

# Sonja Buckmeier

## Education Minnesota candidate questionnaire

### Education funding

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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

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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

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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 would agree with Education Minnesota's stance to restore fairness to the tax code and do not have a unique idea for equitable funding, at this time. For the 25 years I have been a resident of my district, we have had to rely on local levies. This is not sustainable or equitable; it is a patch that doesn't address the underlying issues.**

## Higher education

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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?

**First, I would look at ways to slow the increasing cost of higher education. Another way would be to place emphasis on solid loan counseling that is done one on one, is custom to their situation, and covers all years of their schooling. Students need to understand education debt, repayments, how interest factors, and not to take out loans that would exceed what their projected salary would be when they enter the workforce. Other suggestions to explore could include lower interest loans, expansion of the MN Self Loan, and provide other avenues for potential employers to invest in student education by covering a portion of their tuition expense.**

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

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

**First and foremost is to make pay competitive. In addition, look at ways to have diverse staffing across all levels. Provide mentorship opportunities and ways for educators to connect.**

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

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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   Note: Currently, I do not have a solid understanding of the 4 tiers to answer this question.

## Standardized testing

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

**They can be used as one tool to measure student learning and help guide areas of instruction, but I don't believe that standardized test scores should be the only benchmark for individual or system-level decision making.**

## Honesty in Education

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

**I would work to keep classrooms a safe space for teaching and learning not to wage culture war. Additionally, foster a supportive environment for teachers and staff where they feel valued and can share their professional knowledge in their content area.**

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, I agree students need to be exposed to learning all aspects of race as it relates to our history. As the product of a diverse public school education, I believe the opportunity to learn from other backgrounds as it relates to our history allows for individuals to be more open, accepting, and tolerant of all Minnesotans and people as a whole.**

## Time to Teach

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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

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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?

**First and foremost, I will continue to advocate for unions in the workforce and actively oppose Right to Work legislation that may be presented.**

## Working families

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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 support making healthcare accessible and affordable for all.**

## Privatization

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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 Note: I would consider it. The issue is complex and, like anything, there are pros and cons. As public school districts presently are not fully funded, the financial struggles they face are perpetuated when students transition to charter and private schools and funding to the school decreases. This dilemma furthers a cyclical pattern of students transitioning out of districts, funding being reallocated, and overall quality of education diminishing. The question becomes: how do we adequately build up our public schools to provide the education that students deserve while also respecting a parent/guardian's right to choose an educational system that is best for their student?

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

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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?

**Yes, I have visited our high school, middle school, and community education buildings. I appreciate how well the facilities are maintained, though we struggle with class sizes and staffing ratios. Schools are the heart of a community, and I will make education one of my top 3 priorities.**

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 been an active member of our school district for 20 years. Over those years I have volunteered in classrooms, worked as a short-call substitute for 2 years, served as PTO treasurer for multiple years, been on district bond and levy committees, and have done legislative visits at the capitol. My main sources of information are the teachers, staff, and school board.**

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

**As a new candidate for public office, I would view this as a partnership that would allow for opportunities to learn more about the different facets of education, collaborate on issues, and further improve upon the high-quality education Minnesota is known for. If there were a situation where I disagree with Education Minnesota, I would have an open and honest dialogue with leadership to come to a common ground.**

36. If elected/reelected, how will you balance competing priorities that might exist between Education Minnesota and other education groups? **If elected, I will balance priorities between Education Minnesota and other groups by allowing for open dialogue on the various issues and reflecting on the priorities of my platform: fostering growth in public education and supporting all education staff at all times.**