

Great Alaska Schools

2014 Candidate Questionnaire

20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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Prior Elected Office, If Any: Fairbanks North Star Borough Assemblymember (3 years)		

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

I do believe that schools can achieve success by going beyond simple test scores, and understanding the students they are working with at a more personal level. 90% graduation is a fantastic goal and I think with the right amount of resources and proper utilization of those resources this can be achieved in 6 years.

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

The measures I believe indicate high school quality and performance are as follows: are our kids ready for the rigors of collegiate coursework, can they compete in the demanding job market of the 21st century, and can they function as independent adults.

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.

I believe our focus on diversity and the incredible teaching and support staff are our greatest strengths.

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

I believe there is still a preparation gap between high school and college that many students struggle with.

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

From my conversation with teachers and support staff in the district, the training and career advancement programs at the district are a great strength. Our district has different options for students from Hutchison's vocational and technical training career pathways to the charter schools that experiment with new ways to approach learning that continue to be a great strength of the district.

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

The manner in which the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District handled allegations of sexual misconduct involving a student was an extreme failing that is still being dealt with at an administrative level and hopefully throughout all levels of the school district. The size of the administration is also a concern in our district. I would rather see raises for our teachers and support staff than see an overbloated and top heavy school district.

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

I believe the Legislature does have a role to provide guidance to the Department of Education about what goals should be established and what results we should expect. Letting the School District know what percentage of funds is deemed appropriate for administrative staffing would provide that guidance.

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

Locally elected School Boards are the boots on the ground that understand the issues and how to implement the vision for success. Local control is always better; as a former Borough Assemblymember I understand this first hand in my dealings with the State of Alaska. The Legislature is a very important resource but it needs to remain a resource not another level of administration.

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

None. Education has been my top funding priority as an Assemblymember and will remain so as a Representative.

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

The funding of private and religious schools using public money is absolutely dangerous to the integrity and curriculum for those schools and would undermine their successes and freedoms. Once the door of public funding is open so are the burdens and restrictions that come with those funds. On a second point I think any

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.)



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