

Rep. Esther Agbaje

Education Minnesota candidate questionnaire

Education funding

1. Education Minnesota believes the solution to closing the state's racial opportunity gaps must include fully and equitably funding public education, from preschool to postsecondary institutions. There's widespread agreement the full-funding agenda will require several billion dollars in new education investments. Please indicate your support or opposition to the following components of our full-funding agenda.

Inflation: Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula and tying it to inflation.

Yes No

SPED cross subsidy: The state must also fully fund its portion of special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.

Yes No

EL cross subsidy: Fully fund the costs districts pay to provide quality English learner programs and instruction.

Yes No

Lower class sizes: Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.

Yes No

Full-service community schools: Expand access to full-service community schools across the state.

Yes No

Universal pre-K: Provide universal pre-K taught by licensed teachers, so all children are ready for kindergarten.

Yes No



Teachers of color: Fund programs to increase the number of teachers of color significantly so teachers providing instruction better reflect the students in our classrooms.

Yes No

Student support: Provide additional resources for school districts to hire more student support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other job classifications.

Yes No

TDE/Q Comp: Fully fund the 2011 Teacher Development and Evaluation law, an unfunded state mandate, to ensure teacher quality and lift the cap on the Q Comp program.

Yes No

Professional development: Provide professional development to all staff around cultural competency and trauma-responsive classrooms with aims of closing the discipline disparity gap.

Yes No

ESP living wage: Ensure all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour.

Yes No

Teacher compensation and benefits: Increase teacher compensation to provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain teachers.

Yes No

Health care for all school employees: Make health insurance more affordable, fair and predictable for educators and school employees so they stay in the profession.

Yes No

Education debt relief: Provide debt relief to retain teachers so they can afford to stay in the classroom.

Yes No

Higher education: Renew Minnesota's commitment to invest in the state's future by fully funding public higher education in Minnesota.

Yes No

Education Support Professionals

2. Do you support ESPs being able to access unemployment insurance in the summers, when they are not guaranteed work?

Yes No

3. Will you support dedicated, paid training each year for education support professionals to get the training they need that is specific to their work and students' needs?

Yes No

Taxes/revenue

4. Would you commit to raising revenue to ensure the wealthiest corporations and richest households pay what they truly owe in taxes so every student, no matter what they look like or where they live, can attend a fully funded public school that prepares them to pursue their dreams?

Yes No

5. Education Minnesota believes in restoring fairness to the state tax code by raising revenue from the very wealthiest corporations and richest households and reducing the reliance on local levies to fund schools. Considering your own experience and expertise, are there other progressive, equitable ways to raise state revenue that you would recommend the union consider supporting?

The tax structure needs to be revamped to promote positive incentives. One area to do that is by introducing additional taxes on corporations that are polluters or create other negative externalities in society. That revenue could be directed to education in addition to taxes on the wealthiest corporations and household.

Higher education

6. Do you support increasing the state's direct investment in public higher education to significantly reduce institutions' reliance on tuition?

Yes No

7. Will you support investments in capital bonding projects that preserve buildings, remodel classrooms and keep our technology assets current?

Yes No

8. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with education debt?

We should continue to provide refundable tax credits to people with student debt, and to the extent that states have the power to cancel debt, we should find ways to do so.

9. Some college campuses have no counselors, while others have a ratio of 1:11,000 students. Will you support each Minnesota State campus having at least one counselor so students have access to mental health and academic support services?

Yes No

High-quality professional educators

10. What will you do to help recruit and retain high-quality educators in our classrooms?

I believe that in order to create the just society we deserve, our education system must be supported in a way that promotes success in public schools. This vision cannot come to fruition without high-quality educators, especially educators of color. This means that our federal and state dollars are used to provide resources, teachers, and support staff to those schools most in need. I will listen to educators and organizations that support them to hear from educators about resources they need to stay and thrive in the profession.

11. Do you support changes to current law to include our fully-licensed Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers in the continuing contract law?

Yes No

Teacher licensure

12. Do you support changes to state law to allow Tier 1 teachers to join the teacher bargaining unit?

Yes No

13. Do you support deleting the option in Tier 3 that allows a person to receive a full professional license without completing a teacher preparation program?

Yes No

Standardized testing

14. What individual or system-level decisions in education do you believe are appropriate to make based on standardized test scores?

Our current system over-relies on standardized testing, which is biased according to class and race. System-level decisions, such as school funding, should not use standardized testing results as their sole criteria in determining the State's support of schools and school districts.

Honesty in Education

15. What can you do to protect teachers in the classroom and ensure that they have the freedom to teach?

I support teachers' ability to prepare lessons, including those pertaining to race, sexuality, gender identity, and other aspects of identity. I also support protecting teachers' safety, employment, and

ability to teach regardless of identity. I will work to combat oppressive legislation intended to harm teachers, such as educators of color and LGBTQ+ educators.

16. Do you agree that Minnesotan students deserve an honest and accurate education about race that enables them to learn from the mistakes of our past so they can create a better future for all Minnesotans? Why or why not?

Yes. Honest and accurate education about race is crucial to our students' education so they are informed about our present and our past. Our youth are entitled to honesty and high-quality, developmentally appropriate education. This must include discussions of race, ethnicity, power, and justice.

Time to Teach

17. The planning and differentiating that teachers do daily needs more time. Most after school “prep” is filled with meetings. The current statute falls short of the time needed for preparing lessons. Will you support adjusting this statute to increase prep time?

Yes No

18. Will you support legislation that protects an educator's prep time so it can't be used for meetings or having to sub for colleagues?

Yes No

19. Do you support paid, dedicated time outside of student contact time for special education teachers to complete their paperwork and required meetings?

Yes No

Yes, this could improve educators' quality of life, classroom curriculum development, and could increase retention for special education educators.

Union Rights

20. Do you support collective bargaining rights?

Yes No

21. Will you oppose any legislation or constitutional amendments that would weaken collective bargaining rights, the right to organize, the right to strike, automatic payment of union dues, union access and activities at worksites or other anti-union policies backed by anti-worker groups?

Yes No

22. Do you support teacher tenure and due process rights so the experts who work the most with students have the support to stand up for them?

Yes No

23. How will you support unions as a state legislator?

I have started to develop good working relationships with unions during my first term in office and look forward to continue hearing from union leaders and members about measures I can support as a state legislator. Union members and leaders are the experts, and I expect to engage them in dialogue about measures that will work best for teachers.

Working families

24. Do you support the current language that allows educator locals to unilaterally seek a bid and join the Public Employee Insurance Program (PEIP) as the insurance provider for local bargaining units?

Yes No

25. Will you support continuing defined-benefits retirement systems for public employees?

Yes No

26. Will you support providing the necessary state funding to ensure financial sustainability of public pension funds?

Yes No

27. Will you support exploring new systems for providing educators with a secure retirement, including exploring early retirement options that might help recruit and retain educators?

Yes No

28. What legislation could you introduce or support that would reduce the cost of health insurance to school districts? Where do you stand on health care for all?

My vision for Minnesota, and the country, is that we will deliver on a single payer system where medical costs are no longer a burden for people. Until the federal government takes up the task of developing this system, I will work to make sure that Minnesota's health insurance programs are at the lowest prices possible to provide much more coverage for more people, especially those who are falling through the cracks in our current system. I look forward to working with Education Minnesota and other stakeholders and ensuring that Minnesota becomes a single payer state.

Privatization

29. Do you oppose state tax credits for private K-12 education tuition and expenses?

Yes No

30. Will you support policy changes that will ensure a stronger accountability system with necessary oversight and reporting to ensure quality management and instructional practices in charter schools?

Yes No

31. Will you support a moratorium on new charter schools until such changes are made?

Yes No

32. Minnesota students, from different places and of different races, deserve well-resourced, welcoming schools. These needs are urgent and can't wait decades for lawyers and courts to force it to happen.

Do you oppose efforts that would delete constitutional mandates for using taxation to fund public education funding and for providing equal access to public schools to all students?

Yes No

Do you also oppose these same efforts that would enshrine standardized testing – with all its racial, cultural and economic biases – into the Minnesota Constitution?

Yes No

Your role as a legislator

33. Have you visited a public school in your district in the past year? If so, which one? What were your observations from your visit? How will that experience inform your work as a legislator? If not, when did you last visit a school? Would you like us to help arrange a visit?

I visited Bethune Elementary during a coat distribution day in 2022. I noticed that facilities could be updated and that teachers needed more support staff to help with all the children. During capital investment tours in 2021 we also visited some local schools and I noticed that depending on the wealth of an area you could see increased amenities. As a legislator, I want every student across the state to have the same access to tools and opportunities. This is why I support fully funding our schools especially in the areas that need it the most.

34. What have you done to become informed on issues relating to public education? What organizations and individuals do you go to for your information?

My educational foundation is in public schools. Because of my dad's job I lived in different parts of the country, and I was exposed to different learning styles and passionate teachers within the public school system. I recognize that I was lucky to have these types of programs and opportunities, and that makes me even more committed to fighting for equity in our education system. More recently, the strike in Minneapolis and proposed strike in St. Paul this school year informed me about issues relating to public education. Friends, colleagues, and constituents who are educators have also

informed my views. I also value organizations such as Education Minnesota for information about public education.

35. How do you envision working with Education Minnesota if you are elected/re-elected? If you disagree with us on an issue, how will you communicate that?

I will work with Education Minnesota to stay informed about public education issues and potential legislation. I believe in straight-forward communication to discuss disagreements. I will bring this approach to any disagreements with the organization so that we can resolve the issue appropriately.

36. If elected/re-elected, how will you balance competing priorities that might exist between Education Minnesota and other education groups?

If re-elected, I will continue balancing competing priorities between groups, which includes Education Minnesota and other entities. I will listen to all interests, as well as constituents and other experts, to make informed decisions.