

# Jason Ruffalo – Senate District 31

## 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**

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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

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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 feel any year we have a budget surplus, a larger portion of that surplus should go toward education and healthcare.**

## Higher education

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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?

**We need two things to happen to help educate our children - debt relief now, and lower school costs in the future. Unfortunately, education has systematically been defunded over the past few decades. I would work hard to apportion more of our state income tax to go toward debt relief and lowering the**

cost of schooling. If we believe “the pursuit of happiness” is a fundamental right, then we must make education equitable and accessible to all.

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?

**Increase salary, benefits, and job security. Ensure teachers are not responsible for paying out-of-pocket for supplies and other things any other organization would supply.**

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

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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

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14. What individual or system-level decisions in education do you believe are appropriate to make based on standardized test scores?

**I am not a fan of standardized testing as a whole. Certainly not as the only metric of a student. It is neglectful to think every student can be equally judged by the same set of questions. There need to be a variety of ways to test the aptitude of our youth.**

Furthermore, I am not in favor of having most standardized tests outsourced to the private sector.

## Honesty in Education

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

I would ensure teachers have the means to teach their students within an agreed-upon curriculum safely and without undue criticism and cynicism. To protect teachers, there will need to be open communication between the public and staff to establish expectations. Teachers should not have to directly face angry parents. They should submit concerns for review to the school board or other resources and come to resolutions in that manner.

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 do. This is, unfortunately, a divisive issue that needs to be addressed. Our history as it is taught is at best incomplete, and at worst inaccurate. Though some view change as detrimental or uncomfortable, that is not a reason to not bring the whole truth to the forefront of education. That opens opportunities to have discussions on the subject, engage students at an early age so they are better prepared for the reality around them.

## Time to Teach

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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

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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?

**My goal as a legislator is to ensure everyone in Minnesota has access to healthcare, education, fair pay and fair work hours. I will be working with unions to help strengthen them and ensure fair representation of workers from all corners of the job market.**

## Working families

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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 am 100% for single payer healthcare for all. This state is economically stable enough to the point we have a surplus. Even without a surplus, dollars can be moved around within the system to draw away from unnecessary, less efficient programs, and redirect that revenue to education and healthcare.**

## Privatization

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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

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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 not yet. I just began my campaign and will be looking to connect with public schools and teachers to get know more about their work and needs.**

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 talked with school board members and hosted town hall meetings. with these members to hear what the issue and needs are. With the town hall meetings, this also allowed me to understand my future constituents' questions and concerns.**

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?

**Legislation does not begin at the capitol and work its way down. It starts within the schools, talking to teachers and board members and works its way up. I will work from the ground up, talking with students, teachers, and board members to deeply understand the needs and work on improving our education system.**

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

**Education and healthcare are central to my core beliefs and campaign. My goal is to bring equitable and affordable education to all students in Minnesota. My goal is to ensure teachers have secure jobs, with competitive pay, great benefits, and enough personal time to maintain a healthy work-life balance. As such I will work with all education groups to support these goals to the best of their potential.**