

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 is valuable to have partnerships like the 90 by2020 where school districts, non-profits and local businesses work cooperatively to support and improve student performances. I am encouraged that they are looking at the child from as they put it "cradle to career. It would appear that community resources are being applied to help students meet these outcomes. A consideration of the cost is often a missing step when adopting standards.

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

One factor often overlooked is uneven school funding. Many rural schools do not have a tax base to supplement their budgets. At the same time the face higher operating costs such as fuel and teacher salaries that are needed to attract and keep teachers in remote locations.. In our city the schools where the students have the greatest need and need the most resources to meet academic standards are often schools with less resources.. The schools in the better neighborhood expect/demand and get better schools.

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.

Our workforce of dedicated school staff, teachers and principals are the best asset that Alaska's schools have. Unlike religious and private schools public schools are overseen by elected members of a local school board and fall under state oversight.

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

The biggest failure is to provide local districts with sustainable funding thereby forcing budget adjustments that may result in slash and burn of even the most successful programs and teacher positions.

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

The FNSBSD has teachers and staff that is supported by the parents, local businesses and the public at large. The school board's removal of administrators who attempted to cover up sexual and ethical misconduct placing children's welfare at risk.

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

The school board failure to have adequate oversight of the Superintendent that allowed the above incident(s) to go on for a number of years.

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

I will introduce legislation to raise the Base Student Allocation and automatically adjust it for inflation every year so school districts will have a reliable source of funding.

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

I believe that decisions about local education priorities are best made by the locally elected school boards. However I believe that the Legislature has a role to financially assist with global issues such as technology access for all of its citizens and adequate or supplemental funds so that school safety issues, such as, safe water and dependable electricity are provided.

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

Education would be one of my top priorities, however the liquefied gas project for the Borough will be my one of my priorities as well as infrastructure and 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

In my opinion the amendment would be in violation of our Federal Constitution resulting in a costly legal battle and a siphoning of funding of public 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?
(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.)

8. Many times priorities are inner related.. Lowering the cost of energy resulting from access to natural gas means that school operating costs are lowered freeing up more dollars for direct student services.

12. I favor the increase but not some lawmakers attitude seemed to say that it fixed the problem once and for all.

17. I would provide as much persuasive power as possible in order to obtain the necessary votes to pass legislation with the highest funding level possible. I also would support the caucus if they could prove to me that my level would have almost no support and that their (lower) level of would pass.

18. Not inflation proofing is paramount to reducing funding. Unfortunately it allows some legislators off the hook because they can ignore the burdensome effect it has on school districts struggling to fund the same level of services with fewer dollars and all the while making claims to support education.



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

6. Like all districts FNSBSD has been denied sustainable funding so too much time is wasted discussing which programs to cut instead of working to provide the best education.