

BRANDON LAWHEAD SENATE DISTRICT 23

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

My Comment: Teachers should receive compensation commensurate with other professionals -doctors, lawyers, etc. Investing in human capital is the most essential component to better education. A great teacher makes all of the difference in ways that cannot be measured or tracked.

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 nexus of the debate, currently, is privatized schooling vs. public schooling. I have participated in some very interesting public-private educational opportunities for students.

I spearheaded the Macphail School of Music coming to Austin, Minnesota by working with benefactors from Macphail, Macphail administrators, and the Hormel Foundation. So, looking to the private sector and foundations is one manner in which to raise funding.

Additionally, I do an annual concert, featuring world renowned musicians. I've raised about \$25,000 for the Austin Public Schools Music Department. So, seeking out private persons to volunteer for fundraising is another approach that should be explored.

Finally, I do a free football camp in the community, featuring former Minnesota Vikings players. The Camp is free to the kids. The school helps facilitate getting the word out, and provides facility and coaching support. Again, a private-public partnership.

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?

Coming out of St. Olaf College and William Mitchell College of Law, I had a significant amount of debt. First, I think its essential to provide students significant educational and counseling resources on *what* education is right for them. Additionally, students should understand up front what their student loan payments are going to look like out of college.

Nonetheless, I endorse the notion that a bachelors education is not about getting a job. It's about developing one's self. One of my best friends attended St. Olaf College, then volunteered for the Americorps Program. He not only eliminated his student debt, but also served others and gained valuable skills in the construction industry (a field of societal need). I thought that program was wonderful.

So, I think setting up programs, such as peace corps, military service, americorps, and other opportunities, are invaluable. As for teachers, I think doing abroad teaching could not only pay off the student debt, but also provide more depth to that teacher's background and growth.

Finally, the interest rates are usurious. They should be fully deductible.

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? I'm very sensitive to this because my sister teaches at Hennepin Tech in the psychology department.

Yes No

High-quality professional educators

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

We need to pay them more, although I haven't met a teacher yet that does it for the money. We need to honor their expertise more. In Greek culture, the highest honor is for a child to grow up to be a doctor or a teacher. So, giving a teacher more respect and status is critical. I also think offering student loan forgiveness based upon years of service is an interesting approach. Finally, I think teachers are becoming surrogate parents, which exacerbates burn-out. In higher education, teachers receive sabbatical. I think this should be a part of secondary education. A great teacher gives so much, and the notion of "re-charging" should not be overlooked.

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? My wife is director of community education in Austin. I understand the challenges in this area.

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?

I never did well on standardized testing. My son scored in the top 1% based on his ACT. My son and daughter were put into gifted education based upon test scoring. It was right for them because, as a gifted student, they had social and education needs that were different. On the other hand, I was put into gifted classes based upon my interactions with teachers. So, I really think there should be a great deal of teacher discretion in this. However, I'm mindful of parents pushing teachers to make their kids "gifted."

Honesty in Education

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

I'm a big proponent of academic freedom. One teacher's methods might be completely opposite to another teacher's methods. But both may be effective. I once had a teacher in 7th grade, who taught his social studies class like it was a law school class, using socratic dialogue. It was absolutely fascinating for me. I'm not sure many teachers could pull it off with 7th graders, but the point is that it worked brilliantly for him. I think this is an educational issue best left to administrators and teachers to work together.

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

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? I have represented school cafeteria unions and matters for teacher unions and other unions, like United Food and Commercial Unions.

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?

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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?

The entire health care conundrum is fraught with problems, and the reality is that it's too expensive. Health care is a human right. This is an extremely complicated question for such a small space to answer. But, I thought Rochester Public Schools, by retaining their healthcare in the district, did a great job of providing low cost coverage. The cafeteria workers were allowed to participate. It worked. In the end, looking at reducing administration costs is critical.

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. **Yes, agreed.** These needs are urgent and can't wait decades for lawyers and courts to force it to happen. **Agreed**

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

This is a confusing question. I support strong constitutional mandates that would require that funding from taxation be used for public education, for the benefit of all students, without regard to wealth, race, religion, etc. so all students have equal access.

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? YES If so, which one? Austin Public Schools What were your observations from your visit? Referendums have not passed – facilities severely outdated. 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?

My wife is an administrator in a public school. I believe that public education is the greatest investment that can be made in a society. Austin Public Schools.

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?

See above

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?

Candidly, I'll first go to my wife to see if I'm right or wrong. ☺ I view Education Minnesota as an invaluable component to protecting public education, which is the bedrock of equal opportunity in America. Public Education is the #1 priority of our government to ensure the future. This is especially true in the digital age. Given the dynamic changes in technology, and our entry into the digital age, I think we are going to have to be realistic about significantly more funding to give students technological training. Additionally, I would be interested to study how education changes in the future. The current model, with bells, emphasizes an industrial revolution type model of acclimating to factory working. That's changing. I also believe that the dangers of the digital world are present. Depression and anxiety are at all time highs. This needs to be studied, and much more resources need to be put into psychological help. Students are in front of screens all day long, and the deficits from a lack of physical activities and music are significant. This is an area that I've chosen to help the public schools because I think it will help students live a more balanced and happy life.

There are some in the psychological world who are diagnosing kids with deficits in the organic world. It may very well be a condition in DSM IV some day. One of my friends teaches biology, and takes his kids on Boundary Waters Trips. It's amazing. I think we need to expand our views of public education being about the three R's. I worked with Juvenile Delinquent kids as an attorney in the public defender's office. Without fail, the kids were not involved in extra-curricular activities. The 1980's cuts in education, eliminating music and sports as "fluff", have unquestionably been shown to be foolish.

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

I find this question very difficult to answer in a vacuum. I'm well aware that the opposition party wants to take education to private education. My cousins live in New Orleans. Private education = segregation. I think the school superintendent did not go to college. The public school library had 1 or two books, literally. So, I'm always going to side with public education. However, I think there's room for creativity, and taking advantage of those in the private sector that want to give back. I am very proud of the public-private partnerships that I helped create with the public school administrator in Austin.