

Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire
Alliance for Student Achievement
2010 Election

Overview Statement:

Describe your vision and priorities for E-12 public education in Minnesota.

The key to long term economic success in Minnesota is a highly skilled workforce. A strong economy is built on the foundation of an excellent education system including early childhood, K-12 and higher education.

Minnesota schools face a variety of challenges that deserve attention from the next Governor. In order to prepare our students for the global economy, Minnesota must: close the achievement gap, fund full-day kindergarten, create a system of funding for early childhood education, help districts deal with declining enrollment, and institute policies and pay scales that attract the best and brightest into the teaching profession.

As Governor I will continue to pursue a comprehensive education funding reform system that will provide stable, equitable investments statewide, while providing substantial property tax relief. This funding reform will also fully fund the state share of kindergarten and special education, and would help simplify formulas for school districts across the state.

I believe we must ensure every child is ready for kindergarten. Research shows that when students receive a strong early-childhood education, we close the achievement gap and save dollars down the road in education, health care and public safety. We need a system of early childhood funding to achieve this goal.

Education should not end at high school graduation. However, right now Minnesota has the second-highest tuition rate for two-year colleges in the nation. The steep cost of higher education is contributing to an opportunity gap for our students. As Governor I will turn this trend around.

I also believe it is critically important that Minnesota's next Governor have a strong personal connection to our public schools. I am a product of Mankato Public Schools, and I was delighted that many of my former teachers joined me at my announcement on my family's farm earlier this year. My mother was a teacher, and my sister and one of my sisters-in-law teach in public schools. My children attend Minneapolis Public Schools, and will continue to do so after I am elected Governor.

Briefly describe your experience working on education issues.

As Speaker of the House of Representatives, I have made education a top priority and worked to provide over \$800 million in new funding in 2007 (an increase totaling 8%, the original House bill increased funding by 9.4%). Under my leadership, the House of Representatives consistently supported legislation to establish and fund all-day kindergarten.

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I created an Early Childhood Education Finance Committee in the House to give this area of critical importance needed attention in our budget setting and policy making. I championed and successfully held an Early Childhood Education Summit on January 28, 2009 where over 200 people gathered in the Minnesota House Chamber to hear David Lawrence discuss Florida's commitment to early education.

In 2007, we increased special education funding by 26% and in 2009, the new Minnesota Miracle passed by the House would have fully funded the state's 68% share of special education costs.

From 2007-2009, House Democrats defeated on the House Floor more than 50 attempts by Republican members to weaken education legislation.

Funding:

In 2003, Governor Pawlenty appointed a task force to develop recommendations for reforming Minnesota's education funding system. Legislators and education organizations used the task force report to develop the "New Minnesota Miracle" proposal which includes automatic inflationary increases. Do you support this proposal? If not, what is your plan for reforming Minnesota's education funding system?

Yes, I am the co-author of the New Minnesota Miracle proposal and under my leadership as Speaker, it passed in the House. The legislation provides a sufficient, stable, and predictable revenue stream by increasing the basic funding formula from \$5,124 to \$7,500 and indexing it for inflation. The New Minnesota Miracle also funds several long-neglected needs, such as full-day kindergarten, special education, Limited English Proficiency, and transportation. Finally, the bill includes several provisions that address regional differences and needs in order to ensure that funding is equitable across the state. As Governor, I will insist on equitable, sustainable, predictable and sufficient funding for education.

Do you support funding for all-day, every day kindergarten and for expanding high quality early childhood learning opportunities in our public schools?

Yes. I support funding for all-day, every day kindergarten and expanding high quality early childhood learning opportunities in our public schools. I will work to build a system of early childhood funding for high quality birth to five programming statewide, and as Governor, I will advocate for and sign into law the New Minnesota Miracle.

Tax Policy:

How would you reform state tax policy to stabilize Minnesota's fiscal system and ensure that our E-12 education system has the financial resources necessary to provide students with access to high-quality education programs without reliance on referendum levies?

As Minnesota rebounds from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, elected officials will need a variety of tools to balance the state budget. The key is to develop a clear

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and shared vision for the future of Minnesota with a focus on achieving excellence in our top priorities such as education, health care and job creation. I support reforms that make the tax system fair, stable and progressive. I favor a balanced approach to dealing with the budget deficit. Under my leadership as Speaker, the House of Representatives passed a balanced budget that protected priority areas such as education from cuts.

A large part of tax reform for education funding will be to rebuild our state and local partnerships – like those with school boards. A key component of the New Minnesota Miracle is significant property tax reform so that our schools budgets are not dependent upon property taxes or levies.

Standards/Testing:

Should high stakes tests be used to determine whether or not Minnesota students are granted a diploma?

Students today face a number of tests, based on both state and federal requirements. I generally believe that while tests are a piece of the puzzle, teachers need more time and resources to teach instead of test. Exit exams are not the best method of evaluating a student's preparedness for the world. A teacher, who spends his/her time with that student, can provide a fuller evaluation, and we should trust our teachers to pass and fail their students. Under my leadership as Speaker of the House, Minnesota has moved towards a fuller evaluation of a student's and school's success, rather than focusing on just one measurement. In the 2009 Omnibus K-12 Finance Bill a value added growth model in the state's report card was implemented. I support the growth model approach to testing. We should also work to reduce the numbers of tests that do not use the growth model.

What changes would you recommend to the current standards and testing requirements in Minnesota?

I share the concern that testing devours vital time that could otherwise be spent on teaching and that the data received about the testing often come too late to be used constructively. I have seen this firsthand as a public school parent. The financial cost is also troubling: during a House committee hearing on testing, one school district estimated that testing can cost as much as \$41 per pupil. The financial costs are exacerbated when schools face unfunded or underfunded mandates, like in special education and other areas. It is my wholehearted belief, that the state and federal governments should fully fund any imposed tests and mandates. That is just one of the many reasons I support the Minnesota Miracle, which would increase funding overall for school districts.

Computer adaptive testing offers flexibility in test structure. This results in a more complete picture of a student's strengths and weaknesses. It can help direct targeted interventions which will help maximize educators' efforts, however many districts struggle with lack of computer

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equipment. That being said, there are still some paper and pencil tests that deliver a completely accurate picture of elements of student performance. And, if we as a state commit to computer delivery of assessment, we as a state need to help districts support that commitment.

As Governor I will appoint a Commissioner of Education who will go to Washington DC and seek the strongest waiver from an overburden of testing. A strong, well qualified Commissioner of Education should be a partner with the Governor to raise achievement statewide.

Achievement Gap/Reform Initiatives:

Please describe your initiatives to “reform” education and/or to narrow the achievement gap. Please describe how you would fund these initiatives.

Closing the achievement gap is not only a moral imperative; it is the key to economic success in our state. I believe Minnesota needs a New Minnesota Miracle. Innovation and reform is most lasting when it comes from the grassroots – from educators, parents and students. We need to build not only inflation factors but early childhood education into our school funding system, but achieve a measure of stability in education funding across the state. We need to reinvest in long-neglected needs, such as full-day kindergarten, special education, Limited English Proficiency, and transportation. We need to close Minnesota’s achievement gap, and address once and for all the regional differences that pit school district against school district. As Governor I will make sure all partners are working with school districts to close our achievement gap. We must have the Department of Education working with the Metropolitan Council and an enhanced State Planning Department to systematically close the gap.

We must not ignore how poverty makes the education gap larger. As Governor I will focus to make sure we can reverse the trend of a growing poverty gap. We cannot continue with a system that places so much emphasis on the passage of local referenda just to maintain base services. We need adequate state funding that creates stability and encourages innovation in all of our school districts regardless of geographic differences.