

Kelly Moller

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

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

EL cross subsidy: Fully fund the costs districts pay to provide quality English learner programs and instruction.

YES

Lower class sizes: Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.

YES

Full-service community schools: Expand access to full-service community schools across the state.

YES

Universal pre-K: Provide universal pre-K taught by licensed teachers, so all children are ready for kindergarten.

YES

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

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

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

Professional development: Provide professional development to all staff around cultural competency and trauma-responsive classrooms with aims of closing the discipline disparity gap.

YES

ESP living wage: Ensure all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour.

YES

Teacher compensation and benefits: Increase teacher compensation to provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain teachers.

YES

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

Education debt relief: Provide debt relief to retain teachers so they can afford to stay in the classroom.

YES

Higher education: Renew Minnesota's commitment to invest in the state's future by fully funding public higher education in Minnesota.

YES

Education Support Professionals

2. Do you support ESPs being able to access unemployment insurance in the summers, when they are not guaranteed work?

YES

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

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

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 believe strongly in a progressive tax system that does not place most K-12 funding on property taxpayers (and one that eliminates the disparities based on zip codes). The state is running a historic general fund surplus, and if both houses have progressive majorities, we could use a substantial amount to support education, as we did in the House this year. In addition to use of surplus dollars currently, I do support a fair tax system.

Higher education

6. Do you support increasing the state's direct investment in public higher education to significantly reduce institutions' reliance on tuition?

YES

7. Will you support investments in capital bonding projects that preserve buildings, remodel classrooms and keep our technology assets current?

YES

8. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with education debt?

Minnesota ranks poorly among states for student loan debt. I support loan forgiveness programs for students who enter certain professions, particularly those in the public and non-profit sector. Adequately funding our state colleges and universities to keep tuition costs down is important. I also support efforts to offer college-credit courses in high school as well as partnerships that increase access to the trades.

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

High-quality professional educators

10. What will you do to help recruit and retain high-quality educators in our classrooms?

I support funding our schools adequately so teachers in Minnesota have competitive salaries. I also support training and education programs for teachers who want advanced degrees and/or training to be able to teach certain classes. I am in favor of mentorship programs for new teachers. I strongly support legislation like the Increase Teachers of Color Act.

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

Teacher licensure

12. Do you support changes to state law to allow Tier 1 teachers to join the teacher bargaining unit?

YES

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

Standardized testing

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

As a parent with children in our public schools, I have always been concerned about the amount of standardized testing and emphasis placed on scores, both for our students and our teachers. Teachers should be allowed to teach content without worrying about teaching to the test, and children should not be pressured to perform a certain way on these tests in order to get in certain classes. I'd like to see the elimination of the MCAs in high school and limiting of them (or other tests) in lower grades.

Honesty in Education

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

I am distressed deeply by organizations with conservative agendas pushing a handful of parents to protest how teachers teach. Curriculum standards and their development are very transparent in Minnesota, whether it is about sex education, history, or math. I will use my platform as a legislator to push back on efforts by these organizations who want to micromanage teaching through school board actions based on often fabricated information. Parent involvement in education is critical, but in-your-face protests at school board meetings that are based on inaccurate information are not helpful, and it is driving teachers from the field.

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. As American citizens, we cannot shirk our responsibility to teach age-appropriate information about the influence of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism on today's society. The canard of K-12 schools teaching critical race theory has no basis in reality.

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

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

19. Do you support paid, dedicated time outside of student contact time for special education teachers to complete their paperwork and required meetings?

YES

Union Rights

20. Do you support collective bargaining rights?

YES

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

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

23. How will you support unions as a state legislator?

I am a proud member of AFSCME in my job when I am not at the Legislature. I have always supported the right of collective bargaining.

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

25. Will you support continuing defined-benefits retirement systems for public employees?

YES

26. Will you support providing the necessary state funding to ensure financial sustainability of public pension funds?

YES

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

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?

Every Minnesotan should have access to affordable health care. There are several ways to get there, including taking advantage of every option available from the Affordable Care Act up to single-payer. I would support the strongest possible bill we can pass to reach the goal of universal coverage. At the least, we should expand access to MinnesotaCare to get started.

Privatization

29. Do you oppose state tax credits for private K-12 education tuition and expenses?

YES

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

31. Will you support a moratorium on new charter schools until such changes are made?

YES

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. I have been clear with the Page Amendment advocates that I do not support it unless funding is included.

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. I don't want standardized testing enshrined in the Constitution. I have some thoughts on how to make sure this doesn't happen even if the amendment passes.

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?

Yes! Earlier this year I visited Pinewood Elementary in New Brighton, after connecting with a teacher who testified during an Education Policy Committee. The focus of my visit was to talk to students who are English language learners and their educators/staff about their experiences. I have a child who graduated in 2019 from Mounds View High School, and another who is a rising senior. At the legislature, I have met with and talked to many teachers – both inside and outside of the Mounds View district. Addressing student and staff mental health, increasing services for ELL students, and supporting students with disabilities and their educators/staff are all things I support – largely driven from my conversations over the years with educators and staff, administrators, students, and families.

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?

Public education is a huge priority of mine as a legislator. As a member of the Education Policy Committee, I hear from a lot of teachers – those who testify and those who meet with me individually. When I had education-related bills I was working on, I sought the input of Education Minnesota, who also helped coordinate teachers to testify. My children attend/have attended public schools. I have educators in my family and a number of educators who are neighbors.

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?

Especially as a member of the Education Policy committee, it is very important for me to hear from teachers how the bills we are voting on will impact them. Asking teachers for their ideas in finding solutions is crucial.

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

It has not been a problem for me so far. I like to hear input from a wide variety of stakeholders so that I can make an informed decision.