believe we must have a long term fiscal plan that provides adequate and reliable funding for our public schools. This can be accomplished by funding the Educational Endowment Fund. The Legislature should make this a top priority with surplus funds.