

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Shelley Hughes- Senate District F
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.

Shelley Hughes, Senate District F

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

A. Recognizing that in order to improve academic achievement and graduation results, the answer is not more money. Tweaks and piecemeal reform will not be enough to ensure Alaska's children receive excellent educations; we must transform education—change our present way of doing things: reduce and streamline administration, ensure the dollars really do go to the classroom, rethink all the bells and whistles—what really works? Find the best teachers in depressed areas where students are excelling and let them lead education transformation in Alaska.

B. Attracting and keeping gifted, highly motivated, inspirational teachers

C. Eliminating regulatory and grant-related barriers that stymie creative and innovation teaching

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

I'm aware that such a bill passed Congress but am not familiar with the details of it, but look forward to learning more.

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?

See response to question #4.

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)?

Because our per student spending is already 80% higher than the national average, and our academic results rank toward the bottom of the 50 states, it is clear that increased funding is not the magic bullet. I don't believe it is time to tax Alaskans more; I believe it is time for a transformation of education in Alaska - for educators to be relieved of many of the regulatory and grant requirements that stifle innovation, for teachers to be empowered and inspired to empower and inspire students. It's time for the administration of education to stop consuming as much as 30% of the funding. It's time for state leaders to tackle health care costs - which we all

know is a huge cost driver for school districts - and find tangible solutions to begin to bring down the heretofore skyrocketing insurance premiums.

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 believe we can and should increase the graduation rate among Alaska Native students, and I also believe we can and should realize that what we've been doing has not been working. Higher and higher dollar amounts per student in the rural schools has not correlated with higher and higher academic achievement. In addition to the model not working, the model is not financially sustainable. We must be willing to transform the model into one that increases academic results and graduation rates and one that we can afford. I don't have all the answers but do know that we can't afford to pay for 54 school district administrations as we have in the past, with as much as 30% of funding in a district for administration.

We need to consolidate school districts and streamline remaining administrations. The consolidation would lend well then to the very small schools sharing teachers through the use of technology to a greater degree. Regional boarding high schools should also be options for families and students.

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

I support using a portion of the interest earnings off the Permanent Fund, without touching the corpus and with the goal to avoid altering the PFD calculation. I support the Goldsmith-ISER model, with a budget target under \$4 billion - which is what the budget was under Gov. Tony Knowles, adjusted for inflation and population. Depending on the markets (and thus the interest earnings available) and depending on the price of oil (and thus the current incoming oil revenues available), if there is still a fiscal gap after reaching the budget target and using some of the interest earnings (without PFDs), I would support a sales tax which excludes groceries and medicine.

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?

I support some pre-K as we currently offer for children who may not be ready otherwise for kindergarten. I do not support universal, mandatory pre-K education for all children at state expense. Many children (including my four children years ago) are fully ready for kindergarten at age five and have the added benefit of bonding with parents, grandparents, and family to a greater degree—which has great social and emotional benefits. Considering the huge fiscal gap that the state is facing, I am rather surprised to see this question at this time.

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?

If public money were to follow the student to the school of the parents' choice, and the parents chose a private school which accepted that public money, the school should be held to the same outcomes-based standard that public schools have (not curriculum and methods) and accept all students regardless of race, etc. The public money should not be used to proselytize if the private school is a religious school.

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 do not know enough about this proposal but I would rather see non-profits and churches help parents become more involved with their children than the government.