

# Great Alaska Schools

## 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

### 20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

Candidate Name: Sam Kito III	Legislative District: 33	
Mailing Address: PO Box 21192		
City: Juneau	Zip: AK	Phone: 907 500 2542
E-Mail: kitoforhouse@gmail.com	Cell:	
Prior Elected Office, If Any: Representative, House District 32		

### 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 support increasing the graduation rate in Alaska schools, and two key ways to increase the graduation rate are to insure adequate funding for education, and to support early childhood education. Adequate funding for education helps attract and retain teachers in Alaska's schools, and early childhood education supports all of Alaska's children by encouraging better kindergarten preparedness.

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

I think that the graduation rate is an important measure of success of our school system. Another measure is the percentage of college, career training, or career bound students out of high school.

## **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.

Despite ongoing funding cuts and decreases in staffing, Alaska's schools have been able to show improvements in school graduation rates. This to me is a recognition of the hard work our school districts are doing to educate our children. This success cannot continue with continued pressure on school funding. We could very well be in a position of losing the ground we have

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

One weakness I see is in the state's ability to effectively intervene when school districts are struggling with student performance. I would support a program that would direct additional resources to under performing schools and districts to find ways to increase student performance.

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

The Juneau School District has been very successful at keeping the PTR low for elementary grades. The Chatham School District was successful in completing a renovation project recently at the Gustavus school, and the Skagway School District has been able to effectively manage resources to provide a quality education for Skagway Students.

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

There are currently, and will be, four school districts in my legislative district. They vary from a larger, urban district to a small city district, to a small rural district. All of them have their own challenges, but invariably, one of the challenges, is in stable funding for facility construction and maintenance.

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

Providing adequate foundation formula funding would be a positive action. Providing stable support for the school facilities major maintenance list would also be a positive step in support of schools in Alaska.

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

There are some decisions that are able to be made at the local level, but some decisions, such as establishment of Pre-K programs, would need to be supported with legislative authorization and funding from the Legislature. The Legislature needs to provide adequate funding for the school districts so that they have the ability to make important decisions about classroom size, establishment of Pre-K programs, and programs to enhance school safety.

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

Education funding should be Alaska's highest priority, followed by public safety, health, and our public transportation infrastructure.

## **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? 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.)

q17. I support an increase to the BSA that will keep class sizes from growing, and provide adequate resources to children in our schools. This support would not be dependent on the position of other members of my caucus.

q18. I do support the concept of inflation proofing, but would need to see the particular proposal in order to make sure it provides the funding needed for education. Inflation proofing would need to also recognize that other factors may need to be adjusted in any given year.

q19. Providing three years of scheduled increases provides some amount of security for districts as they budget for future years, and also provides a clear direction by the Legislature. The problem occurs when the three years of increase are not adequate to support education of our children. So my response comes full circle to question 17; I support an increase in the BSA that will keep class sizes from growing, and provide adequate resources to the children in our schools.

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