

Matt Norris – 32B

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 left Question 4 above blank since, as a rule, I do not answer questions on these types of questionnaires about tax increases or tax cuts in the abstract. My commitment to the voters in my district is that I will weigh the specifics of each tax bill brought before me in the Legislature and evaluate the ROI for my district. If I think it's a deal that makes sense for my constituents, I will support it. Having said that, ensuring our state has the resources for a high quality public education system is one of my top priorities (education is one of the "3 Es" I lead with in my stump speech). I also believe in making sure our system for generating the necessary revenue is fair and minimizes the reliance on local levies, which can lead to gaps between those communities with greater resources and those with fewer. I also believe supporting high quality public education should be an area of alignment with the business community. Part of the reason Minnesota has been a leader in the number of Fortune 500 companies per capita is the highly educated labor force in our state. Ensuring that pipeline of workers continues will lead to greater prosperity for all.

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?

The skyrocketing cost of higher education tuition is alarming. It's driven in part by disinvestment from the state in our public higher ed institutions. I would make sure students do not have to take

on an unmanageable debt load by expanding public funding for higher education along with increasing state-funded, need-based grant programs. I also support exploring programs like Indiana's 21st Century Scholars, where the state covers 100% of college tuition for residents who achieve a 2.5 GPA and attend a public college or university in the state.

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?

Recruiting and retaining high-quality educators starts with making the profession more attractive. This means paying teachers a salary comparable to other professionals with similar credentials. It means making sure teachers don't have to leave the classroom because they can't afford their health insurance. It means making sure we have manageable class sizes, support professionals to address student mental health needs, and programs to support the mental health of teachers themselves. Lastly, it means respecting teachers for the work they do rather than vilifying them as part of political debates or constantly second guessing their professional judgment.

In this area, specific attention must be paid to our Black, Brown, and Indigenous educators. In my role as policy director at Youthprise, I've supported the work of the Increase Teachers of Color Act Coalition, and I would continue to support this important work as a legislator. I also would introduce new proposals, such as one based on the "Boston Public School High School to Teacher Program," which identifies students who would make good teachers and then provides them with mentors, college prep courses, half their tuition, and, if they're successful, teaching jobs. We also must put an emphasis on retaining our teachers of color. This includes fostering inclusive atmospheres in our schools and addressing the fact that these teachers are often the first to be laid off because of their lack of seniority.

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?

Standardized tests can be one data point in a broader evaluation of a teacher, school, or district. They should be one piece in an assessment puzzle. However, there are other evaluation methods that should be incorporated as well like portfolios of student work, peer evaluation, and exit interviews with randomly selected students.

Honesty in Education

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

The first and most important thing I can do as a community leader is set a rhetorical tone. I can demonstrate respect for our educators and the professional judgment they bring to the classroom. I can also support legislation that protects teachers' ability to create their own lesson plans within reason and protect them from threats and harassment.

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?

I agree. To avoid the mistakes of the past, we must understand our history from multiple perspectives and gain an appreciation of how it has impacted our neighbors of different races. As a sports fan, I like to think of education not as a "pep rally" where we simply celebrate how great our country is but rather a post-game film review where we look critically at what went well and what didn't so we can do better in the future. Our schools are also responsible for preparing our students to be successful citizens and workers. In an increasingly global and multi-cultural world, the people who succeed in life and in their careers will be the ones who understand race and are able to work effectively across differences. Failing to receive an honest and accurate education about race puts students at a disadvantage in life.

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 will support unions with both my words and actions. Whether encouraging organizing efforts on social media or joining pickets, union workers deserve to know that Minnesota's elected leaders have their backs. I will also strongly advocate for legislation at the State Capitol that protects and even expands the rights of workers to organize. At a time when wages have largely stagnated for decades, we need to reverse the trend of decreasing union membership. That begins with enacting pro-union policies in our state. I also believe in engaging and involving affected stakeholders. They often have the best lived experience with an issue and can bring both important insights and powerful passion to the table, resulting in better outcomes.

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 (**Need to know more specifics to form an opinion**)

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?

My policy decisions regarding healthcare are guided by a simple philosophy: no one should go bankrupt because they get sick. I've heard too many stories of teachers having to leave the classroom because of their health insurance premiums. I strongly support allowing people to buy into MinnesotaCare and setting a cap on the total amount of a family's income that goes to healthcare expenses in a given year. This will help to reduce costs and ensure everyone has access to affordable care. I also support Minnesota adopting a program modeled in other states that allows the state to use its bargaining power to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs.

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?

I visited Spring Lake Park High School, which, while not in my district, serves a significant portion of the students in my district. While opportunities to visit public schools have decreased during the pandemic, I've had numerous opportunities within the past five years to visit public schools throughout our region both as an employee of AchieveMpls and through Leadership Twin Cities. Each visit reinforces many of the same themes: our public schools are filled with students eager to learn and quality teachers excited to teach, but a system that struggles to always translate that eagerness and excitement into quality outcomes. That's why, as a legislator, I am eager to tackle improvements to that system to unleash the talent and potential of our students and educators. And I am always happy to visit local public schools anytime I'm invited!

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?

When I first started running for the Minnesota House, I met with the union leadership from Anoka-Hennepin and Spring Lake Park School Districts to hear directly from teachers about what's working and what needs improvement in our education system. Working in the youth policy space also gives me the opportunity to interface directly with representatives from Education Minnesota and other organizations to hear about the issues most important to them. Lastly, I've helped lead Education Day for Leadership Twin Cities for a number of years. We typically host this day in a public school, giving us the opportunity to hear directly from students and teachers.

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 believe in engaging and involving affected stakeholders. They often have the best lived experience with an issue and can bring both important insights and powerful passion to the table, resulting in better outcomes.

A perfect example of this in my own career was my work on securing unemployment insurance benefits for high school students. The students themselves were the first ones to start calling attention to this issue. They began organizing themselves and wanted to get a law passed. As the policy director at Youthprise, I came to the table and offered my experience and connections, but I was careful to ensure the other adults and I didn't take over the movement. We continued to advance the campaign using authentic youth-adult partnership, where we would meet regularly to confer, share our various perspectives, and collectively come to decisions we thought were in the best interests of the campaign. This type of collaboration made our work stronger and was one of the reasons we were successful in securing these benefits.

That work offers a template for how I would work with Education Minnesota. On education issues, I would authentically engage educators in a true partnership fashion, ensuring their voices are at the table and actively participating in the process. This will allow us to engage in frequent dialogue and communicate and discuss any disagreements on issues.

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

My top priority is doing what is best for our students. That's why I've worked in youth development for almost my entire career. I know educators share this same priority. I believe one of the best things we can do for our students is ensuring a high-quality, public education system where all our students feel safe. As a result, I envision our priorities will often be in alignment. However, should competing priorities arise, I will do what is best for the students in my district and across Minnesota.