

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Natasha Von Imhof, Senate District L
Submitted September 1st

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.

Natasha Von Imhof, Running for State Senate Seat L

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

Top three challenges:

1. Very expensive to build and maintain extensive real estate portfolio statewide.
2. The stress or support at home that affects a student's ability to focus on his education.
3. High administration costs (nearly twice the national average).

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

"Every Student Succeeds Act" To me, education is one of the most (if not THE MOST) important area where we can invest public dollars. However, I also believe in accountability for those dollars invested. I like that states have to submit accountability plans, I like that states are allowed some flexibility in their plans to accommodate natural uniqueness, and I think testing is important to gauge teaching effectiveness and student understanding.

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 don't think the problem is adequate funding. I think the problem is "adequate allocation" of that funding. We have a lot of administrative positions and special interest groups that sometimes erode classroom funding for teachers. We have a lot of buildings that need to be heated and maintained. We have a lot of schools districts for a state with our population.

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 be open to talk about it. I would like to learn more.

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?

First, the 10 student enrollment. What are the cost/benefits of keeping schools open with a dozen kids? Can the state continue to afford that? To what detriment? Can we look at delivering education differently through on-line platforms?

Yes, I would like to increase graduation rates for all students in Alaska. Unfortunately, there is a wide variety of opinions on how to go about doing that. For Alaska Native Students living in rural Alaska, I am in favor of using the Rural Education Stipend funds to encourage students to visit their schools at the local regional hubs. Below, I have listed the reasons why I think this will help graduation rates.

Teachers: If teachers are clustered in a larger community, there is more opportunity for collaboration, consistency over time, professional development, and peer support

Access to more classes: The larger hubs have the efficiency to offer more classes like science labs, foreign languages, electives, music, etc

Student Support: The regional hubs can offer nurturing environment, counselors, a safe place to sleep, study, and play. Also can provide Votech skill that a student can return to village and utilize.

Sustainable: The state can afford to keep fewer schools fully staffed. **Trade capital for operations.**

Limited time frame: There will be many models to choose from. Quarterly, semester, annual, or more. Student can choose the length of time to attend the regional hub

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

I would be open to discuss it.

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?

No. We can't afford it.

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?

Yes, I fully understand that families and parents can affect a child's academic performance. But I don't know what a Statewide Family Engagement Center would look like. I would need to learn more about it before commenting.