

Aleta Borrud Senate District 24

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?

I believe we need to reverse the decline in tax rates for corporations and top earners as the most important step. Although this is not my area of expertise, I would support increasing taxes on unearned investment income. I would be willing to look at estate tax thresholds, mindful of the question of the loss of family farms. Legalizing cannabis may provide an additional revenue source that would be politically popular. Finally, I wonder about the possibility of increasing taxes on luxury goods above a certain price threshold such as pleasure boats or sports cars and on second homes that are not homesteads.

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?

The most important step is increasing state funding of our public institutions of higher education to reach towards the constitutional obligation to fund 2/3rd of the cost of education. I supported the MN House proposal to provide tax credits to people holding student debt. I would support a state debt forgiveness program for graduates serving in high need occupations, such as K-12 schools or caregiving or in underserved areas that is modeled after the Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. We also need to fully fund our government agencies that aid borrowers. This would include funding a high-profile office within the Dept of Commerce that can provide outreach

and education to borrowers regarding options for refinancing loans. The Attorney General's Office is also a source of information and can investigate complaints regarding scam loans and for-profit institutions.

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?

We need student loan forgiveness program for the training of educators. We need to increase the pay to recruit adequate staffing for all the support professionals that classroom teachers rely on, such as ESP's, counselors, nurses, reading specialists. We must provide equitable financial support to all school districts for professional development to provide ongoing mentoring and support. I note the very many proposals put forward by Ed MN to support retired teachers and substitute teachers to lure them back into the classroom. This all depends on our commitment to funding public education. Finally we need to educate the public about what the "Parents Bill of Rights" legislation actually means and how it demeans what teachers do in the classroom and the relationships that already exist for parent and teacher communication and collaboration.

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

I took the opportunity to call the Rochester Education Association office to talk over these questions and I am still not clear on the full implications of any changes. I am fully open to discussing further how we tackle the looming shortage of qualified classroom educators. I believe it is essential that there be adequate funding to fully support the ongoing professional development of teachers (e.g. opening up the cap on Q-Comp participation and funding TDE across MN) so that highly qualified people in their fields with some qualifications, but not meeting all the requirements right now for Tier 3 or 4, become fully licensed. We cannot lower our standards for teaching excellence to meet the shortage. Can we find solutions to ensuring teaching excellence that allows more experienced people to teach with adequate mentoring and professional development opportunities?

Standardized testing

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

There are many factors that impact student success, including socioeconomic factors. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequities in educational supports such as availability of family help or access to technology making assessments following these years somewhat unreliable. I believe standardized test scores may be useful to assess a student's progress year to year to determine if tailored interventions may be helpful or if there are extenuating circumstances for that student that is impeding their progress. I could also imagine that system-wide scores may identify districts which need increased investment and allow a district to assess year to year progress. However, I worry that such scores may be utilized in a punitive manner. Also, we know that standardized scores are not the best predictors of future success, and that language and cultural barriers prevent some students from demonstrating their facility with specific knowledge and decision-making.

Honesty in Education

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

We must stop the "Parent Bill of Rights" from gaining ground and getting passed. I have used the platform of my campaign to publicly support our educators, explain how public education is funded and what our public school advocates state is currently needed. When proponents sought copious records from the Rochester Public School District, which would cost approximately \$900,000 in staff time to acquire, I publicly stood with our School Board, Superintendent, and educators to make clear that this had nothing to do with ensuring parent access to information. Parents already have many avenues to understand the curricula and access to classroom teachers.

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?

Rochester Public Schools are fortunate to have National Teacher of the Year, Natalia Benjamin. From the opportunities I have had to learn from her, I understand how important it is for our students to see themselves in our curriculum and not have their own identities erased. That such affirmation is essential for student success and self-esteem. I have explained that successfully to voters at the doors, letting them know that many of our elementary schools have upwards of 60% New American or students of color. Our future depends on their success. In addition, it is only fair to all our students to be equipped with an accurate understanding of the world as it is, and why challenges and inequities exist, if they are to go out and navigate this world and act to improve it. We must be able to collaborate to solve our many challenges together.

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

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 believe unions are our most important lever to gain back power from corporate interests that wish to undermine public institutions and replace them with for-profit private entities. I will always stand with unions to support collective bargaining, support unionization of more sectors, and most importantly, support unions representing public employees. I will fight to protect the hard-won gains by unions such as opposing the raiding of state pension funds to balance our state budgets and oppose replacing pensions with defined contribution plans where funds are managed by for-profit entities. My opponent, as Senate Tax Chair, is seeking deep permanent tax cuts which will lead to deficits and attempts to raid public employee pension funds. I oppose any tax cuts that will lead to less funding for our public institutions and have canvassed and called for an increase in tax rates for the wealthiest.

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?

I have been a vocal supporter of a universal publicly administered, publicly funded health insurance program for decades. I have lobbied for a public buy-in to our MinnesotaCare health insurance program but would like to see a program that is based on a direct contracting with our MDH, to reduce the costs and any restrictions on care associated with private insurance companies. I am a supporter of the Minnesota Health Plan and would advocate for that.

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 did visit Mayo High School this year at a public iftar sponsored by the Mayo High School students with support from their Equity Specialists and school administrators. Although I have not visited a classroom this year, I have held meetings with classroom teachers, ESPs, and students to understand the issues within the schools in my district. I have attended Rochester Public School Board meetings and have had discussions with SB directors. I would like help visiting a school.

Despite not visiting a school within this year, I am aware that the pay for our hourly school employees is far too low to support adequate staffing and does not honor the challenging work that many do. Our paraprofessionals also do not have sufficient paid time to be adequately trained to support students with special needs. Our teachers, parents, and students are calling for more staff trained to address mental health issues in our schools. I am excited that the Rochester Public Schools have hired Equity Specialists that are working to ensure our New American students and BIPOC students feel seen and welcomed and are having a very positive impact on these students. This was clear from the highly successful iftar that the Muslim students sponsored with their help this spring.

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?

I have spent time talking with teachers, ESPs, reading specialists, School Board members, students, educators at state facilities of higher education, as well as hundreds of voters at the doors. I have researched information regarding legislation sponsored in the Minnesota state Senate regarding school issues, such as proposed school vouchers and the “Parent Bill of Rights”. I have attended forums and School Board meetings. I have also visited the Education Minnesota website to understand implications of proposals such as the Constitutional amendment which could undermine equitable funding for public education.

I rely on information from our local School Board members and the school administrators that are dedicated to innovating to enhance learning for all students. I rely on the guidance I receive from classroom teachers and other education professionals. And I rely on those legislators, public employees, and unions that are committed to ensuring a strong, fully funded public educational system. I trust those who share my values and believe that all our students, regardless of race, ability, language, or how they got here, are our future, and worthy of our commitment to their success. These are the sources of information that I trust.

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 believe we share values—a deep commitment to funding the public institutions that ensure all, without exception, can develop to their highest capabilities. I believe in co-governance with organizations that share my values and have the expertise that I lack. Thus, I would look to Education Minnesota's expertise to navigate funding and policies issues that might impact our public education system and would look to sponsor and advocate for legislation that protects and enhances it.

I believe in being forthright about differences because that is the basis of trust. On an issue where there might be a difference, I would seek a conversation to fully understand Education Minnesota's viewpoint and to be fully informed before being public about a policy difference. My door would always be open for discussion and collaboration.

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

I prioritize funding and supporting public education and understand that Education Minnesota speaks for a wide base of education professionals. I know that there may be times when there are competing priorities for funding and could imagine this might occur when considering early childcare education, or funding for mental health resources in schools, or even pay for educators in our state higher education institutions. I think the first answer, if funding is the issue, is to fight against scarcity and for an increase in state revenue. Secondly, asking who would be most impacted by the funding and how is that measured.

For other types of differences, I would go back to my core values and ask who benefits, what are the incentives for each group, and how would different proposals impact our objective of enhancing the success of all students, regardless of zip code or financial circumstances.