

# 2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Sue Levi, House District 24  
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 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

1. Please provide your name and the Alaska Legislative seat you are a candidate for.

Sue Levi, candidate for State House -District 24

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

(1.) A reliable and stable method of fully funding education, Pre-K through 12th grade and fiscally supporting the University of Alaska system so that Alaskans attend the university and remain in Alaska to contribute to the workforce and economy after graduation;

(2.) Return to a defined benefit system for teachers to encourage recruitment and retention of public school teachers; and

(3) We need smaller class sizes, more vocational classes, more specialized education funding for students with disabilities, before and after school programs and mandatory preschool. The need to increase parental and community involvement in our public school education is also a challenge.

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

I believe the new ESSA will have very positive impacts in Alaska. It is a "breath of fresh air" after the former NCLB system. It will

(1.) Strengthen local control;

(2.) End the Common Core mandate;

(3.) End the federal Secretary of Education waivers by prohibiting the Secretary from mandating requirements for states or school districts seeking waivers from federal law;

( 4.) Maintains important information for parents, teachers & communities. The ESSA provides for annual data reporting, which provides valuable information on student achievement, including low-income students, students of color, students w /disabilities and English learner; and

(5.) Ends federal test- based accountability;

(6.) Strengthens the Charter School Program;

(7.) Assists states in fixing the lowest performing schools, and the federal government is prohibited from mandating, prohibiting, or defining the specific steps school districts and states must take to improve these schools; and

(8.) Helps states support teachers -provides resources to states and school districts to implement activities to support teachers, principals, & other school leaders.

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?

No

I believe that education funding should be one of the top funding priorities and the last thing the Legislature should cut is education monies.

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, absolutely. The school tax is long overdue.

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. I have worked and travelled in many rural hubs and villages and know that these are important issues for consideration and assistance in achieving.

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

A state income tax to include taxing out-of-state workers, seasonal workers and S-Corporation and Alaska workers. I propose a 4% rate for state residents (with exemption for low-income seniors and disabled Alaskans) and a 10% rate for out-of -state workers and coroporations. As stated above also reinstate the School Tax. We also need to drastically reduce or eliminate the millions of\$ going to the oil industry in tax subsidies and operating losses. All these would bring new sources of revenue.

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.

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?

Absolutely not. The constitution has served us well and will continue to do so.

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.