

Sandra Feist, Candidate in 39B

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?

You've listed the most important component of adequate, equitable taxation – taxing the highest income individuals and corporations. Beyond this, I would also mention that we need to fund our public schools at the state level so that the cost – and the benefit - doesn't impact local communities unequally. I know between my school districts the ability to fund schools based on local levies varies dramatically.

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 introduced a bipartisan bill last year to create “Universal FAFSA” in Minnesota, requiring FAFSA completion for high school graduation (with broad exemptions to ensure that no students are actually held back from graduation). In 2021, Minnesota students left \$49 Million in Pell grants unclaimed. Many students do not complete the FAFSA form because they don't think they are eligible for grants or loans, so creating an “opt out mentality” rather than an “opt in mentality” around the FAFSA will significantly boost completion and claiming of this federal funding for higher education, as has been demonstrated in other states that have implemented Universal FAFSA.

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?

First and foremost, we need to ensure that teachers wages, benefits and working conditions are reflective of the significance of their contributions to society. My mother was a teacher and she told me not to become a teacher because it was such an under-appreciated profession- even though she loved being an educator and was great at it. Teachers should make what investment bankers make and vice versa.

On top of this basic fundamental truth about compensation and conditions, we can look to programs like “grow your own,” and other legislation that has been introduced (and passed in the House) to create additional supports and incentives for excellent teachers of color and Indigenous teachers to diversify the teaching profession.

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 test scores are extremely problematic and should be replaced by more holistic, thoughtful measures of student progress and teacher effectiveness, such as classroom observation. I would like to move away from standardized testing altogether.

Honesty in Education

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

Let's never pass creepy, invasive legislation like the Senate advanced this past year – that would be a good start! The current trends around parental intrusion and oversight of pedagogy as profoundly disturbing on numerous levels and the idea that parents should supplant the decisions of trained expert teachers in the classroom is nonsensical.

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?

Absolutely. I loved history class in high school and went on to be a history major in college. It was important to learn about the past and embrace all of its complexities in order to understand present day trends and inequities. Rep. Frazier's ethnic studies bill, Rep. Keeler's Indigenous People's Day bill, and other legislation (and the social studies standards) can ensure that our classroom embraces the stories and realities of all Minnesotans.

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 continue to vocally support unions, both in the specifics of the disputes and in the bigger picture support of the importance of unions to the conditions of ALL workers. I would be honored to carry legislation on behalf of the labor organizations, and will definitely plan to continue to co-author this type of legislation in order to provide formal support for pro-union measures.

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?

As a member of the Minnesota Health Plan Caucus, I support an overhaul of our current health care system altogether, moving from a system that benefits insurance companies and high-paid CEOs to one that prioritizes care before profits. In terms of legislation that could reduce the cost of health insurance, I support legislation to reign in the cost of prescription drugs and to expand access to state-funded healthcare.

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 frequently visit my children's elementary and middle schools, as well as the other public schools in my district (Columbia Heights and St. Anthony). This spring, I also spent an entire day at my son's middle school (Highview) teaching civics to each class period. I gained a new appreciation of teachers after that day! This past week I attended my son's science fair, which I particularly appreciated because the teacher allowed students to stay late each Thursday afternoon and worked with them on their projects. My daughter's elementary school recently completed renovations based on a levy and I toured the new cafeteria and modernized classroom structure. I did the same for a levy-funded renovation of an elementary school in Columbia Heights. These renovations make it clear that with sufficient funding, we could implement so much new understanding around the optimal space for students to learn.

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 informed as the mother of two K-12 students in public school. I am a member of a number of Facebook groups for parents in my kids' school district. My mom is a retired educator and shares her opinions (she has many!) I also always know I can turn to Education Minnesota for insights.

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 have LOVVVVVED working with Education Minnesota over the past term. Working together on the Student Data Privacy Act showed me how thoughtful, principled, and enjoyable Education Minnesota is to work alongside. I enjoyed working together to introduce the bill to reform how schools staff substitute teachers as well. Seeing how well we navigated the complexities of the Student Data Privacy Act, I know that if we ever had differences of opinion, we could talk them through effectively and thoughtfully and in a productive manner.

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

I plan to prioritize Education Minnesota as the key education stakeholder (along with students, of course!). My experience in my first term demonstrated to me that we are on the same page in terms of policy priorities. I also saw the contrast between Education Minnesota and other stakeholders that led me to feel extra confident about this stance. When balancing the priorities (e.g., increasing the overall funding for education versus prioritizing funding/structural changes around increasing substitute teachers) my default will be to support Education Minnesota's position. If there is ever any doubt in my mind, I will reach out to Education Minnesota to discuss and get additional context.