

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Mike Gordon, House District 18
Submitted September 24th

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.

Mike Gordon, House District 18

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

1. Ability to develop analysis programs which will effectively be able to measure results.
2. Identifying programs which are receiving better results and duplicating them.
3. Willingness to restructure the current model to bring more efficiencies.

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

I am not an advocate for federal-based programs because they tend to attempt to homogenize children into general classes which do not take in account the diversity of our educational community. I like the fact that ESSA was a bipartisan effort and that it incorporates elements of individual state participation.

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?

Yes. I would prefer administrative and overhead cost to be held lower and the existing available money be better allocated back into the classroom and to the teacher where "real results" would be expected.

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)?

A head tax that would significantly offset the Anchorage School District \$830 million budget would have to be pretty high. Our problem is not underfunding our public schools; it's how we're managing the funding. We need to spend less on administration and more on classrooms and teachers.

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 both, but I'm afraid we can no longer afford the current system. We need to think outside the box. Perhaps we should consider "traveling" superintendents, consolidating districts and a renewed system of boarding schools. There are no simple solutions.

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

It is a constitutional responsibility, but we must be responsible stewards regarding the allocation of funds. Currently we are paying more for public education than any other state in the nation and we are ranked 38th overall. We really need to pay attention to utilizing the funds available for better results or it looks like we are just identifying funding as a single source indicator for better education. There are substantially more factors than just money.

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?

As stated earlier, I would like to explore more funding mechanisms to provide money for additional funding for pre-K.

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?

Currently there are funds which are going into "other" programs which are in direct violation of the Blaine Amendment. States all over America are developing educational options and getting excellent results. I am concerned that if we do not allow for alternate forms of education to be developed within our system we may fall even farther behind on the national scale. I would be adamant about alternate schools having a lottery system so they could not "pick and choose" their student population but I do support other ideas. It is important to acknowledge that the current system has serious systemic flaws and we are getting results which are difficult to support. Is this an issue of control or of excellence?

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?

Unfortunately, you cannot force a parent to be involved. It is imperative that we address the issue of students wanting to be involved, especially as they progress in the educational construct. Why are so many students choosing to drop out? I would think it would be a better use of money to "sell" students on the advantage of developing their educational portfolio and what this means to their future financial well being. It is true that when parents are directly involved in the education of their children, there are better

outcomes, but I question how any federal program would be effectively designed to encourage this participation.