

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Bill Wielechowski, Senate District H
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.

Bill Wielechowski

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

1. I believe deep budget cuts are hurting our school districts' ability to simply keep pace with inflation and recruit and retain top-notch educators and staff.

2. I am concerned about the lack of respect for our educators by many in the legislative Majority. Many educators feel they are not valued.

3. I believe poverty remains a huge challenge. Studies show that lower educational outcomes are often (but certainly not always) tied to poverty levels. The Legislature need to do more to address income inequality issues and issues that impact working families.

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

The ESSA is certainly an improvement over its predecessor, No Child Left Behind. I believe this change is very positive for Alaska. I agree that less reliance on standardized tests is a big improvement, as is the ability for more local and state control over our educational system.

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. I have fought for years for adequate funding for our schools. I'd like to see us set a fair foundation formula rate and then inflation-proof it so that our kids are not used as bargaining chips in the budget process every year.

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)?

I believe we need to take steps to fix our budget. However, a revenue stream dedicated to public education would likely violate the Dedicated Funds clause of the Alaska Constitution.

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?

We have a constitutional obligation to provide education to our kids in both urban and rural Alaska. Reducing the minimum enrollment levels in rural Alaska likely would violate the Constitution.

Of course I support increasing graduation rates among Alaska Native students, and all Alaskan students.

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

We've got to balance our budget. I believe we need to make more cuts in our government and also fix our broken oil tax structure that has us paying out \$700 million more in oil tax credits than we get in oil production taxes. Historically we've gotten 29% of the gross value for our oil. We are now getting 8%. Close that gap and the deficit is virtually eliminated.

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, and I have opposed the Republican Majority's efforts to gut this program.

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.

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.