

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

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

Poverty is a predictor of student success, and of course school success is student success, and vice versa.

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.

Local school districts have the ability to localize their curriculum to fit varying cultural needs. With school boards elected locally, communities have the ability to participate in the decision making process.

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

I consider the inequity of funding across the state from rural to urban school districts to be problematic. Additionally, the costs of school utilities should be separate from other school funding issues. Electric, heat, and broadband should be kept separate from what happens in the classroom.

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

The diversity of programs available for students allow more children to have educational choices. Many of our students are excelling in higher education institutions, which is a sign we are doing something right.

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

Budget cuts, resulting from inadequate funding, are denying students opportunities they will never have again.

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

Long term educational planning and a sustaining funding plan that actually gets implemented.

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

The responsibility rests with both bodies. The legislature controls the purse strings, so we will always have our hands on it. At the same time, the legislature owes the local school boards a steady hand, allowing school boards to plan and implement an educational strategy that meets local needs.

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

If we were to drive the cost of energy down for school districts across the state, there would be more funding available to put resources into the classroom.

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?
(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.)

School funding, it's a complex issue. Schools should be funded at the level that gives teachers the tools they need at a sustaining level without worrying about yearly appropriations squabbles and the fear of pink slips. The budget stress affects everyone in the system. The kindergardeners may not notice it, but their parents certainly do. Number 17 is a complex question that doesn't have a simple answer.

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