

# 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, 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 think that the 90% by 2020 partnership is an excellent model and should be replicated throughout Alaska. The collaborative approach - bringing parents, educators, service providers, community leaders, and business leaders together to support our students - is a successful model. In 2006, the graduation rate was 56%. In 2013, the rate was 73%. This approach works. It should be our collective goal, statewide, to reach 90% by 2020 and I believe that this partnership has established a good example for other communities to follow.

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

I think that graduating from high school is a good indicator of school quality and school performance. A high school diploma should signify that the student has met and can demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, as well as a high level of problem solving skills. By demonstrating proficiency in these areas, our students will be successful in college or vocational technical schools or training programs beyond high school. I think that these are the basics needed to live a healthy and productive life in our state.

## **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 think that one strength is that many parents have a choice in the education of their student: charter schools, alternative schools, neighborhood schools, and home school programs.

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

I think one weakness is the limitation or availability of some of the most popular and successful school models. The schools that are producing the best results should be encouraged and available.

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

I have spent a lot of time in our classrooms and I can unequivocally say that the ASD teachers are our greatest strength. They do a great job with the resources that are available and bring innovation into the classroom to supplement the curriculum.

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

I believe that one of ASD's weaknesses is class room size and teacher to student ratio, especially in our elementary schools. This is the time in a child's education where it is beneficial to have one-on-one time between a teacher and student, to ensure that learning is taking place.

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

Targeting class room size and student to teacher ratio, really is a local issue, with the Anchorage School Board allocating resources and prioritizing programs and the funding that they receive.

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-- I think the best decisions are made at the local level by the school board. However, if we see a program that is working in another part of the State, I think we should at least have the right to ask why our local district isn't trying it. I also think that it is important to understand what the education priorities of the local district and presiding school board are to assist legislative leaders in securing funding, technology or implementing statewide programs, such as Pre-K.

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

I believe that funding education funding is a top priority, but it is not our only priority. As a State, we also have a duty to provide for the public safety of our citizens, infrastructure to move people and goods, energy to heat our homes and communities, and promote economic development such as a natural gas pipeline, which will provide jobs, energy, and revenue.

## 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 Constitution can only be amended by a vote of the people. If a resolution can pass the Legislature, I trust the people to vote on the issue and I support their right to vote on the issue.

## 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.)

**Questions 12-19:**

In FY 2011-FY 2014, additional funding for school districts was provided outside of the forumulary. While the BSA was not increased in each of those fiscal years, additional dollars were allocated to school districts to support education of our children.

In 2014, the Legislature approved and the Governor signed into a law a 3 year education funding plan. Approximately, \$300 million was approved for education over the course of the next 3 fiscal years. \$150 million will be going into the BSA and \$150 million will be utilized outside of the BSA for school district discretion, charter schools, residential schools, and distance delivery services. No program received more attention or substantial increase than education did this year. I am proud of the work that we did, but I also understand that we have more to accomplish in terms of education funding and supporting education models that work and deliver results throughout our state. Through the education plan approved in 2014, I supported a BSA increase in FY 2015 of \$150 (more than FY 2014), in FY 2016 of \$200 (more than FY 2014), and in FY 2017 of \$250 (more than FY 2014). I have already voted for increases in future fiscal years and the funds have been appropriated. We have forward funded education for 3 years.

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

Question 10: I have had parents ask that they be able to have the option to take their per student allocation determined by the State and transferred to the school district and use it to get specialized help for their child with special needs. A good example is a child that struggles with dyslexia. Help for these kids is only offered through 6th grade, where as the problem continues past 6th grade. Why not let these kids go to a private school that specializes in this program?

Question 16: I have sponsored legislation to increase the BSA (2012). It passed the Senate and died in the House of Representatives. As Co-Chairman of the House Finance Committee (2005-2008) and Senate Finance (2013-2014) I have been a lead advocate for increased funds.

Question 17: Leaving a caucus is a detriment to any legislator. You lose committee assignments and you also fore go any real opportunity to make changes to legislation and enact positive changes in policy direction. It is far better to work within a caucus to enact change and to change the tide of policy by educating your colleagues and working to build consensus. Taking your ball and going home is not an effective strategy to improving policy. It takes working together and even a degree of compromise to accomplish good policy.