

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1690**

**Page**

Candidate endorsement questionnaire - SPFE office

**Candidate name**

Athena Hollins

**Election district**

66B

**Party endorsement**

DFL

**Email**

[athena.hollins@gmail.com](mailto:athena.hollins@gmail.com)

**Phone**

6512634446

**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 will advocate for policy reforms that address disparities in pension calculations and penalties, engage with the chairs and other decision-makers to highlight how these penalties disproportionately affect educators, and promote legislation or amendments that

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1690**

offer fairer treatment. I will also encourage dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to develop solutions that enhance retirement security for all teachers, ensuring a more equitable and supportive 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.**

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.**

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1690**

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?**

Yes

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

## 2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry # 1690

I would like to advocate for increased funding for public colleges and universities, supporting initiatives that expand financial aid programs, and promoting policies that make textbooks and other educational resources more affordable. We can also work to create or enhance scholarships and grants, and push for measures that reduce student loan interest rates, making higher education more accessible and financially manageable for all students.

**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 was proud to be the chief author of the MN Association of Black Lawyers' Pathways Program, which is a student readiness program for Black and other racial minority students, to increase their chances of success in law school. It provides for a full range of services, including rigorous LSAT preparation, academic mentoring, career counseling, ongoing support during law school, and continued career guidance and skill development for success in the legal profession. I would love to continue this work by expanding out to undergraduate students, so that our investment in the North Star Promise is properly supported.

**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?**

Based on conversations I've had with educators, I would like to focus on improving salaries and benefits to make teaching more financially viable, and invest in professional development opportunities to support ongoing growth. Additionally, I would like to create supportive work environments with smaller class sizes and abundant teaching resources. Finally, we need to recognize and reward teachers' contributions to foster job satisfaction and long-term commitment.

### Standardized testing

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

Decisions based on standardized test scores should be carefully considered to ensure they enhance educational outcomes rather than just penalize or reward. While standardized test scores can provide valuable insights, I believe that they must be used alongside other measures of student achievement and well-being to ensure a comprehensive approach to educational improvement.

I do think they can be useful to identify students or schools that may need additional support and resources; and allocating funding and resources to schools or programs that show a need for improvement as indicated by test scores, ensuring equitable support where it is most needed.

### 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?**

We absolutely need to actively oppose attempts to ban or restrict books based on personal or political beliefs, and support the right to read as a fundamental aspect of academic freedom and personal development. We also need to promote and support diverse literature by ensuring that school libraries and reading lists include a wide range of genres, authors, and perspectives to reflect diverse experiences and viewpoints. I think we would also benefit from encouraging open discussions between educators,

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry # 1690**

parents and students about the importance of diverse and unrestricted reading materials, fostering an environment where differing opinions can be respectfully considered.

Finally, I am a big supporter for educating students (and teachers) on media literacy. With all of the fake news and AI generated content online and on social media, we need to make sure that we teach students how to critically evaluate and engage with different types of content, empowering them to make informed choices about what they read.

**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?**

Yes

**Time to Teach**

**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

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1690**

**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 always seek to advocate for collective bargaining rights that strengthens workers' rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining, ensuring fair negotiations for wages, benefits, and working conditions. I also support laws that prevent unfair labor practices, such as retaliation against union activities. I have also been in favor of providing support for programs that educate workers about their rights and the benefits of union membership.

**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?**

Both of my children attend St. Paul Public Schools, so I have attended their school several times. I've noted that the school buildings are old and in need of repair. Also, the class sizes are quite large, and I wish my kids could get more individualized attention.

Also, because they are in a French immersion school, I have witnessed teachers who are expected to translate materials not only from French to English, but also translating from French to Spanish and/or Hmong, because we have an extremely diverse student base, where English is not the primary language spoken at some students' homes.

Finally, I have met some of the most dedicated, loving, amazing educators-- people who put their time and energy into making sure that our children have the best possible education and experience in the classroom.

**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 rely a lot on SPFE for my connection to public schools. But as I mentioned above, my kids are both in public schools, so I have been pretty active with what they do. My husband's family also has several public educators, so we chat about the system often. Finally, I rely heavily on my colleagues who have more experience in the public education system than I do.

**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?**

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1690**

I always appreciate working with Education Minnesota, and learning about your priorities. Because I don't typically sit on the education committees, I rely heavily on EdMN and SPFE's input on education provisions that come up at the House. I check in with my point people at SPFE fairly regularly, especially when negotiations are happening. I haven't yet disagreed with EdMN on an issue, but if I did, I believe in having reasonable, respectful conversations, learning all sides of an issue, and trying to focus on the things we agree on to move things forward.

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

I don't really engage in any education groups other than Education Minnesota and SPFE. But I know that my district does have the highest number of charter schools in it; so it is always a delicate conversation when I talk to some of those schools. That being said, I've been a loud, proud supporter of public education for years, and I don't envision that ending any time soon. So the priorities of our public educators will always come first to me.