

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

Graduation rate is a critical metric since many life opportunities are tied to having received a high school diploma. While we must help as many students graduate as possible, we must also consider the quality of a graduate when determining education standards. 90 by 2020's focus on reading proficiency in 3rd grade, for example, shows real awareness to the importance of early childhood education.

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

Because so much in life depends on graduation, that is a key metric. Other important (not necessarily "better") indicators might include teacher student ratio, level of parental involvement, civic & community partnerships, and student involvement in extracurricular programs.

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.

Some of the gains in graduation rates in districts across the state have been incredible. Vocational & technical education programs have engaged students while preparing the workforce for demands of the job market. Incorporating cultural programs into our schools gives students a cultural context for learning. +

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

Erratic and inadequate funding has led to staff cuts and uncertainty in the districts. A lack of pre-K programs leads to many students entering kindergarten lacking basic school readiness skills.

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

The Juneau School District has done a great job in supporting its neighborhood schools during difficult budget times while increasing options available to students, such as cultural programs, vocational education, extra-curricular activities, music programs in elementary schools and more.

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

Budget shortfalls have caused the CBJ to not fund to the cap for the first time in recent history. This will affect the quality of education. Reduced special education and counseling services (resulting from reduced budgets) have hampered teachers' efforts to provide the best possible learning environment for students. I have heard of technology shortfalls as well, like inadequate +

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

Fully funding education would help schools plan for the future, retain quality teachers, and improve the quality of education. Supporting families (through increased access to health care, affordable housing, universal pre-K, etc.) will help students come to school ready to learn.

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 the Legislature and local school boards will play a role in determining spending priorities. The Legislature must fully fund schools so that local school boards can properly equip teachers and students for success.

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

All of these items are priorities of the State. However, we must prioritize education to achieve a maximum benefit to the State from these other economic sectors.

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 do not believe so, but I am open to hearing other perspectives. With the continued stress already in place upon public school budgets, I would be very concerned about moving funds towards private 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 Question 14, I would support an increase in the BSA that fully funds schools. On Question 15, the maximum value in the BSA I would support is one determined by experts that will fully fund schools while being conscious of the current budget situation. On question 17, I would fight for a BSA increase that fully funds schools. While a caucus gets its power from numbers and cooperation, I would vote my conscious in the case of education funding.

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