

Betsy O'Berry – 31A

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 support a progressive income tax system that raises revenue based on the ability to pay what you owe. I would consider a possible windfall profits tax on corporate price-gouging, particularly in pharmaceuticals and oil and gas. I do not have additional new revenue source ideas at this time but would be open to discussing this.

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 **This is one of the main issues in my campaign. I talk about this as I doorknock every day.**

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?

We need to start by making higher education, whether it is trade schools, community colleges, colleges or universities affordable by increasing the state's investment in public education. I will also advocate for students who have been cheated by attending private for-profit institutions that were not accredited.

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?

Support smaller class sizes, increased teacher pay and benefits and be an advocate for treating our teachers with dignity and respect. I have been appalled by the parent groups who target their venom at our teachers. Also, I support more time and funding for teacher's mental health including paid leave.

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?

At the individual level, standardized test scores should be used to determine gaps in students' learning, just like any other test. At the system level, they can also be used to determine special programming that may be needed. Standardized tests, used appropriately, should not be used to punish schools, but to identify needs.

Honesty in Education

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

I oppose initiatives that attempt to "protect" our students from learning accurate, factual history. I support freedom of speech in the classroom and diverse books and materials in our school libraries.

I believe that we need to provide protections for our LGBTQ+ teachers and allies who accept and encourage all our students. I also believe that no 18-year-old outside of the military should have access to military grade weapons. We need sensible gun laws that make our schools and society safer. I do not ever want my son, or any other teacher in America, to have to stand between a gunman and their students.

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, I agree. My love of my country is not so fragile that it will break by knowing that we have made mistakes in domestic and foreign policy in the past, and I don't think our students are that fragile either. If we want to build a better future, we must discuss the best and the worst of our past.

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 **My husband is a retired member of IBEW Local 292. Union pay and benefits have made all the difference for my family. Everyone should have the benefits we have had.**

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 oppose any so-called “right to work” legislation and support collective bargaining efforts. I will also talk publicly about the difference union membership has made for my family, particularly for worker safety, health care and retirement benefits. My son is just entering the teaching profession and I will stay in touch with him about local collective bargaining efforts.

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 second issue I talk about while door knocking is the cost of healthcare. I support affordable, accessible health care for all including a public insurance option. I believe that we need to also include dental and vision benefits in health care plans.

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 have been to Oak View Middle School in Andover and Brookside Elementary School in Ramsey, but not during the school day. I would enjoy a visit as long as it would not interfere with important learning activity during the day.

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?

My mother is a retired high school teacher and was a member of her district's bargaining committee. I learned a lot about the importance of tenure and a strong bargaining team at the dinner table at home. My son is interviewing for his first teaching job now and I will be getting the view "from the ground" from him. I have benefitted from friendship with Julie Blaha who is clear on educational policy. I look forward to working with Val Holthus from AHEM on educational issues related to our state and our local district. House District 31A also has a small number of students in the ISD 728 (Elk River) School District and I look forward to working with them as well.

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 think areas of disagreement are a chance to carry on a dialogue about what we value and why. I will be up front and transparent about what I see. After many years of giving my tax clients good and bad news about refunds and amounts due, I have had a lot of practice with explaining hard truths. I have found that it is always best to be upfront and prepared to explain what I find. I am also hopeful that when we agree, we can discuss possible areas of opposition and how to counter them so that I can better explain policies to constituents.

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

I don't know what those competing priorities are, but I have based my campaign on our Minnesota Constitutional guarantee to an education for every one of our citizens. We need to get this right to make sure we have citizens prepared to contribute to our state and our world in the future. I want to work with public school teachers to make sure they have the resources to educate all of our students no matter their zip code or background.