

2016 Alaska Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

Vince Beltrami, Seat N
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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.

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

1) State funding and continued budget cuts due to the legislatures inaction on creating a sustainable fiscal plan

2) The ratio of dollars spent directly on students versus administrative and overhead costs, especially the steep rise in healthcare costs

3) Lack of opportunities for pre-k and early childhood learning, which has shown to pay huge dividends in a child's development

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, which replaced the No Child Left Behind, will work to increase equity among sometimes disparate groups in our education system, promotes and expands preschool opportunities, and focuses resources to low-performing schools. All of these can have positive impacts in our schools.

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, but we need to decide what "adequate funding" looks like. The ratio of classroom to non-classroom expenditures and how the legislature decides to appropriate capital expenses must be reviewed. Having the highest per capita spend in the country on education is understandable, given our state's constitutional requirements and the challenges of remote delivery. At the same time, I support forward funding of education. The expense must end in results.

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. Would also like to see a Pick.Click.Give option to your residential schools by legislative house district. Those so inclined can financially support their neighborhood schools in an alternative way and would encourage more involvement in the PTAs and other dynamics of school life. I would introduce such a bill!

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?

Absolutley support the current 10 student minimum. In many villages, these small school are the hub of healthy cultural and educational development.

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

Yes! I'm firmly on record of diversifying our revenue streams. The reliance on one volatile commodity is no way to responsibly run a state.

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. It would take a decade to see the results, but it is a known quantifiable fact that early education funding saves money in the long run across the social spectrum.

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. Taking money away from public school doesn't help fix public school. I enjoyed a private education. I also paid for it myself working all kinds of odd jobs around the school. That's how we Alaskans do it.

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?

In these times of lean state dollars, if the federal government is willing to invest in family engagement, then I'm all for it.