

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Luke Hopkins, Senate District B
Submitted September 25th

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.

Luke Hopkins, Senate District B

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

The top three challenges facing delivery of public education in Alaska are the unclear future of classroom funding, lack of adequately trained teachers and the attacks of school privatization supporters (vouchers). As a state senator, I will work to return to forward funding our schools each year, train more Alaskan students to become Alaskan teachers and ensure that public money is spent on public education and not on for-profit or religious schools.

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

There are many substantial changes in the new "Every Student Succeeds Act" from No Child Left Behind that can have a very positive effect on Alaska's public education. From more state and local control, to the removal of high stakes testing and more stakeholder input. If the legislature works with parents, teachers and students we will have the potential to dramatically improve on the needs in our schools across the state.

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?

Alaskan schools should be adequately funded if they were supported to the amount required by law in the Base Student Allocation. State and federal funding must keep up with inflation and allow districts to expand what they teach to Alaska's students beyond the "Three R's."

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, I would. While this is technically not allowed by the dedicated fund clause in the constitution, there is precedent for such a revenue stream in our past. I believe that forward funding our education budget as we did for nearly 10 years, is an excellent "re-start" to provide stable, predictable funding for our schools so they can plan and grow responsibly and effectively.

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, it is very important to keep rural schools open and the 10 student minimum is a standard we should fight to keep. Most importantly, I strongly support efforts to increase 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 would support a comprehensive fiscal plan that includes new revenue streams. Alaska must get off the funding rollercoaster that we've ridden as the price of oil rises and falls. Having an unpredictable funding source makes it difficult for any government, business or school district to thrive. Developing a sustainable and steady funding stream would allow Alaska to see their important education programs through to success, instead of having to cut them every few years.

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 do support funding for a universal pre-kindergarten program, and I know that some of the most important years to learn in a child's life are their early years. This cannot be done at the expense of our K-12 schools, because a comprehensive, whole student education system is what Alaska needs going forward.

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 strongly oppose privatization of Alaska's schools and the constitutional amendment that has been introduced by the legislature recently. Public money is for public education, not "for-profit" or exclusionary schools.

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, I would support the federal government funding a statewide family engagement center in Alaska, though I am not intimately familiar with this idea. Along with well-trained teachers and adequate funding, the work of PTAs and greater parental involvement are extremely important aspects of ensuring the greatest opportunity for success for our students.