

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Shirley Cote, House District 28
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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.

Shirley Cote - House District 28

2. What do you see as the three top challenges facing the delivery of public education in Alaska today?
 - a. Develop a level of funding that at least maintains and hopefully increases the 80.2% graduation rate over the 60% of ten years ago. Alaska is still one of the states with the lowest graduation rates.
 - b. Maintain programs such as Pre-K that prepares children early for success.
 - c. Ensure that students are learning for success and not how to answer particular test questions.
3. What is your understanding of the "Every Student Succeeds Act", and what potential effects it can have on public education in Alaska?

Over the years I have heard from teachers that the No Child Left Behind Act did not work for Alaska. It imposed standards assuming that all children from all parts of the U.S. needed to learn the same things in the same way. That simply was not true and children began learning how to fill out the tests rather than learning material crucial to their education. ESSA will allow identifying the schools that are doing a good job and will allow Alaska's educators to craft the plans that will ensure success in their schools. I believe ESSA will allow our schools to determine the appropriate measures for progress and success.

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 do not believe our schools are adequately funded if class sizes are increasing, good teachers are finding more stable positions outside the state, and programs like Pre-K are cut, or in jeopardy of being cut.

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 be in support of an education head tax until the state comes out of the fiscal crisis.

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?

I absolutely support increasing graduation rates among Alaska Native students. I would remain open to hearing the best solution for increasing that rate. I respect the Alaska Native cultures and the need to preserve a way of life. I also understand the need for equality in quality education. Times are tough and I don't want to see the education of our Native youth suffer.

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?

Having had a long career in law enforcement, and working with the school systems throughout my career, I understand the value of education as it relates to crime. Studies show well-educated people are less likely to commit crimes.

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 would not support that change to our Constitution. We cannot afford to dilute the education in our public schools in order to support private or religious 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?

That sounds like a positive project – anything that engages families in the education of their students, I would be in favor. Schools have the tendency to fulfill that role now, but I would be open to learning and seeing the value of a family engagement center.