

# 2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

**Chuck Kopp, 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 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

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

Chuck Kopp, State House, District 24

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

1. Instability of state fiscal situation, no plan in place to fix it - State fiscal stability is mandatory, otherwise the delivery of public education is greatly hindered.

2. Teacher turnover and retention - according to the Alaska Teacher Placement site, we hire just under 1,000 new teachers every single year (out of 8,000 total). We lose 1/8th of our workforce each year, and have to constantly be training first year teachers. This is a particularly severe problem in rural Alaska. Teachers stay 1 or 2 years, then move on. 50-60% of those that move on stay in Alaska on the road system, the rest leave the state.

3. Principal and Superintendent retention - we need great leaders that stick around, this is not happening right now. Our schools are suffering statewide because of it.

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

I believe Alaska needs to make ESSA work for us, rather than Alaska work for the ESSA! I believe there is a potential for implication to funding but the federal Dept of Education is still promulgating these regulations so we don't have a good understanding yet of how this will impact federal aid to Alaska schools. ESSA is the successor to the No Child Left Behind Act, hopefully a step back from the heavy hand of the federal government requiring states to jump through a lot of hoops revamping their standards. My understanding is that ESSA is not as rigid and stringent on the states, now allowing them to establish their own accountability, standards and assessments. A controversial element of NCLB was the evaluation of educators, both teachers and principals, through student learning data and other standards (up to four standards in an evaluation). Waivers were being granted by the Federal Government to get out of the NCLB Act, which seemed arbitrary to states. What we need to do now is make standards and efficiencies that work for Alaska. I believe ESSA has given more flexibility to states to revamp state specific standards and assessments, and possibly delink student learning data from teacher and principal evaluation. I have much to learn about ESSA, and I think it will take our own state Dept of Education a couple years to fully understand its impacts to Alaska.

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 think to answer this question fairly, we would need to define "adequately funded". Certainly more money would be a great benefit to our educational system. Most state agencies would argue a strong need for more funds to carry out their mission at this time. Our current oil price environment is not good, and there is no price recovery on the horizon. This makes it all the more urgent to move our fiscal stability away from the price of oil, and to the significant financial strength Alaska does possess. We do have possible solutions, and we must pursue them.

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, absolutely I would support this.

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 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 think we need to do revisit the "all or nothing" number of 10 students to qualify for state funding. Perhaps we should stair step down the amount of state funding a certain percentage for each number below 10. In this way, school districts would feel the state was partnering with them in the tough times, not just turning off the funding entirely once enrollment fell below 10. Home schooling is not a good option for many of these young people. Schools are the life hub of many small communities in Alaska. I was raised in the village of Newhalen on Lake Iliamna, my dad was the only school teacher there in 1966-1973. The school was the center of community life. Just in recent years in southwest Alaska we have seen schools close in Ivanoff Bay, Chignik Bay and Egegik. The school at Pilot Point is on the edge of being closed. The closing of schools hinders our ability as Alaskans to occupy our land. Without statewide education, we all fall back into the cities, which is a huge cultural loss. Yes, I absolutely support increasing graduation rates among Alaska Native students.

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

Yes, I do. It is my highest priority - the fiscal stability of our state.

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, I just would not want it to be mandatory for parents. I would like to find a new revenue stream to support this, so it would not compete with K-12 funding.

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?

It depends on the specific program that is proposed. As active PTA parents, you can probably appreciate that I support parents. I believe parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their child, not the government. They choose who to partner with in this most significant responsibility. I am very cautious about public money going to private institutions, and any such program would have to be vetted by the Legislature. I would only be able to answer the question of support for a constitutional amendment if I could see the

proposed program, how it would benefit parents in educating their child, and what its possible short and long term impacts would be on the public education system as a whole. For reasons stated earlier, I want our public school systems to be funded and prosper, not close! NorthStar Behavioral Health takes care of many high school age students that are incapacitated due to behavioral and mental health issues. NorthStar sought legislation this past session to use public money to allow them to educate their hospitalized youth. Currently ASD has this role, and it has not resulted in good outcomes for the youth. NorthStar asked to take over the education component with the help of public money. The bill passed the Senate, but did not make it through the House. This may be a very good purpose. Is the Permanent Fund Dividend public money? I believe it is. Is it used by parents to pay for tuition to any education institution of their choice? I believe it is. I want all our kids to achieve, it is of paramount importance. Can you imagine an Alaska where 90% of our kids graduate high school? And 70% graduate post-secondary? This is what I believe we all want for our kids. A strong education system is foundational to a strong society, and I believe that it is crucial that families have the freedom to choose the best schools for their child's specific needs.

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, this is an exciting opportunity which holds great promise.