

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Cathy Munoz, House District 24
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.

Cathy Munoz, House District 24

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

Three challenges facing the delivery of public education in Alaska are the adoption of a fiscal plan for a sustainable budget, the retention and training of local teachers, and providing a quality education to rural Alaskan students.

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

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires state educational agencies to formulate a statewide plan for standards and assessments, accountability systems, as well as school support and improvement. ESSA will provide Alaska with more local control over its public education, allow for an emphasis on place-based education, and will give opportunities and funding for incorporating Alaska Native cultures and languages into public schools.

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?

I support innovative ways to increase funding for public education, such as the educational tax credit law, which I sponsored. The law allows individuals and companies to receive a tax incentive for donations to K-12 and post-secondary schools. This legislation has resulted in large donations to the Juneau School District, and millions of dollars in contributions to schools statewide.

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)?

An educational endowment could infuse Alaska's public education system with additional funding.

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?

I support the continued minimum enrollment of 10 students to keep rural schools open because schools are the nucleus of a community. I wholeheartedly support raising the graduation rates among Alaskan students, which could include an emphasis on traditional learning methods, place-based education, and technology.

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

In order to achieve a sustainable budget, a comprehensive plan that includes new revenue streams is essential. Alaska is a vast state with equally vast resource potential. In the end, a diverse portfolio that does not predominantly rely on one revenue stream will stabilize Alaska and preserve funding for public education.

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?

I support ways to improve the quality of pre-k programming, including an effective rating system, as well as financial incentives for vetted and proven programming.

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?

I do not support using public funds for private or religious schools and would oppose a change to the Alaska Constitution.

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?

I support federal funding for a statewide family engagement center for several reasons. First, research has clearly shown that active and effective family and community engagement is a critical component of successful learning at every stage of a student's education. Second, I believe that family and community engagement is particularly important to delivering a quality education in rural Alaska.