

Melissa H. Wiklund

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?

I think we should review current tax laws to see if there are tax reductions that were put in place which benefit very wealthy corporations and households. These could be removed to ensure that our tax code is more fair. I do not sit on the Tax Committee, but I am open to hearing about new ideas for restoring fairness and discussing those with my colleagues on the Tax Committee.

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 support bills that would provide loan forgiveness to Minnesotans who work in certain fields where there is need. I would also support increasing resources in grant programs that go to college students to reduce the amount students need to borrow.

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 think we need to increase teacher compensation including access to benefits in order to attract more people to the profession. We also need to increase funding to schools so they have enough resources to hire sufficient numbers of teachers and support personnel. Teachers need to have reasonable class sizes and sufficient support personnel to address other student needs. We also need to model respect for the profession of teaching in the legislature.

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?

It's hard to make judgements without knowing more about the specific standardized test. Some tests may not be valid for use in making decisions at all. If the test is well-designed: For individual students, I think that standardized tests can provide the teachers and parents with one piece of information on how students are progressing. It needs to be used in conjunction with other ways of learning how the student is doing. In terms of system-level decisions, I think standardized tests can help to inform trends in progress and maybe could be used to help discern whether there are specific needs in classrooms, but only if other factors are considered. I do not believe they should be used to make comparisons between districts.

Honesty in Education

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

I oppose bills that would put constraints on what teachers can teach and try to put burdens on teachers to document every action they take. Teachers need to be able to use their skills to develop materials and we need to respect their judgement.

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 agree. Students need to learn about race, racism and the history of our country and that includes positive and negative aspects. We will have a hard time making progress in addressing disparities without having our schools teaching history fully and without students having the ability to ask complex questions.

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?

By resisting and objecting to efforts to pass state laws that weaken rights and policies that protect teachers and the unions. I also vote for passage of state contracts that are created between the state and other public employee unions.

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 introduced a bill developed by Education Minnesota in the 2019-20 biennium that would have addressed school district contributions to providing health insurance. We need to make sure teachers have access to affordable, quality health insurance plans. I support creating a health care for all system in Minnesota which would reduce costs and improve access to healthcare. I am open to learning about proposals Education Minnesota believes could reduce the cost of health insurance.

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 have not visited a public school in the past year. I have worked to have open communications with teachers from the Bloomington and Richfield districts to understand current issues and have met with the school boards from both districts. I would like to visit schools in my district now that we are at a different stage with covid and I'd appreciate assistance in setting up visits.

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 reach out to teachers who are constituents of mine, and the schools districts in my senate district when I want to understand the impact of bills on public education. I seek their input on bills they would like to see introduced. I also do research and reach out to Education Minnesota.

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 would envision continuing to work with Education Minnesota on legislation and meeting with constituents who are Education Minnesota members on a regular basis. I hope that I can be on the Senate Education Committee again and that the Senate will place more emphasis on strengthening

public education. I have a particular interest in early childhood education, and I hope to work with Education Minnesota, teachers from districts I represent and with other stakeholders to make our early childhood system provide better access to high-quality early learning opportunities for all families.

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

I have always had an open door policy and seek to understand multiple perspectives on issues as I form my decisions about how to vote on legislation. I strongly support the teachers' union and the input I receive by way of Education Minnesota is highly valued. I think that I have been consistently supportive of better funding for schools, for reducing burdens placed on teachers, and for addressing student needs for better access to support personnel and mental health care. I will listen to other views, but I believe I have demonstrated that I prioritize strengthening the teaching profession and fully funding public schools.