

Nicole Mitchell SD47

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 do agree with raising revenue from wealthy corporations and rich households, for example, the previous DFL proposal of adding a small surcharge on net investment earnings over \$250,000.

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?

I believe we should invest more money in higher education to begin with, so students do not incur as much debt in the first place. I would also definitely support setting up a student-loan forgiveness program for students interested in teaching, if they work as a teacher for an established number of years...this would help both with loans and hopefully with the teacher shortage.

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?

As previously stated, I support setting up a student-loan forgiveness program for students interested in teaching, if they work as a teacher for an established number of years. This would make it more financially viable for students to become teachers. I think we also need to specifically attract a more diverse pool of teachers, and I would support and work to pass the Teachers of Color program. Proper funding of education would also go a long way to easing the burden on teachers, in terms of sustainable class-sizes and support staff.

Finally, I already vocally support teachers and I think this is crucial. They do so much, and yet face such unfair criticism from some groups, they need to know they are appreciated!

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?

I believe standardized tests can be a valuable tool to gauge where students are at in their learning, however, I think we need to be careful about tying them directly to teacher reviews or ultimately, school funding. Schools have various technology gaps, parent or community support can vary wildly by district or school, and then we have all the unique challenges COVID has posed. We need to look at how teachers and students are doing given their specific situation, not just based on 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?

I would definitely stand up against any legislation that attempts to regulate every minute of a teachers' days or undermines their ability to best serve their classrooms. As I said, I am a strong advocate for public education and have 2 children in public schools (including one with an IEP). I see teachers working hard and caring about their students, and they deserve our support.

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! First, we need an accurate education about any topic, not one-sided “versions” of history, because history informs the context of so many issues we still face in our society today, and history is something we need to learn from. Additionally, be it race, ethnic origin, gender, LGBTQ+ issues, etc., students are more likely to thrive when they feel they are included and respected, and this includes how these issues are presented in school.

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 am very pro-union and have already been honored to receive many union endorsements. I support collective bargaining rights, the right for workers to organize, and I understand the need to protect pensions. I am also willing to listen, so I can better understand what needs unions are experiencing on specific issues.

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 believe healthcare is a fundamental human right and would support legislation to enact a single-payer plan in Minnesota.

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?

My foster son was in District 833 pre-K this past year (at Liberty Ridge), so I was in that school both for him, and for an ECFE STEM class he and my biological son took last Fall. We also took a couple community education kids sports classes in Middleton Elementary last Fall, and then toured the Elementary in the Spring as the boys will attend Kindergarten there this year. Finally, I spoke to a class at East Ridge High school in May.

My observations are that there are many AMAZING teachers, working hard with the children. They need more support though. We also need to plan for more space as our schools are starting to have more children than adequate space. One of the things I spoke with the High Schoolers about included the need for more counselors/ mental health options.

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 read our district's newsletter, I've talked with my children's teachers, I have a friend who is a district teacher and a couple students in the district who are all helping to volunteer on my campaign, and I ask them questions about their thoughts on issues. My campaign director (another mom) is very active with the local schools, so she brings thoughts to the table too.

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'm a scientist, so I love data and want to be well-informed before making decisions. I envision working with Education Minnesota as a resource I can reach out to with questions, and where I would also like to be approached with issues you feel I should be aware of.

I'm pretty transparent, so if I have a different viewpoint, I'm happy to explain why.

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

I am VERY supportive of public education. I am a product of District 833/Woodbury schools, and I want to keep the education in Minnesota top-notch, because we owe it to our children to provide everyone access to quality education. As a foster parent/someone who has experience with special needs, I also know the role public schools play in helping children struggling with a variety of issues. My priority is doing what is best for the children, an important part of which is supporting and retaining passionate teachers. So, my balance in any priorities is doing what achieves those things.