

Heather Gustafson for MN Senate District 36

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: 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, licensed school 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?

One idea to consider would be a technology sales tax. A tax on mobile phone contracts as a consistent form of sales revenue for school funding would lessen the need for increased property taxes and levies.

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 would propose that full-time teachers receive complete loan forgiveness on all education credits after five years of teaching in a public school.

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?

We need to be more realistic about the demands and obstacles we place on those pursuing a teaching career. Student teachers should be paid for their training, E-12 teachers should be able to obtain a teaching license through community colleges, and state grants for those wishing to pursue a master's degree. This is in addition to expanding student loan forgiveness for educators who meet requirements.

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?

The obsession with test scores as the chief “accountability” metric for students, educators, and schools has led to the exams becoming the goal instead of the process becoming a goal. Standardized tests have also been used to punish educators, causing teachers to leave the profession. There’s a pressure in schools now to teach to the test. As a current teacher, I know our focus now is reading and math scores. It often feels less like a way to support students and more of a way to meet a test score requirement. I do appreciate how the tests can offer an objective measurement of mastery but that’s only possible if it’s done properly across the board.

Honesty in Education

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

Teachers should be allowed to focus on their craft and their students and not have to fight needless and heavily influenced political battles in the classroom. It sets up conflict with students, staff, and families. Legislators should have clear and strong support for teachers in the classroom with well defined guidelines that allow teachers to teach the standards in a way that best serves the students in their classroom. This will support administration and school boards as well so that the burden of these conflicts does not fall on our children’s teachers.

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 am a World History teacher. It’s important to teach what happened and teach it accurately. We use data, primary and secondary sources, and critical thinking skills to look for patterns and causes and effects. We are not indoctrinating students or teaching them they are at fault. We are explaining what happened, how it impacted people, and how it affects us now. That’s the curriculum, not a political agenda. A full and accurate history of the world’s people, from several points of view, is not only important for our students but necessary.

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?

Unions are an important part of our democracy and they strengthen middle class families. I was a single mom with four daughters for several years and my union benefits are what helped me take care of my children. I will do everything I can to make sure that the will of the educators is respected and their collective bargaining rights are protected.

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 am for expanding healthcare coverage as much as possible. Ideally, I think universal healthcare is the most responsible path forward but I realize it may take awhile to get there. In the meantime, we should do everything we can to lower the cost of healthcare coverage for all Minnesota families.

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 am a current public high school World History teacher with Minnesota Connections Academy, an online charter school based out of St. Paul. Most of my teaching experience in the last twelve years however has been at Centennial High School and North Community High School in Minneapolis. I will continue to work in the classroom, even after I'm elected, as being an educator is a profession that I enjoy and am good at. I am in a unique position as a current teacher to bring real experiences to the Senate and plan to influence decisions based on what is best for students, families, and educators.

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 am a PLC lead at my school and a member of Minnesota Council of Social Studies. I have also worked with pilot programs for standards-based education applications and curriculum writing. I have been on staff development committees, curriculum review committees, and a mentor teacher.

35. How do you envision working with Education Minnesota if you are elected/reelected? If you disagree with us on an issue, how will you communicate that?

I welcome all education voices and ideas to the table so we can move as many good ideas and policies forward as possible. If there is a policy EdMN believes in that I have a differing opinion on, I would like to build a relationship where I would be able to ask you directly how we could better explain our points of view and find understanding.

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

Students and educators come first. As a current teacher with a recent roster of 278 students, I know exactly how stressful the current education system is for both our children and our teachers. My goal will be to always ask what is best for the student and educators and then move forward with groups who share that motivation.