

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Les Gara, House District 20
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.

les gara, House Dist 20

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

Lack of adequate funding, lack of a fiscal plan, lack of quality voluntary statewide Pre-K

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

I think it has pre-k provisions that the state can take advantage of to expand Alaska's minimal pre-k offerings. It promotes school stability for foster youth. It erases some of the burdensome NCLB rules. I am not completely familiar with the new federal law

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

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 would support any fair revenue stream that closes our fiscal gap, and doesn't disproportionately hit only working or lower income people. All who are financially able should help, including corporate Alaska.

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?

Yes

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

Yes

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 - if it is quality pre-k, voluntary for parents, and cost effective. I have always championed pre-k, and we have to find an affordable way to expand it statewide.

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?

I would support any rational, effective efforts to increase parental involvement where parents are not adequately involved