

Great Alaska Schools

2014 Candidate Questionnaire

20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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Prior Elected Office, If Any: Speaker- Coalition of Student Leaders- University of Alaska Statewide		

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

We should always be working to increase graduation rates. We also need ot fund schools in a way that will enhance this goal, our current method is undermining this now.

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

I am open-minded on this, it takes many different approaches for student success. Support staff funding is an important piece of this, so that educators can effectively teach to individual students when needed. There are many factors that are important to a students success both in graduating and as members of our communities.

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.

It is amazing to me what educators accomplish as I see funding diminish. Working in the after school program at the Boys and Girls Club, I was and continue to be in awe at what can be accomplished with so little. I would love to see the results with education as a top priority.

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

Continual underfunding is eroding the fiber of our schools. The 600 full time teacher layoffs since 2011 are unacceptable, and the education plan passed this year continues cuts like these for three years. Education needs to be placed as the top priority for funding.

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

Kenai Peninsula Borough's jumpstart program and the partnering with our local UA campus is amazing. Dr. Atwater is a fabulous leader and can make a lot of things work with little funding.

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

Lack of funding has lead to increases in class sizes.

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

Funding that would reverse the last few years of educator loses and prevent more loss in the future.

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

Each has it's own role. However, adequate funding is the states primary function under the Constitution.

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

They are all important however, educations should not be short funded because of other priorities.

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

I don't believe that there is. However, my role as a future legislator would be to hear the ideas being presented before making decisions.

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.)

In regards to 17 and 19. They are blank because a yes/no answer does not reflect my views properly..
17- It would depend on what the amount is that my caucus supports. I would not want to support continued staff cuts, but also would not tie my vote to my caucus.
19- I believe that three year funding is better than one-year funding. However, long term funding that could be supplemented as needed would be far better for long term planning. Funding for schools should reflect increased school costs, which are sometimes not adequately measured by inflation when, for example energy costs rise at 48.5% as they recently have on the Kenai Peninsula for natural gas users.

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

I think that students deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and having funding that allows enough staff to maximize this achievement is important. Efforts to increase parent involvement, and available voluntary pre-k are integral to student success. With this the number of guidance counselors, key staff and administrators of excellence are important and should be attracted, hired and retained to ensure that students reach their full potential.