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Candidate endorsement questionnaire - Southwest Metro office

Candidate name

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Election district

61A

Party endorsement

DFL

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Educator Pay

1. ESP living wage: Will you support legislation to ensure that all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour?

Yes

2. Due to significantly below-market compensation for teachers, most school districts in Minnesota are having difficulty filling teaching jobs, and state colleges report a continued decline in the number of graduates from teacher preparation programs. Would you support creating a minimum salary for all licensed Minnesota teachers of \$60,000 a year and an \$80,000 minimum salary for licensed teachers with 10 years of experience and a master's degree?

Yes

Pensions

3. Will you support increasing state funding to ensure the financial sustainability of public pension funds?

Yes

4. Will you support exploring the necessary benefit improvements in order to provide educators with a secure retirement, including reducing early retirement penalties, lowering the normal age of retirement and a career threshold that will help recruit and retain educators?

Yes

5. How will you support efforts to lower inequitable penalties in the Teachers Retirement Association in order to expand retirement options?

I am committed to supporting our teachers and ensuring they have a fair and equitable retirement system. Addressing the inequitable penalties in the Teachers Retirement Association is crucial for providing teachers with flexible and viable retirement

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options.

I'll do this, in part, by supporting legislation to reduce the penalties teachers face for early retirement and lower the Normal Retirement Age to 64 (specifically HF3294). Teachers should be able to access the full benefits they have earned without facing undue financial penalties, and I believe this will help in retaining and recruiting dedicated educators by providing a more supportive and fair retirement system.

Health care

6. Do you support educators having access to a mandatory statewide health insurance pool, just like other state workers?

Yes

7. 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

8. All Minnesotans deserve access to affordable health care and publicly managed plans like MN Care and Medicare are some of the most efficient plans out there. The legislature is currently seeking a federal waiver to expand MN Care to more residents. Do you support expanding all public health care programs to include more working people?

Yes

Education funding

9a. Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula.

Yes

9b. SPED cross subsidy: The state must fully fund special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.

Yes

9c. EL cross subsidy: Fully fund the costs districts pay to provide quality English learner programs and instruction.

Yes

9d. Lower class sizes: Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.

Yes

9e. Full-service community schools: Expand access to full-service community schools across the state.

Yes

9f. 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

9g. Student support: Continue providing additional resources for school districts to hire more student support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other job classifications.

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Yes

9h. 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

9i. Professional development: Provide professional development to all staff around cultural competency and trauma-responsive classrooms with aims of closing the discipline disparity gap.

Yes

9j. Education debt relief: Provide debt relief to retain teachers so they can afford to stay in the classroom.

Yes

Taxes/revenue

10. 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

11. 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?

Yes

12. Fully funded schools require adequate and stable revenues. Will you oppose tax cuts and carve outs that lower tax collections or narrow the tax base?

Yes

13. A balanced tax code draws revenue from a mix of income, sales, and property taxes. Will you support policies that maintain both adequate funding and a sustainable balance between revenue sources?

Yes

Higher education

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

Yes

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

Yes

16. Do you support DEI efforts on our college campuses and universities?

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Yes

17. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with the cost of higher education?

I would focus on expanding and enhancing programs that directly reduce financial barriers for students, such as the North Star Promise scholarships which ensure that more students can access higher education without the burden of substantial debt.

I would also advocate for increasing funding for loan repayment and grant programs targeted at underrepresented students. For instance, expanding the teacher shortage loan repayment program and scholarships for aspiring teachers of color will not only alleviate student debt but also help address representation in public education. Lastly, I would also address the problem at the source by supporting caps on tuition increases and tuition freezes for Minnesota State colleges and universities to keep higher education affordable and accessible across the board.

18. The North Star Promise is expected to result in an increase in enrollment on our campuses. Many of these students are projected to be disproportionately first-generation students and students from historically underserved communities. As a legislator, what would you do to ensure these students had the support they needed to be successful?

I believe the North Star Promise is a triumph for equity in higher education, and ensuring that these additional first-generation and historically underserved students receive the support they need requires a multifaceted approach. As a legislator, I would push for increased funding for student support personnel, such as counselors, social workers, and advisors, to provide individualized assistance and address the unique challenges these students face.

I have some experience of the overwhelming feeling of not being the "right" type of student while in higher education. Women are a minority in my chosen field of engineering. When I went to university, there were approximately 6 males to every 1 female student. Luckily, my university acknowledged the challenges inherent to that and established peer learning communities. These provided spaces for female students to support and mentor one another through not only a grueling curriculum but navigating the gender and power dynamics, particularly on design teams and group projects. As a result, I not only learned the material but I gained important soft skills for navigating and asserting myself, which is so valuable as an adult. I am a big fan of such peer learning communities, particularly for any underrepresented group, and will encourage their development at higher ed campuses.

I would also push for expanded access to academic resources, such as tutoring and mentoring programs, to help bridge any gaps in preparation for college. Investing in campus support services that address basic needs, such as housing, food security, and mental health services, is also crucial for fostering an environment where all students can succeed.

19. There are efforts to expand the North Star Promise to Minnesota's private colleges and universities. This would dramatically increase the amount of public money going to private institutions. Do you support the expansion of the North Star Promise to include private colleges and universities?

No

High-quality professional educators

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

Simply put: the wages that we are offering our teachers, ESPs and support staff are not enough to live on. As a candidate for 61a, I'm particularly concerned that Minneapolis public schools have fallen short in this area, historically struggling to keep up with Saint Paul public schools and other school districts surrounding the city in terms of teacher pay. We need to right-side the budget so we can pay our people more and work towards a more equitable administrator to teacher pay ratio. If we want to retain great teachers, we have to pay them an appropriate wage.

I'm particularly concerned with how we've struggled to recruit teachers of color—60% of the student body in Minneapolis are kids of color, and there's no reason why Minneapolis schools shouldn't be a destination for teachers and educators of color too. Wages and benefits are a big barrier here, but we also need to take a hard look at MPS policies and practices to identify what's creating

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those barriers, and that includes continuing to center teachers of color in these discussions. I recognize the different levels of authority between the school board and the legislature and will work with our local leaders to ensure we're pulling the appropriate levers.

There are also upstream problems: for example, the number of Black and Brown educators going into the teaching force correlates relatively closely with the number of teachers of color we have in the Minneapolis Public Schools. That needs to accelerate—if we want more teachers of color, we need to encourage more people of color to go become teachers. The Increase Teachers of Color Act is a good first step toward addressing this problem, and more work needs to be done.

Standardized testing

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

I welcome discussion on what the role of standardized testing should be in Minnesota. I taught high school in Austria for two years, and through my experience I found that the best way to approach evaluation is by empowering high quality teachers to do what they think is most appropriate for assessment. As a key part of assessments there, the students in my classrooms took individual oral exams with a panel of teachers to assess gains made in their learning and critical thinking.

The culture of rigorous federal standardized testing was a misguided and inequitable approach of No Child Left Behind and often has cultural bias embedded within. I know that the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments play a critical role in evaluating statewide performance. Broadly speaking, decisions based on standardized test scores should be approached with caution and used narrowly and should not be used to make high-stakes decisions about teacher evaluations, student promotions, or school funding, as these can lead to an overemphasis on testing and narrow the curriculum. As we continue to invest in education solutions coming out of the pandemic, we should be measuring for the purpose of identifying school needs. However, I see testing as a critical method to evaluating charter schools which have recently shown to have poorer outcomes than other public schools and a tool we can use to increase accountability for these schools.

Honesty in Education

22. Most educators believe students should have access to a wide range of age-appropriate books that include relatable characters and situations that reflect the diversity of Minnesota families. However, certain politicians and big money groups are trying to remove books from school libraries across America, particularly books with LGBTQ+ characters or those that deal with racism in America. How should Minnesota protect its students' freedom to read?

Protecting the freedom to read and think means protecting our libraries from extremist book bans that work to censor our nation's history and harm to our communities by erasing LGBTQ+ representation. It also means recognizing that an important step in achieving justice and equality in education includes all students seeing themselves represented in their curriculum as well as being exposed to different identities beyond their own.

I would support and strengthen legislation that prohibits book bans in public schools and libraries, reinforcing the "Library Bill of Rights" included in HF4373 that defends against the removal of materials based on partisan or doctrinal disapproval. I would also collaborate with educators, parents, and local communities to promote the inclusion of multiple perspectives in our curriculum.

23. Education Minnesota believes all students should have the freedom to feel safe and welcome in their public school, no matter what they look like, where they're from, how they pray, transgender or not. Do you agree?

Yes

24. Students bring many needs into their public schools, but our union believes they all deserve the freedom to grow with the help of support for their mental health and with lessons in how to recognize and control their emotions, which is sometimes called social-emotional learning. Do you support increasing support for students' mental and emotional health in public schools?

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Yes

Time to Teach

MoveDuplicate Settings Delete 25. 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

26. 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

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

Yes

School safety

28. Creating incentives for school administrators to enforce districts’ codes of conduct without bias and/or creating accountability measures for those who don’t?

Yes

29. Increase reporting and transparency in worksite safety when reporting physical injuries and emotional trauma in the workplace?

Yes

Union Rights

30. The ability of workers to come together in union and bargain collectively has been vital for reducing wage gaps by gender, building the middle class, and limiting wealth inequality in Minnesota. Do you support expanding and strengthening workers’ rights to join a union and bargain collectively?

Yes

31. 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

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

As a state legislator, I will support unions by advocating for legislation that protects workers' rights, enhances collective bargaining, and promotes fair wages and benefits. I will aim to build on the legislature's recent successes, such as the higher penalties for worker misclassification and the elimination of minimum wage carve outs, while pushing my colleague on the areas we've fallen short (passing a public option, unemployment for striking workers, and new retaliation protections for nurses to name a few). By working closely with union leaders, including those from Education Minnesota, I will ensure that educators' and workers' voices are central to our legislative efforts, contributing to a more just and equitable work environment for all Minnesotans.

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Privatization

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

Yes

34. 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

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

Yes

Your role as a legislator

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 visited multiple public schools within the past year including Bryn Mawr Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Ella Baker Magnet School, and Washburn High School. It's clear from the wall hangings and prompts on white boards that educators care deeply about their students, about encouraging students to think critically, and about exposing students to diverse perspectives and rich lessons of history. I took a Spanish class with Minneapolis Community Ed and remember being in what appeared to be a history classroom with questions on the board exploring and contrasting the civil rights movements for Native, Mexican, and Black Americans. In Bryn Mawr, I recall seeing student artwork lining the walls of the hallways. It's apparent that students' minds are being engaged and that they are given pathways to express themselves. On the flip side, what I found dismaying was the condition of the physical school assets - the old bathroom sink that had a surface washed away and degraded after 1000s of uses, the graffiti on the stall walls, the classroom so packed to the brim with desks you could hardly move around, and the teacher's desk lacking some basic supplies.

These instances also have shown how resilient our students and educators are and the promise of public education. I can only imagine how much farther they can go with further investment. The visible signs of crumbling foundational structures, the high student to teacher ratios, and insufficient resources underscore the urgent need to champion strong schools and funding at the state level.

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 receive my information on public education from a lot of sources, including my own experience. Having taught in a high school in Austria for two years, I have a unique appreciation for what it's like to work in a place that properly invests in education. I've seen firsthand the difference between teaching a class of 15 kids versus a class of 30 kids. I've also volunteered in first grade and tenth grade classrooms at the FAIR School downtown. These experiences have given me a deep appreciation for how meaningful and challenging educators' jobs are.

I'm also keenly aware of what I don't know, and I don't pretend to be an expert on every subject, but as an engineer, I do my homework. Education policy was new to me when I started this campaign, and as soon as I jumped in the race I looked to ground myself in it. I've consulted with members of my campaign committee, which includes a public school teacher and multiple parents of public school students. I'm also a big fan of asking people for coffee—1:1s are key to developing personal relationships and building trust. My initial steps included reaching out and sitting down with many members of the Mpls delegation and the leaders of MFT.

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When it comes to improving access and quality of education, I believe our educators, students, and families are our community's experts on what thriving schools can and should look like in Minnesota. And our experts have been very clear – in order for our state to succeed we must: ensure our public schools are fully funded and fiscally sound, retain and support our educators with competitive salaries and benefits, and prioritize the mental health and well-being of young people. These are not blue sky goals: they are achievable and fundamental.

For all things education related, organizations like EDMN will continue to be my first source of information, and I look forward to consulting with them in real time on issues as they arise in government.

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?

If elected, I envision working closely with Education Minnesota by maintaining an open line of communication; actively seeking your help on legislative matters that impact educators and students. I will regularly meet with EDMN members to better understand your priorities and concerns, and will work to ensure that EDMN perspectives are considered in the legislative process.

In instances where we might disagree on an issue, which I don't anticipate happening very often, I pledge to approach any differences of opinion with transparency and respect. I will be direct and open with EDMN about my perspectives and the reasoning behind my decisions, and will always be receptive to feedback and alternative viewpoints.

I'm a coalition builder, and I view EDMN as an important partner in that coalition. My goal, one that I believe EDMN shares, is to find common ground and work towards solutions that support the best interests of Minnesota's educational community. I am confident we can navigate our state's present challenges and continue to advocate for a high-quality, equitable education system together.

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

Candidly, I'm not aware of the full landscape of current divisions between Education Minnesota and other progressive education groups. Ultimately, I would exercise my own judgment but I would certainly consult Education Minnesota on these priorities as a vital stakeholder and welcome any counsel given.