

Susan Pha for State Senate in SD 38

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?

As a mom of four children, I know we can do more to secure funding for our education professionals and our students. I fully support dedicated funding for schools at the state level that focus on equity around the state. Schools are true lifelines for so many in our communities, especially in Brooklyn Park and Center. I also hope to work with and learn from you on securing the funding needed for our schools.

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 think we need to expand the MN student loan tax credit to make sure that more graduates can take advantage of it. We should also look into creating specific loan forgiveness programs for those pursuing careers in teaching and other essential work. This will help but we also need to invest more in our state colleges and universities to make sure tuition is affordable to start with.

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?

I will vote to pass the Increase Teachers of Color Act. I support loan forgiveness and scholarships for education professionals that work our public schools. Not only do we need to make it more affordable and accessible for people to become teachers, we need to support teachers in the classroom with at through every step of the process. This means fully funding our schools, reducing class sizes, having enough support professionals in the schools and opposing policies looking to micromanage and undermine teachers' authority.

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?

Testing scores can be a helpful guide and indicator of progress but there are a lot of problems with standardized tests, like cultural biases. Test scores should not be used as the primary source for any system level decision making

Honesty in Education

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

I can loudly oppose the so called "Parents bill of Rights" policies that republicans here and around the country are promoting. I will not support policies that try to undermine our teachers and but even more barriers in place for our students and teachers to succeed.

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! Our students deserve an honest and accurate education about race and the history of our nation. We can't learn from our mistakes and create a better society if we ignore the mistakes 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

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 efforts to weaken unions and will support legislation to strengthen worker protections because unions improve lives in our community. One thing I can do right away is to sign onto the bill that would allow legislative workers in Minnesota to have collective bargaining rights like all other state workers. I will also sign on to a bill to give education support professionals access to unemployment insurance. I also hope that this endorsement process can be the start of a strong relationship with EdMN and other union workers and that I can call on you to help guide my decisions at the legislature.

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 support health care for all and Sen. John Marty's MN health plan.

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?

As a Brooklyn Park Council Member and as Author of 2 books I have made many visits every year to public schools in and out of my district over the last 7 years. Most recently I visited Park Center High School to talk with students about the importance of goal setting and pursuing a college education or trade apprenticeship program after high school. I also visited Zanewood Community School to tour their computer & technology room and gym. I heard from students and staff about the resources they need in their schools to thrive.

Over the years I've visited many schools to read books to kids, be a guest Author, be a guest speaker at school events, and to help facilitate activities at schools. I have a lot of family, friends and networks of people I know who work in schools and at the school district I participate in a lot events around the city. I have truly enjoyed my relationships with students, teachers, and school administrators. I've learned many things from 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?

I have a strong network of people, including family and friends, that work in the schools in many roles. I look to these teachers, counselors, principals and support staff for information about our schools. As a city council member I get regular calls and emails from staffers around the district. They have shared so much with me about what they need to be successful and what they face each day. I hear from them about the work conditions,

the lack of funding for so many programs, school safety concerns and many other challenges.

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 look forward to working with Education MN to guide me and work with me on creating policies that addresses the gaps and needs in our education system. Policies to fully fund education, support our teachers and all school staff, address equity issues and ensure that all students have what they need and deserve to succeed.

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

I believe that the best solutions are reached when we create space for all of us to come together, talk and listen to one another, debate respectfully, and find a path forward together.