

John Hest – House District 4B

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 think that approach certainly makes the most sense. Coming from a rural district with a shrinking, aging property tax base, we can't afford to continue to subsidize the state's share of public education. It certainly seems like we have the money, given the tremendous budget surplus, but it's just a matter of actually investing that surplus in our public schools, from Pre-K through our colleges and universities.

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?

Student loan debt has become a predatory cycle which prevents our rising generations from being successful. I support targeted debt relief to help graduates in high need career fields including (but not limited to) education, healthcare, eldercare, and childcare. Part of that, too, is fulfilling the state's obligation to fully fund our public colleges and universities. As state subsidies along with enrollments have shrunk, what choice do colleges and universities have but raising tuition and fees? Trapping young people in an escapable cycle of debt is not the way forward and I support efforts at the state and federal levels to forgive and mitigate student loan debt.

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 think this does still come down primarily to funding. Teacher salaries need to be competitive with private sector employment if we want to attract and retain talent. We also need to take serious steps to improve retention as burnout is far too high; we need to support good teachers to ensure they continue to work as teachers and don't leave for a less stressful, higher paying job. I also know that we need more teachers of color and that tends to be exponential given that the more teachers of color there are, the more students of color are likely to consider that as a viable and valuable career choice.

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?

Given the history of standardized test scores as a cudgel to be used against teachers and districts, as well as their history as a tool to keep students of color out of higher education, I'm deeply skeptical of standardized test scores as a measure of anything other than socioeconomic background. I understand the value of a hard and fast numerical measuring tool to determine student success and outcomes, but we need a more holistic approach given the inherent limitations of standardized testing. Frankly, there are few if any decisions that I would base on standardized test scores.

Honesty in Education

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

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of a quality education. While there are certainly some benchmarks that we want every student to meet (literacy, basic writing skills, basic math skills, etc.), teachers must have the flexibility to approach their subjects in creative ways that are going to best engage their students. Muzzling teachers by preventing them from teaching certain topics or forcing them to discuss topics in certain ways is not doing our students any favors and will only serve to hurt us as a state.

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, of course. As a historian and college history teacher, I'm constantly teaching about the checkered history of race and racism in the United States. I teach history for a lot of reasons, but a primary one is to ensure that students are well-educated about our past and able to make informed decisions about the future of our communities, states, and nation. Whitewashed history or other subjects does students a fundamental disservice and serves to propagandize rather than educate. As educators, we have a responsibility to teach students fully and honestly to ensure they are prepared to take up the full mantle of civic participation as adults.

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'm a proud member of MAPE Local 1502 and a firm believer in unions and the collective bargaining process. If elected, I will respect the collective bargaining process and its results, voting for the contracts as bargained by the different bargaining units. I will also take action to ensure that private sector unions are able to grow and thrive in the same way that our public sector unions have. I support any and all efforts to ensure that working folks are fully educated about their rights to organize and bargain collectively and will fight to protect those rights in St. Paul.

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?

Health insurance is far too expensive. I support a public option for MinnesotaCare as an immediate solution to decrease the costs of health insurance and as a way to open the door for more discussions about health care for all. I won't pretend to be an expert in the minutiae of insurance policy, but I do think it's likely that a public option would decrease costs for all plans, given the

increased competition in the marketplace. No person should lose access to healthcare because they lose their job or because they can't afford the premiums, but I also understand and appreciate the hard-won union health insurance plans that serve many Minnesotans well.

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?

As a first-time candidate only a few months into my run, I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting a public school in my district this year, except for the public college where I work and its other campuses. I would love the chance to visit some of the schools in my district, especially given just how many school districts overlap here, including (as far as I can tell) parts of Moorhead Area Public Schools, Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton, Ulen-Hitterdal, Hawley, Barnesville, Ada-Borup, Lake Park-Audubon, Detroit Lakes, and Pelican Rapids.

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 follow the news closely, including local, state, national, and international news via newspapers, new websites, etc. There is some great reporting on public education done by local news organizations like the *Forum* in Fargo-Moorhead as well as MinnPost statewide. In a previous job, I served my union, North Dakota United, as a member organizer and NDU represents public educators from Pre-K through university so the connections I made there have also been super informative on issues of public education. My potential seatmate, Rep. Heather Keeler of District 4A, also has much more public education experience at the secondary level than I do as well as a couple of years of legislative experience, so I also plan to consult her regularly. I would also certainly plan to consult with Education Minnesota members and staff, particularly those within my district.

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 intend to work closely with Education Minnesota if I am elected. The combined years of experience of Education Minnesota's membership is an incredibly valuable resource that I fully intend to use in crafting policy. I intend to be incredibly communicative with my constituents generally and with relevant groups like Education Minnesota as well. If I disagree with Education Minnesota on an issue, I would be happy to discuss the disagreement in greater detail; I'm a learner and am more than happy to change my mind if I get more info and realize I was mistaken. There's no shame in that.

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

This is a constant balancing act that every legislator has to complete, balancing budgetary concerns with the concerns of Education Minnesota with the concerns of some of the other stakeholder groups. It always comes down to the question of what's best for our students and then what's best for our educators, parents, etc. Thankfully, typically what's best for teachers is also what's best for students. My priorities in almost every foreseeable case, though, do overlap with Education Minnesota's so I foresee very few instances where we might butt heads.