

# 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, 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

I think those are excellent goals and I do support those efforts.

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

I would consider the 90 by 2020 good indicators and I would go beyond to look at the percentage that go on to higher education and to what level of university or trade school students attend. This continued tracking gives another level of school quality/performance that indicates where our children are involved and inspired by their teacher/schools and where there is need for improvement.

## **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 to deal with the staff reductions caused by Legislators, such as my opponent Mike Hawker and to not diminish the graduation numbers in light of the majority in the Legislature's efforts to institute a school voucher system.

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

My opponent, Mike Hawker, continues to say one thing and do another in cutting education funding which has led to over 600 full time teacher and staff reduction since 2011. The current education plan and funding passed this past legislature continues with additional layoffs.

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

The ability to provide optional learning experiences for students in a variety of schools. The neighborhood school is important and are the backbone of the communities. Some children learn better in optional programs and there are many choices for students and parents in the ASD.

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

It may be sacrilege to say this as an Architect, but I believe that if budgets need to be trimmed to fund teachers and staff, then unnecessary design frills should be cut to allow for funding of necessary teachers, not more monuments to Architects and Engineers.

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

Identifying where necessary maintenance budgets for schools need to be maintained and where unnecessary frills can be reduced or eliminated. No more Taj MaHawkers such as the sole source boondoggle of the LIO should be allowed.

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 School Boards and the Legislature have their own roles. Funding is primarily the responsibility of the Legislature under the State Constitution, but has fallen to School Boards as incumbent legislators such as Mike Hawker say they will fund the schools properly and then don't. More important to Hawker is funding his Political Palace--the Taj MaHawker.

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

All those mentioned are high priorities, but education needs to be adequately funded because our children are our most important resource.

## 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

No. I believe in the separation of Church and State and the allocation of funds to private and religious schools is merely a smokescreen for the funding of religious schools.

## 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 12, my opponent, Mike Hawker made statements in his newsletter of May 2014 that were not true and here are the facts from the ASD Chief Financial Officer, Mark Foster. Hawker stated "The education package provides an additional \$300 million over the next three years to schools across our state, of which Anchorage will get \$75 million in unrestricted funding." This is not true--Offset by elimination of \$22.5 million in "general education / high cost of energy" support. Net new money of \$52.5 million for Anchorage. HB 278 includes legislative requirements directing \$14.4 million to charter schools and \$5.7 million to correspondence schools. Net new "unrestricted" money of \$32 million for the Anchorage School District. Hawker goes on to say "On top of that, we provided extra funding for charter schools and correspondence programs." Again, not true-The funding for charter schools and correspondence programs came from the Legislature redirecting local funding from neighborhood schools to charter schools and correspondence programs. Hawker states "HB 278 gives the Anchorage School District \$24.4 million this year in additional unrestricted funding in response to their \$23 million deficit." Again, not true. HB278 provided the Anchorage School District with \$10.2 million in additional "unrestricted funding" in response to the \$23 million deficit. Hawker states "The funding was not as much as some folks wanted, but was enough for the district to avoid teacher layoffs."

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

This is another incorrect statement. Hawker continues with his false arguments "Forward-funding education for three years provides the certainty- and stability our school districts seek, while giving the legislature the time it needs to collect data and have a meaningful discussion on the current funding methodology." This is untrue! The Legislature provided roughly 1/3rd of the funding required to sustain district staffing over the next three years which will require the district to cut: 73 positions in FY1415; 180 to 220 positions in each of the following two years (FY1516, FY1617), and 280 to 300 positions in FY1718 when legislative grant support is zeroed out. For a total of ~760 positions (14 percent or roughly 1 out of 7) over the next four years. Meanwhile Hawker commits the State to a minimum of 7.5 million to be invested in the sole source boondoggle, the Taj MaHawker, a building we won't own when completed; an increase in rent of 700% over the next 10 years minimum costing \$50 million; an increase of the sole source Furniture Fiasco from Germany from \$100K to \$500K in the last two weeks and who knows what other expenses will crop up on this appalling Political Palace brought to us by Mike aka Taj MaHawker. On 17, I believe the Democratic Caucus would support a BSA increase. I am not a politician, so I may vote against my caucus, if I don't believe it is in my District's best interests.