

# Senator John Marty responses to Alliance for Student Achievement Questionnaire

## Overview Statement

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

## John Marty's Vision and Priorities for E-12 public education

Education is our best investment in the future.

To have a vibrant democracy, we need people to be well educated and civically engaged.

To have healthy economy, we need people to be well educated and trained for work in the 21st Century world economy.

All students deserve to have the opportunity to graduate ready for 21<sup>st</sup> Century success – whether they go on to a college, university or technical school, or head straight to the workforce. That means that all students need affordable access to higher education as well as a quality E-12 public education. Remediation after high school should not be needed regardless of the path they choose.

In these tough times, we are told that we need to cut education funding – writing off a generation of students – just when we most need to recognize the importance of education. Minnesota invested in education even during the great depression, and the entire nation did so after World War II, with the GI bill.

To achieve a world-class education for Minnesota students, we need a strong state investment. Minnesota will not succeed if we expect our schools to rely on higher property taxes and the funds that parents and students can raise from bake sales and boxtops.

**More education funding is urgently needed.** Schools cannot thrive when the funding they receive does not keep up with inflation, or when they face outright state cuts in education funding. In recent years, state accounting shifts have forced schools to borrow money just to pay operating expenses. I believe that the state must re-pay the school aid funding and levy recognition shifts and abide by its commitments to local school districts.

I support the “New Minnesota Miracle,” as a fair funding reform proposal. This is not inexpensive, nor will it be easy to accomplish. In fact, the non-partisan analysis by PS Minnesota of the Governor’s education funding task force report estimated that the state needs to invest at least an additional \$1 billion a year, above inflation, to adequately fund education and meet the needs of a 21st century high quality education system.

Although many gubernatorial candidates might say they support more education funding, I have had the courage to support the revenue needed to make that commitment a reality. I have demonstrated that commitment in standing up to the Taxpayers' League when they were pushing for massive tax cuts. I was the only "no" vote in the entire Senate in 1999 and again in 2000 when they passed the biggest tax cuts in state history. It would have been politically easier for me to go along with those tax cuts, but they were unfair and unsustainable, and have led to deep cuts in education funding in recent years. The

Marty Administration will ensure that schools receive the funding they need.

**Education funding is a responsibility of the state, not the property taxpayers.** The quality of our children's education, their school's facilities, and the educational opportunities available to them, including extracurricular activities, should not be based on property taxes and the property wealth of the community in which they live. Under the Marty Administration, Minnesota will make that strong state investment.

**The school funding formula must be fair.** In providing needed funding, we must ensure the school funding formula is fair to the needs of differing types of students and districts. School districts have different expenses in such areas as transportation, technology, and salaries. In order for individual students to have a fair opportunity to graduate ready for success, their differing needs – e.g., challenges related to special education, gifted and talented, English Language learning, and poverty compensatory funding for students who are poor – must also be factored into the funding system. The Marty Administration will use a funding formula that recognizes school districts have differing abilities to raise money through local property tax levies for things like school buildings and their maintenance.

**Students need a comprehensive education.** Schools today must teach more than just the fundamentals of reading, writing, math and science. While these are vital parts of the core curriculum, education must include a broad spectrum of learning, including financial literacy, arts, world languages, service learning, physical education, technical competence, and nutrition. Schools should ensure that students become caring, informed, knowledgeable, compassionate, and productive people, prepared for life and work in a global society. The Marty Administration will ensure a comprehensive education is available to all students.

**We must address the needs of the whole child.** While schools do an outstanding job with many students, they face growing challenges. Many students have mental and physical health problems, others do not speak English at home, and homeless kids bounce from school to school, with no stability in their lives. Children who go to school hungry or ill can't concentrate on learning. Addressing the needs of the whole child requires family and community support and early intervention with health and other problems. Children whose needs are not addressed languish in school or disrupt their classrooms, and neither they nor their schools can succeed. The Marty Administration will address the needs of the whole child, including the health care needs of all children and their families through my Minnesota Health Plan, and address other needs of the children and families through my anti-poverty initiatives.

### **John Marty's experience working on education issues:**

Although I do not serve on the Senate Education Committee, I have a strong record of advocating for education. Over the years, I have opposed the education funding cuts proposed by the governor and legislature, and have authored legislation to restore education and early childhood funding cuts from 2003. In addition, I have carried legislation supporting Environmental Learning Centers, legislation for Adult Literacy Programs, and legislation to enable schools to create healthy youth development community programs.

Because of the importance of **addressing the needs of the whole child**, I want to highlight my work in developing and authoring the Minnesota Health Plan, legislation which would provide comprehensive health care, including mental health and chemical dependency treatment to every Minnesotan, as well as vision care, dental, and prescription drugs. The Minnesota Health Plan will ensure that all students and their families get the care they need so that they can thrive in school. It is important to note that

the MN Health Plan saves money. By spending our health care dollars wisely, focusing on prevention and public health, early intervention and treatment, efficient delivery of care, and elimination of insurance bureaucracy and paperwork, the MHP is far cheaper than what we are currently spending on health care. That has the additional benefit of saving school districts and their employees from the crushing costs of health insurance.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of **investing in early childhood**, I authored legislation and advocated for full funding for cost-saving programs: Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), sliding fee child care, the Women, Infants, Children (WIC) nutrition program, Head Start, Crisis Nurseries, and the School Readiness and School Breakfast programs. As Governor, I will make these wise, cost-saving investments a reality.

## **Funding: The New Minnesota Miracle**

I am a strong supporter of the New Minnesota Miracle, including the early childhood provisions, as developed from the **PS Minnesota** coalition recommendations and principles. These principles spell out what is needed to ensure success for all students, throughout Minnesota. The New Minnesota Miracle provides needed funding in a way that is fair and equitable for all types of students and districts.

My support for the New Minnesota Miracle comes from my confidence that it will meet school funding needs. The proposal is designed to provide enough funding, and allocate it fairly, to meet the needs of every student and every district, in order to reach the academic expectations we set for them. It provides an adequately funded formula that is linked to inflation and targets dollars for special student and district needs. In addition to better funding, the formula is simpler, more equitable and fair. Recognizing the tough economic times, it is designed to allow for a phase-in period (though this "phase-in" must recognize that at the end of the phase-in, the total funding commitment must be at the *inflation-adjusted* level.) By fully funding the state's share of special education, it would end the current practice of compromising general education funding in order to meet state and federal mandates for special education. All-day kindergarten would be state-funded making it equitably available to all children, and districts would have the flexibility to fund early childhood programs.

Student differences are funded: English Language Learners, special education, gifted and talented, career and technical, as well as compensatory funding to address the high needs for poor children.

District differences are funded: declining enrollment, sparsity funding for low-populated areas of the state that are spread out, transportation, salary differences, school facilities and debt service aid, and agricultural school bond credit to lessen impact of school building projects on agricultural lands.

The reformed funding formula provides for an equalized school property tax system, reducing the differences between high and low funded districts through levy referenda offset.

A final highlight of the New Minnesota Miracle is the creation of a new funding stream for Innovation Revenue. Districts whose students are making progress receive this new funding and can serve as "best practices" districts for those whose students need to improve. Districts whose students need to improve also receive the funding, but only after they produce an approved plan that spells out how they will use research, evidence-based, or promising practices to enable their students to make better progress.

My confidence in the New Minnesota Miracle is not mere lip service. I am proud that **Rep. Mindy Greiling**, the author, and chief advocate of the legislation is a strong supporter of my campaign, and she and I share a vision for making Minnesota schools the best in the nation.

### **Funding for all-day kindergarten and early childhood learning opportunities**

As indicated earlier, I support investing in early childhood programs, like Head Start, School Readiness, Sliding Fee Childcare, and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). These learning opportunities give a big boost to young children and save money by enabling schools to focus more on kindergarten education and less on remediation and acclimating and disciplining emotionally and behavioral-disturbed children. I support a quality rating system for evaluating programs to enable families to know they are providing quality opportunities for young learners. As Governor, I will make sure that Minnesota fully funds these cost-saving programs, knowing that they are an essential part of a strong education system. Current waiting lists are unacceptable.

In addition, I support funding for all-day, every day kindergarten, to maintain early learning academic gains once children reach the K-12 system.

### **Tax Policy: Stabilizing Minnesota's fiscal system and ensuring that the E-12 education system has the financial resources to provide high quality education programs without relying on referendum levies.**

The New Minnesota Miracle (NMM) requires significant changes in Minnesota's fiscal system. And my commitment to the NMM is strong. As mentioned above, not only will I ensure more funding for schools; I will also **change education funding from property taxes to state taxes**. Property taxes are a regressive and unfair means of paying for education and other services, because the quality of a school often reflects the property wealth of the community in which it is based. Statewide taxes provide a more equitable basis for funding education, as our state constitution explicitly requires. Currently, educators and volunteers are forced to devote far too much time and effort to convincing taxpayers – even the majority who do want to help students – to vote for local levy referenda, when they recognize that property taxes are the least fair means of paying for schools.

This is not only a question of fairness. By providing adequate funding from the state, we can maximize the impact of parents and other adult volunteers, using them in school classrooms to provide extra attention to individual students. It is a terrible waste for parents, volunteers, teachers and school board members to spend their time trying to pass levy referenda, collect boxtops and soup can labels, and support school kids in peddling magazines, candy, and other products. It is wrong to expect parents, teachers, and students to spend countless hours begging for money to keep their schools open, when their talents could be better used to improve educational quality.

**Funding the schools adequately at the state level requires more state revenue.** This is the crux of the education funding problem in recent years. During the last decade, the state has made big cuts in taxes, and then locked in the shortage of revenue under "No New Taxes" commitments of Governor Pawlenty and others.

**I have had the courage to stand up to these misguided anti-tax policies, even when it meant standing alone.** In 1999, the Senate passed the biggest tax cuts in state history by a vote of 64 to 1. In

2000, additional tax cuts passed by a vote of 65 to 1.

In both cases, I was the only "no" vote in the entire Senate. Representing a suburban, Republican-leaning district, these were not easy votes. But these tax cuts were not fair, they were not wise, and they were not sustainable, so I stood up and fought against them.

Those tax cuts resulted in deep cuts in funding for schools, and massive property tax increases. I had the courage to stand up to the tax cutters then, and as Governor, I will continue to stand up to them.

It is by making wise investments in our future -- in education and in cost saving investments in prevention -- that we will build a better future, a stronger economy, and ultimately, lower costs for taxpayers. Ignoring problems does not make them go away. Tackling our problems is the only way to build a better future.

I support a state tax code that is progressive (relying primarily on the state income tax), and that uses reserves to stabilize the ups and downs of our economy.

I support undoing those unwise tax cuts of the past, and establishing a more progressive income tax system that brings in more money, based on taxpayers' ability to pay.

## **One More Note About Funding for Schools**

Proper funding is essential for strong schools. There is no magic "reform" bullet that can substitute for that funding. Too many school "reforms" that have been proposed in recent years are bogus solutions used by politicians as a smokescreen to cover for their unwillingness to provide proper funding. An example of a pseudo-reform is Governor Pawlenty's "70 percent solution." He claimed that as much as 40% of education spending was going to administrative costs instead of educating students, so he proposed requiring that 70% of school funds must be spent "in the classroom," an artificial distinction that suggested that school libraries, computer labs, special education, school nurses, counselors or social workers, working with parents, transportation to and from school, and numerous other education expenses were simply wasted money, that had nothing to do with the success of students. This was a purely political move intended to persuade voters that he was concerned about waste in school funding.

Thoughtful reforms are needed, and the Marty Administration will work to ensure that every dollar is spent wisely; however, we need to recognize that schools need *more* funding. Laying off teachers and increasing class sizes, cutting or eliminating essentials such as the arts, world languages, vocational classes, and extracurricular activities are not the way to improve schools. Money *is* needed to run quality schools. Investing time, energy and dollars in our schools is the only way to ensure that Minnesota's children become productive citizens and leaders in our multi-cultural society. In these challenging economic times, investing in education is also the most effective way to grow jobs and stimulate our economy. The bottom line, most important, ingredient for student success is more funding for their schools.

## **Standards/Testing**

Federal and State standards have often been misguided attempts to improve education. Accountability for results and monitoring to close the opportunity gap is essential, but too much testing, and failing to

measure the appropriate things is a problem, too. Too much testing takes time and money away from teaching and learning. Comparing class averages between years is a poor measure of school and teacher effectiveness, and does nothing to help parents and teachers find out how their students are doing. Also, many valuable things that teachers teach are not possible to measure in any standardized test, e.g., character development or teaching kids to care about others. Although there is no objective way to measure character, individual teachers can see it in their students and help them develop empathy, respect, and other important values. Standardized tests may work for math and other skills, but when the hyper-focus on such tests takes away a teacher's ability to build character and help students in times of personal crisis, we are not helping their future or ours.

**The state should evaluate academic excellence in a variety of ways that are fair and meaningful measures.** For example, we should evaluate rigor and value-added in a manner that recognizes the diversity of ways in which students learn, and allow school districts the flexibility to achieve results accordingly.

## **Achievement Gap/Reform Initiatives**

Minnesota has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation. Starting early, especially with at-risk children, is the cheapest and best way to prevent an opportunity gap in the first place. The tools we give our young children to learn and the expectations we set for them will determine their readiness for kindergarten and for the future.

As mentioned previously, I am a strong advocate of **investing in early childhood programs** like Head Start, School Readiness, Sliding Fee Childcare, and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). These early learning initiatives can reduce the opportunity gap early in life, at the very time when that gap is frequently growing.

**Provide individualized attention.** Every child counts. Measures of academic excellence that focus attention on the progress of each student and recognize differences in student needs, can help prevent them from falling through the cracks. Children have different learning styles and backgrounds, so the Marty Administration will make sure that schools get the resources to challenge gifted and talented students, provide education to special needs children and give alternatives to those who don't thrive in a traditional classroom. Educational equity requires the acknowledgment of student cultural diversity and divergent strategies to address it. Many students today also need individual attention from school counselors, nurses, social workers, chemical dependency specialists, and psychologists. Well stocked, culturally competent libraries and instructional materials, and up-to-date technology enable schools to tailor and personalize their education.

**Address the needs of the whole child and family.** Homeless children and those who go to school on an empty stomach, are unable to focus on learning. Likewise, students who live in dysfunctional households, with abusive or neglectful parents, are not able to thrive in school. I will make sure that Minnesota addresses these inter-related social needs: I am the author of the Minnesota Health Plan, which would provide comprehensive health care, including chemical dependency and mental health treatment. I have been leading the fight to address hunger and homelessness and have fought for economic and social policies that would ensure that every student arrives at school ready to learn.

Funding for these efforts will require more state funding, as is discussed above. I continue to be willing to support the funding necessary. However, it is equally important to point out that by tackling

our problems and making wise investments in education and prevention, we will ultimately save *billions* of dollars for taxpayers. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

## Closing Comments

Education is truly our best investment in the future. It is expensive, but as the bumper sticker says: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

I am running for Governor because I really believe that we can build a better future. Breaking away from the anti-tax, ignore-our-problems mentality governing our state in recent years will not be easy. But I have the courage, the vision, and the fight needed to do so. Working together, we will turn Minnesota around, build the best education system in the country, and move Minnesota forward to a bright future.

Especially in times of economic crisis, Minnesota needs strong, bold leadership. As governor, I'll lead Minnesota in tackling challenges, not ignoring them. We'll get the budget under control through cost-saving prevention: our MN Health Plan reduces costs -- keeping people healthy and providing care in an efficient, timely manner. Our focus on early childhood education prevents costly remedial education later. We'll intervene with troubled youth and deliver chemical dependency and mental health care, lowering crime and prison costs. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

I'm not running for Governor because the job is easy, but because Minnesota needs courageous leadership.

John Marty

p.s. Please take a minute to read these three columns that I have written on education funding and policy:

**Paying for Quality Schools**

<http://apple-pie.org/tp/default.asp?articleid=52>

**Funding Schools with Bake Sales and Boxtops**

<http://apple-pie.org/tp/default.asp?articleid=62>

**School Breakfast, Not Political Deception, Brings Success in School**

<http://apple-pie.org/tp/default.asp?articleid=67>