

# Alicia Kozlowski - MN House 8B

## 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: 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, licensed school 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?

Budgets are moral documents, and they reflect our values. To restore fairness and to continue to make progress restoring decades of state disinvestment in public education, my first priority would be to look for additional revenues, not make cuts to other vital things like healthcare, housing, climate action, infrastructure, etc. A struggling family's first impulse is not to choose between either fixing the leaking roof or feeding their child. These are false choices. Their first response is to try to find more money to do both. I have never heard of a society or business that has cut its way to greatness. I believe this is true for education and the state as well.

So, I would start where Education Minnesota starts - raising revenue to ensure the wealthiest corporations and individuals pay their fair share, so that every Minnesotan – across race and region – has the opportunity to build a better future.

I also believe that we need to look at Minnesota's Tax Expenditure Budget. Minnesota has over 300 tax breaks worth billions of dollars each year, each giving preferential treatment to one group of people or entity over another. Many of these tax breaks are well supported and socially beneficial and should continue to be supported. Others are simply tax loopholes or ineffective incentives which automatically roll over outside the normal budget process. One idea is to look at sunseting certain tax breaks and throwing them back into the budget debate where their social merit must vie against other priorities like education, housing, and health care. If a tax break for horses in

Minnesota is a more valuable use of public money it should be funded, but other state priorities should not lack funding simply because these types of tax breaks go unexamined outside the normal budget-setting process. I would also avoid hidden cost-shifting through fees and regressive taxes, like property taxes.

## 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?

As a someone who was the first in my family to graduate from high school and college, I know the challenges first time college students have when it comes to tuition and other associated costs. Legislation and investments matter when it comes to funding scholarships to support post-secondary education access, so that our students leave debt-free from public colleges and universities. I will continue to support funding that expands equitable access, success, and opportunity for students who have historically been unable or discouraged from attaining higher education.

Also, if college becomes unaffordable and requires aspiring teachers to take on tens of thousands of dollars in debt, it will become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers, especially teachers of color. I will support existing federal and state debt forgiveness programs and ensure that state programs like Minnesota's Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment Program are funded and expanded to cover more teachers and more costs. I am open to hearing if there are other avenues to forgive educator education debt.

I understand this deeply having worked at the College of St. Scholastica advocating on behalf of students and representing their interests to the administration to ensure their needs were being addressed. I was a bridge-builder in this role and developed many strong connections with educators and education students and would continue to use these strong relationships while advocating for education in St. Paul.

Additionally, I would fight for more state funding for post-secondary education opportunities and higher education to help keep tuition costs from rising. It's vital that support and funding be available for hyper-localized solutions such as on-campus mentoring, training and professional development opportunities, digital inclusion, and bolstering early childcare so our families and non-traditional students can obtain education barrier-free.

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?

There are few things more powerfully rewarding than teaching and seeing learning happen. Every educator knows it, every parent has experienced it. But while teaching is an extraordinarily rewarding job it has had way too many barriers put up which make an already challenging job virtually impossible, draining the joy from teaching. So many educators tell me how much they love their job and increasingly describe burn out and other factors that inhibit love for their job in the same breath. The pandemic only made this worse.

What can be done? Better pay and respect would be a good start. We need to support and respect teachers and the knowledge they bring, not target and blame them for society's problems. Our schools can't thrive unless we make them a top priority, so I'm committed to fully funding our public schools, so they have the resources they need to deliver the education all of our children deserve.

Teachers can't give individual attention in packed classrooms, so **let's fund smaller class sizes** so teachers can teach to individual student needs and foster strong relationships. A few others: Professional development and pathways and rewards for career advancement. Testing regimes that make sense for student growth. Proper support - e.g. paraprofessionals, mental health services, social workers, counselors, and nurses - so these critical student needs are not ignored and by default fall back to teachers.

I would advocate for direct funding for districts so they have the ability to further implement teacher mentorship programs. I understand Duluth Public Schools has established a good mentorship program already and I want to make sure this succeeds. There are many good things happening in our schools led by the DFT like this that I believe are crucial for us to further support.

I will also support legislation that sustains investments for specific recruitment programs like the Minnesota Indian Teaching Training Program and Increase Teachers of Color. We can make it possible for aspiring teachers of color to receive college aid and work with community organizations and high schools to mentor and help graduating students of color see themselves as part of a new generation of educators.

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

## 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?

As a parent I know that testing is stressful for students. And while effective testing is essential for educators and local districts to effectively develop learning plans for students and identify system-wide areas for improvement, state and local district standardized tests are usually blunt and poor tools for such evaluation. Too often these tests don't do enough to illuminate and diagnose, and they tend to put higher priority on certain subjects or learners over others. When they are truly done effectively then we can truly make data-driven decisions on interventions for student success.

I am no longer an educator nor am I a testing expert, so I would need to rely on current educators to help guide me on what is appropriate and useful, and what is not. Having said that, here are a few principles I would follow regarding making judgements around testing requirements: (1) test what students are actually learning in the classroom - not be based on some abstract, uniform notion of what "should be taught," (2) track individual student growth; (3) be useful and timely for modifying approaches to student learning; (4) do not prioritize one type of learning - say reading and math - over other types of learning - say music, culture, or languages; (5) do not distract from classroom learning. My impression - and I am open to learning the facts more fully - is that there is too much time spent on testing and preparing for tests. I know what this feels like as a parent through my daughter's and community member's eyes. I can only imagine what it feels like for an educator whose life work is dedicated to ensuring each student reaches their fullest potential.

## 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 once heard a quote, “Unless you know my full history and I know yours we can’t know ourselves or each other.” I am deeply committed to amplifying marginalized voices, the absent narratives often left out of Minnesota’s story and classrooms. I will fight any and all state proposals that would limit what could be taught such as we are seeing in multiple states around the country, whether that be about race, sexual identity, culture, etc.

In Duluth, my daughter attends the Misaabekong Ojibwe Immersion School where every single day she receives an education rooted in our ancestral ways of being and knowledge. I understand how important this is for her, our family and community, and I’ll work tirelessly for all our children and grandchildren who deserve an equitable and culturally affirming education.

I fully appreciate the many investments the Duluth Public Schools have made to address the achievement gap including integration specialists, the Check and Connect program, and expanding full-service community schools at Meyers-Wilkins, Lincoln Park and Denfeld.

Our public education communities have struggled to serve the needs of students of color, ability-diverse students, low-income students, and immigrant students. The result is a stark and persistent achievement gap. If a student of color doesn’t see themselves in what they’re studying or in who is teaching them it’s hardly surprising they too often check out. I’ll work collaboratively to pass legislation such as the Increase Teachers of Color, Indigenous Teachers Act, Ethnic Studies Bill.

Black, Indigenous, and students of color will reach their full potential within their school communities through meaningful, equitable, and targeted educational experiences that affirms and values their unique cultural identities. That’s why I support investments and strategies such as hiring culturally responsive curricular experts to help teachers and districts improve their lessons and helping schools responsive and affirming relationships with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Finally, maintain strong unions. A union is about more than a means to higher wages, benefits, and better working conditions. All of these are important. But it is also a protection for professionals to exercise their professional judgement without fear of reprisal.

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?

Absolutely. See much of my answer above, which is relevant to this question. We must name the trauma to heal, and we must heal to move forward. Teaching the truths of our history - the good and the challenging - is how we learn to see in another our basic humanity. It is the only way we will begin to heal the wounds that still wound. It is our path forward.

I also admire and support community initiatives like the “Understand Native MN” initiative, led by Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. This initiative increases visibility around negative and harmful stereotypes against Native peoples by including accurate Native culture, history, and modern tribal governments in Minnesota’s K-12 schools. I will also support organizations like the Minnesota Humanities Center “Absent Narratives” and “Why Treaties Matter” initiatives that developed a free collection of over 1,000 educator resources in partnership with our state’s diverse cultural communities.

I support efforts by Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial Committee to teach about the history of The Duluth Lynchings in our schools.

I have deep relationships across communities in-district as a former educator in higher ed, cultural community organizer, and as a leader for the City of Duluth. I have a history of fighting at the local, state, national levels for healing and justice for our communities. When I’m elected, I’ll bring with me a wave of community leaders into the Capitol to apply pressure and change public policy to make a better future for all of us.

## Time to Teach

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17. The planning and differentiating that teacher 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?

I will do all of the things checked above, and I will be a vocal supporter and champion. I grew up in a union family and was raised by my grandmother on a public union pension. I believe all working people, in both the public and private sectors, have the right to join in union and bargain collectively in an environment free of interference, intimidation, or reprisals. Unions are about more than secure employment, better wages and benefits, and workplace safety. They also serve the public interest by providing professionals the security and protection to use their professional judgement to advocate for and serve the public good. This is particularly important in education.

In addition, I will support workers' efforts to organize by issuing public statements, attending rallies, supporting organizing, and sponsoring public forums. I will provide an effective voice for the working families in our state and work to increase the visibility of working families' issues, the union movement, and oppose all anti-labor legislation.

## 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 healthcare for all Minnesotans - healthcare is fundamental to living a full and thriving life. I am open to any proposal that will meaningfully move us there, including opening MN Care to all Minnesotans and strengthening/expanding programs like the Public Employee Insurance Program (PEIP) which helps lower premium cost rises. Ultimately, my goal is comprehensive statewide healthcare coverage such as Senator Marty's Minnesota Health Plan (MHP).

## 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

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. Lowell Elementary as a parent, and in my role in Mayor's office, I have visited Meyers-Wilkins, Laura MacArthur, East High School, and Lester Park Elementary among several others. My observation, most broadly, is a feeling of gratitude for the amazing and committed educators I've seen - from teachers, to paras, to food service workers, social workers, and custodians.

In both my previous job at St. Scholastica and in my current job, I've had the opportunity to work with a lot with schools, especially around families and students in transition. I've worked with Head Start, ACE, Indian Student Services, Office of Equity, school principals, the Superintendent amongst others to get struggling families what they need so their children can be in the classroom. We know when kids are able to show up to class healthy and secure, they learn. This may require community resources, or backpacks and school supplies, or access to broadband, or food, or Covid rent payments so the family can keep their home. All of these are issues that directly impact a child's ability to learn and thrive. This also speaks to the importance of community-based schools like Meyers-Wilkins in my District. These schools provide the wrap around services that holistically meet the whole student. I understand these are model programs that were able to be expanded with legislative funding and I will continue to funnel money to this community-based schooling model.

Finally, I approach most issues collaboratively and look to the people doing the work for ideas, insights, and solutions. One brief story from a week ago is exemplary. I was visiting East High School for their Unified Athletics Day. While there I saw several paras I knew, and we talked about how they spent their day. I went back to the kitchen and took selfies with a couple of food service workers I knew, but also heard about the challenges kitchen workers faced as lower paid, often part-time, and disproportionately employees of color. I stopped by the front desk to greet the receptionist and got more of an earful, for the receptionist knows everything about everybody. Visiting schools for me

is not about the official tour, event, or grip and grin photo. It is a source of learning from the people who make our schools work, listening to their experience, needs and ideas. As a legislator, I will fight to pass policies and ensure fair funding, but I will also be in relationship with the food service workers, mental health counselors, paraprofessionals, teachers, and so many others who help children learn, so they, too, can have a voice in the policies that impact them.

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?

Until I ran for office, I relied mostly on my personal relationships with educators I know along with the various programs I worked with in my professional life, as discussed in the question above. Over the years, I have spent considerable time talking with ESPs and other school staff I know, who are often overlooked in debates over education, but who provide the heart and the glue that keeps a school together and able to provide a healthy and safe learning environment.

Since running for office, I have found some of the reports from Education Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Education incredibly helpful. I believe it is important to hear from parents and care givers to see what they think are our strengths and challenges. I am open to hearing about other sources of learning.

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?

I will reach out to Education Minnesota when issues that impact education come before me. Any politician that says they will never disagree with a group of people is not telling the truth, and I can't promise that I will support every position of Education Minnesota. But I will proactively seek out and listen to your ideas and explanations, and I will not sit back and wait to be lobbied or try to hide if we disagree. If we disagree, you will know where I am coming from and why, and I will know where the union is coming from and why. And if we can't find a path to agreement, you will still know that I will continue to support the union and be a champion for education.

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

Education Minnesota represents over 90,000 educators. No other union or association that I know of comes close. Education Minnesota does and will continue to have a significant voice based on both numbers, expertise, and reputation.