

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Andy Josephson, House District 17
Submitted September 15th

Alaska PTA aka Alaska Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. represents approximately 7,000 members from 116 schools around the state. The Alaska PTA Advocacy Committee would deeply appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions about your perspective on public education in Alaska. Providing quality public education is one of the most important sectors that we can invest in, when one considers the impact it has on the future of our children and thus the competitiveness of our state.

The questionnaire will be used to provide a synopsis of candidate positions to our members, in order to better inform them of candidate positions prior to the November election. We respectfully ask that you complete and submit the questionnaire prior to September 15th, 2016.

1. Please provide your name and the Alaska Legislative seat you are a candidate for.

Andy Josephson, Candidate for House District 17

2. What do you see as the three top challenges facing the delivery of public education in Alaska today?

First, I believe contemporary American culture does not facilitate the delivery of public education. There is insufficient parental oversight and interest in developing young minds. There are too many distractions from healthy playtime combined with artistic and intellectual stimulation. Combating an entire national culture is difficult. The best means of doing so that I've divined are the establishment of (a) universal Pre-K; (b) a 200-220 day school year; (c) legislation like Maternity and Paternity Leave acts that foster development of healthy families and increase quality family time.

Second, I am a huge supporter of an expanded school year. I have carried legislation in support of an expanded school year for 4 years. Frankly, my proposal for a 190 day school year is inadequate. It should be increased. I believe children need more "face time" and cannot be expected to compete with children elsewhere in the world who are provided more academic rigor.

Third, budgetary constraints should be lifted so that districts can better predict their annual resource and focus on the education of children, not the management of budgets in constant flux. A discussion of additional resources available for this purpose should be had, to include additional local and tribal resources

3. What is your understanding of the "Every Student Succeeds Act", and what potential effects it can have on public education in Alaska?

My understanding of ESSA is limited. As I understand it, the ESSA was designed to transfer to state governments greater authority in the rating of schools and how to help schools that are not meeting standards. Therefore, ESSA is an attempt to decentralize. ESSA will continue to require annual standardized testing be done.

As to its specific effects on Alaska public education, I'm unsure. I would speculate that the requirement of NCLB that schools suffer closure in some instances would be lifted. Perhaps waivers for rural school districts (where there are no choices) would also be lifted.

For each of the last six years, school districts across Alaska have cut their budgets and eliminated programs and positions due to local, state and federal funding levels that have remained flat. Thus we have the following questions:

4. Do you think Alaska public schools are adequately funded?

No. \$1.2 billion may sound like a great deal of money. And, it is. But we have far-flung districts whose needs must be met. We are a subcontinent. We have rural communities with little to no tax base. If we want local

control of education, there is a price to pay for that, as well. I believe criticism of the amount spent is focused on the alleged inadequacy of the "product". What are we getting, in other words? In some instances, we are getting future doctors, lawyers, and accountants. In other instances, we are getting future trained workers in the construction trades. Where we suffer is where the rest of the nation suffers, too: in poor socioeconomic areas, with exceptions, our students struggle. Solving that relates to the issues I've raised in No. 1, above.

5. Would you support an alternate revenue stream for public education in Alaska (one example would be an education head tax similar to that which was in place in 1980)?

Yes and no. Yes, I would definitely support supplemental revenue streams. No, I would not want to alter the existing foundation formula and fully supplant it with something else.

6. Do you support the continued minimum enrollment of 10 students to keep rural Alaska schools open to serve our rural communities and students? AND Do you support increasing graduation rates among Alaska Native students since according to the National Center for Education Statistics they have one of the lowest graduation rates in the country and are residing in many of these rural small school locations?

Yes and yes. Yes, I would oppose shuttering small schools who hold a population of 10 or more. And, yes, we need to enhance rural education graduation rates. Doing this is tricky, however. In the village I lived in (2 villages combined), there were about 450 people. Those 450 people held about 20 paid positions. The point is this: if the goal is to create income earners {whether it should be can be debated}, there has to be an effort to tie learning to what is available in the outside world. Alternatively, rural jobs could grow through tourism or resource development.

7. Would you support a comprehensive fiscal plan that includes new revenue streams, in order to preserve funding for public education?

Yes. Hold me to it.

There is a large body of research that documents the benefits of early childhood education on overall student outcome, and graduation rates. In addition, this research suggests that pre-kindergarten programs can reduce the possibility of a student becoming incarcerated later in life.

8. Do you support funding universal pre-kindergarten as part of a complete education system in Alaska?

Yes, see above.

The Alaska Legislature has considered legislation that proposed a constitutional amendment to allow public money to be spent on private schools, especially. Private schools can pick and choose students and are not held to the same standards as public schools for the quality and content of education. Public schools serve all students, regardless of race, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status.

9. Do you support changing the Alaska Constitution to allow public money to be spent on private or religious schools?

No. I've publicly and repeatedly opposed doing this. Indeed, I've told people I will resign before I'd support such a thing.

Research suggests parental involvement in a child's education contributes to improved academic performance, better social skills, greater attendance rate, and a higher likelihood of completing a post-secondary education.

10. Do you support the federal government funding a statewide family engagement center for Alaska?

Yes.