2026 Education Minnesota state auditor questionnaire

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1. **What qualifies you to be Minnesota state auditor and a champion for workers?**

I am a Certified Management Accountant, a finance manager for a nonprofit, and a former City Councilor from Duluth.

As the only accountant in the race, I'm ready to start day one to make sure our local governments, from our smallest rural townships to cities, school boards to counties, have the tools, data and support they need to make the best decisions for their own communities. That means sharing resources to tackle a critical shortage of finance professionals in greater Minnesota, working with organizations to identify additional guardrails where needed, and holding open houses and forums to ensure transparency at every step.

I am the candidate with the accounting, local government, and management experience required to support our local communities. As Finance Chair on council, I sat across the table from the Auditor's office as they worked through their process with the City of Duluth. Currently, I work as the finance manager for an area non-profit where I help lead a team focused on supporting the growth and resilience of small businesses, organizations and local governments, and sovereign tribal nations. I have my MBA from the University of MN, Duluth.

As a former AFSCME member (Local 66) who represented my union at our local labor body, I know firsthand how important unions are to families, our local economy, and the strength of our local governments. Strong unions are critical to advancing an agenda that supports workers and families across Minnesota.

2. **What do you see as the key issues in this race, including those affecting public schools and educators?**

Communities need to know the local dollars paying for teachers and other public workers will be there when we need them. I'm running because I've seen our cities and local governments struggling, taking on more responsibility with fewer resources, and expected to do more with less funding and support.

The State Auditors Office conducts financial audits on over 3,400 units of local government, including local school districts. The OSA exercises professional judgement to identify risks of fraud and misuse of funding.

Key issues in this race:

- Strengthening Our Local Communities
  Provide data and tools needed through technical assistance and education to local units of government so they can make better decisions in a rapidly changing economic and technological environment. This includes Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District best practices through reporting on their use, holding information sessions and engaging with local stakeholders on questions they have.
- Oversight & Accountability
  Working with organizations to identify additional guardrails where needed when it comes to the auditing process. This also means focusing on a pro-active approach to oversight and addressing questions and concerns before they become larger problems. It also means identifying opportunities for sharing financial tools and resources to tackle the critical shortage of finance professionals in greater Minnesota.
- Communicating & Building Trust
  Translating the work of this office for a shared public understanding of the role by holding open houses and forums to ensure Minnesotans see transparency at every step. This includes relating the impact failure to complete audits have (e.g. disqualification of some state aid distribution). Communicating the importance of the key leadership positions this role holds, on the State Board of Investment and supporting union pensions, the MN Housing Finance Agency, and the Rural Finance Authority Board.

The opposition in this race are anti-union and the lead candidate, Scott Jensen, continues to campaign against public schools with hate-filled rhetoric. There is an intention to change the scope of this office to audit federal and state programs and leave local government support behind and use this office as a platform to treat certain communities or local governments differently in the audit process.

School districts are required by state law to be audited annually. Removing the focus from auditing local units of government and instead using staff resources to duplicate the work of the Legislative Auditor to audit federal and state programs will greatly reduce the capacity to provide support to local units of government, like school districts. This reduces transparency and data that communities and our public school employees may use to advocate for local funding decisions.

3. **If elected, how will you use your position to educate and influence legislators to invest in your office?**

We know that the office has been understaffed for many years, with a high turnover rate. This is very much attributed to the need to grow funding for salaries to meet the market rate. I believe that this advocacy starts with the relationship building I am doing while as a candidate and continues on into office. Our team is using every opportunity to meet and support labor endorsed legislative candidates to support their election and understand their district and the needs of our local governments in each district statewide. In office, I am committed to holding open forums in each county within one year, in collaboration with local representatives as well as local government officials. oversight and support in navigating regulations for audits of school districts. A strong focus will be the need for funding to continue the accessibility of the OSA's data, including the audits of school districts, to provide to the public and decision-makers. Finally, this advocacy will be a partnership with our public employee unions.

Delivering results with a reduced turnover rate will also show data-driven evidence that more staff leads to shorter turnaround times for audits.

4. **If elected, how would you approach your position on the State Board of Investment to protect and strengthen educator pensions?**

My father's union pension is what allowed us to have economic stability. I have had a PERA pension from my time at AFSCME, and so does my spouse currently. I intend to be an active member of this board, and have committed to working with union partners to ensure that pension funds are strong and protected. To be an active member, I first need to learn from the expert staff, and from board members who have sat on the board. From my limited observations, the current board takes the time needed to study the possible outcomes of a proposed action. That would be my goal to help ensure that educator, and all pensions are strengthened and protected.

5. **What would be your approach to political requests that come before the State Board of Investment?**

This board has a fiduciary duty for the benefit of pension holders, especially when making decisions regarding the pension funds. With each request the board needs to balance risk, reasonable returns, portfolio diversity and liquidity. Changes should be reviewed through the lens of a financially responsible investment strategy that advances the interests and welfare of our public employees and Minnesotans long-term. This is, and should be a high threshold to meet, and one that is done in communication and collaboration with our union, former union-members, and their representative organizations.

6. **Education Minnesota members have strongly advocated for improving educator pensions in TRA and PERA. If elected, how would you support educator pensions as member of PERA?**

I will support improvements to state contributions for PERA and TRA. That support includes communication with members, our union organizations, and other partners and advocating during bargaining or with legislators.

7. **How would you approach fraud risk when it comes to local government and schools, including charter schools?**

Risk for local units of government can be measured based on opportunities (e.g. lack of internal controls and segregation of duties among officials), overall revenue and budget, as well as population. For example, some smaller entities are now required to be audited less frequently if they meet certain criteria (under a population threshold and with segregated leadership). For charter schools, these independent audits are reviewed annually for compliance and must utilize government auditing standards.

Identifying risk by these factors alone does not identify the significant capacity concerns that local governments, including school districts, have as we continue to see a shortage of finance professionals, especially in greater Minnesota. The State Auditor should help local communities with fraud prevention through pro-active policies, and be able to communicate to the public what these entail. This includes helping local finance officials identify weak points in their process and strengthening them so it is harder for bad actors to get their hands on local tax dollars.

8. **How would you support school districts in adopting/enforcing strong standards for school budget forecasting?**

Growing the capacity of the auditors office is central to this support. Performance auditing and budgeting is a common way for cities and other local governments to demonstrate the use of funding, and for communities to better advocate for funding increases. There are clear processes in performance budgeting, forecasting that are best for transparency. The State Auditors Office can provide formal recommendations, as well as work within the existing audit guidance to determine if those recommendations could be required in the future. I am committed to meeting with Education Minnesota, school districts, staff and community representatives to hear how the OSA can support this work.

9. **Please describe your thoughts on tax increment financing and its impact on schools and local governments.**

We need to ensure there is strong oversight that this tool is being used correctly and sparingly. Each project is required to be measured by a “but for” test, where without a subsidy, a project would not otherwise move forward. In addition, any project needs to include clawback provisions and meet union labor requirements. I have experience in adding these requirements to proposed projects as a former city councilor in Duluth for any TIF or subsidy over $150k. These requirements also included other Community Benefits Agreements for projects that required affordable housing. The State Auditors Office oversees TIF use, and I am committed to providing guidance to local communities in the use of CBAs and advocating for the use of these measures. Public subsidy should be in the benefit for the community as whole, and should be examined for any negative impact in future funding for schools and communities.

TIF Districts can be a powerful economic tool for cities to use to provide long-term economic benefits when used properly. There is a high potential for overuse, and abuse of this tool. I believe that the city using this tool has a responsibility to consult with other governmental jurisdictions on its use to help ensure that the potential project is one that will benefit the community, and provide higher tax revenues in the long-term for all jurisdictions, including school districts.