

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 do support the efforts of 90 by 2020. The goal is to measure and predict if students will be successful and if and where they need help. This indicates where extra effort and work needs to be performed to prepare our student for success in school and in life. This starts in pre-school, K-12, and puts the students on a path for a successful secondary education and then employment. Student performance is a metric that has been reliably used to measure student success.

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

The indicators chosen are reasonable for the purpose of evaluating performance. There may be better indicators but each child is an individual and it is difficult to say that a one size fits all indicator is best when measuring a schools performance. Since we observe student performance and correlate that value and change with school performance, we assume that there is a direct relationship between the two. Then we compare similar schools to each other. There may be other factors: The quality of teachers employed, the number of teachers employed at a school, class size, family participation, and student motivation. I would be interested to track student success after their education career is complete and have the students define success.

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 ability of public education to provide a great educational experience to all students and holding all students to the same academic standards while being underfunded.

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

The centralization of education in rural Alaska by utilizing boarding schools. That has left a scar on many families and communities. Providing the same educational experience for all students and the funding to ensure that opportunity is present. 3 years of teacher and staff layoffs.

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

The improvement in High School graduation rates by 1% per year (avg) for the last 10 years. ASD recognizing that the earlier we start the education process the more successful the students will be. Combining a holistic approach to education by including family and community.

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

The school district's inability to make business decisions regarding teachers/employees continued employment and programs until the legislature presents a funded budget.

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

Legislation that would inflation proof the education budget. Require that education be considered first and foremost for expenditure before other state budget expenses.

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

It rests with local school boards. They are the "boots on the ground" and know what the district and local school needs are. They are the experts and not members of the legislature. I have been deeply disappointed in the legislature's lack of fiscal responsibility when it comes to funding education. The legislature's job is to provide the funding.

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 priority items. The only state expenditure that would be equal in priority to education funding would be public safety.

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

Not at this time without violating the state constitution. Public funding is for public education. Private schools should be supported by private spending.

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.)

#12 The legislature should be embarrassed not proud that they short changed education once again. Some are proud of the level of funding but don't realize that if we are losing teachers, the level of funding is too low.

#18 We need to take the step to renew our commitment to funding education in Alaska. At a minimum, the first step should be inflation proofing the BSA with the understanding that some expenses may rise faster than the rate of 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.)

#2 I truly believe that we must measure individual growth and achievement as well as grades. Grades do not tell the entire story of a child's ability to learn and performance nor do they measure their struggles and successes. We need children to achieve in school but we also must teach them to be life long learners, confident students and independent thinkers.