

Heather Holmes MN HD24A

Education Minnesota candidate questionnaire

Education funding

1. Education Minnesota believes the solution to closing the state's racial opportunity gaps must include fully and equitably funding public education, from preschool to postsecondary institutions. There's widespread agreement the full-funding agenda will require several billion dollars in new education investments. Please indicate your support or opposition to the following components of our full-funding agenda.

Inflation: Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula and ensuring that it is tied to inflation.

Yes No

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

Yes No

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

Yes No

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

Yes No

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

Yes No

Universal pre-K: Provide universal pre-K taught by licensed teachers, so all children are ready for kindergarten.

Yes No



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 No

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 No

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 No

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

Yes No

ESP living wage: Ensure all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour.

Yes No

Teacher compensation and benefits: Increase teacher compensation to provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain teachers.

Yes No

Health care for all school employees: Make health insurance more affordable, fair and predictable for educators and school employees so they stay in the profession.

Yes No

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

Yes No

Higher education: Renew Minnesota's commitment to invest in the state's future by fully funding public higher education in Minnesota.

Yes No

Taxes/revenue

2. 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 No

3. 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?

I agree with this 100%! The quality of our children's education shouldn't be contingent on their zip code. Many towns want to support their public schools but can't afford to increase their property taxes through levies. I don't have any specific ideas for raising revenue at this time but will definitely keep my eyes open for equitable solutions!

This isn't something we can do as a state, but I would love to see the federal government start to put a lot more money toward our public education systems. The disparities in school funding between states is a huge problem.

Higher education

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

Yes No

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

Yes No

6. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with education debt?

I would like to see if we as a state could fund a debt forgiveness program similar to ones at the federal level for people working in public service.

7. Some college campuses have no counselors, while others have a ratio of 1:11,000 students. Will you support each Minnesota State campus having at least one counselor so students have access to mental health and academic support services?

Yes No

High-quality professional educators

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

If we as legislators can continue to improve working conditions for our educators (i.e. benefits, pay, prep time, class sizes, etc) I think that will go a long way to helping us recruit and retain high-quality teachers here in MN.

Teacher licensure

9. Do you support deleting the option in Tier 3 that allows a person to receive a full professional license without completing a teacher preparation program?

Yes No

Standardized testing

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

Standardized testing shows how a student performed on a test on that particular day. Not all students are able to perform well on standardized tests. I think they can be useful snapshots on where students are at a current time or measure some progress. They may give districts/schools insight into what areas may need improvement or more focus and can potentially identify students who require additional learning assistance. However, I never want to see any type of funding decisions for schools tied to standardized test scores.

Honesty in Education

11. What can you do to protect teachers in the classroom and ensure that they have the freedom to teach?

I support the legislation passed that makes banning books illegal in our state. I would support other legislation if needed to ensure teachers are not being censored in their classrooms and protected from repercussions for the content they teach.

12. Do you agree that Minnesotan students deserve an honest and accurate education about race that enables them to learn from the mistakes of our past so they can create a better future for all Minnesotans? Why or why not?

Yes! Students need to have an accurate understanding of race and how the mistakes of our past have brought us to where we are today. These issues are deeply ingrained in so many areas of our society. We can't expect students to help make our state a more equitable place for all Minnesotans if they don't have this understanding.

Time to Teach

13. 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 No

14. 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 No

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

Yes No

Union Rights

16. Do you support collective bargaining rights?

Yes No

17. 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 No

18. Do you support teacher tenure and due process rights so the experts who work the most with students have the support to stand up for them?

Yes No

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

I will work to protect collective bargaining rights of unions and to protect the defined benefit pension plans for public employees. I will work to protect the rights of workers to form unions. I will oppose legislation that would erode any power held by labor unions.

Working families

20. 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 No

21. Will you support continuing defined-benefits retirement systems for public employees?

Yes No

22. Will you support providing the necessary state funding to ensure financial sustainability of public pension funds?

Yes No

23. Will you support exploring new systems for providing educators with a secure retirement, including reducing early retirement penalties that will help recruit and retain educators?

Yes No

24. What legislation could you introduce or support that would reduce the cost of health insurance to school districts? Where do you stand on health care for all?

Health insurance costs for school districts are a huge burden. My home district of Byron has seen our insurance premiums go up by as much as 30% the past two years due to few high claimants on our plan. People should not be penalized for getting sick. I would love to see a single payer plan (i.e. medicare for all) happen. I've also heard ideas about trying to expand PEIP to all districts so all staff are in the same pool. This would hopefully spread risk around and make premiums more affordable for everyone. I would love to learn a bit more about this idea to understand if it is a feasible option.

Privatization

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

Yes No

26. 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 No

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

Yes No

28. Minnesota students, from different places and of different races, deserve well-resourced, welcoming schools. These needs are urgent and can't wait decades for lawyers and courts to force it to happen.

Do you oppose efforts that would delete constitutional mandates for using taxation to fund public education funding and for providing equal access to public schools to all students?

Yes No

Do you also oppose these same efforts that would enshrine standardized testing – with all its racial, cultural and economic biases – into the Minnesota Constitution?

Yes No

Your role as a legislator

29. 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?

Yes, I have been in all of our schools in Byron, MN. One of the big things I have seen is how much funding affects our public school systems – especially our smaller more rural districts in greater MN. As a legislator, this will make me advocate for greater funding for our schools and ensure we are not mandating changes that we are not providing money for.

30. 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 currently serve on the school board for Byron Public Schools. This has taught me a lot about issues currently facing public education. I am close friends with numerous educators and people that work in education. They are a valuable resource. I also plan to use Education Minnesota as a resource to help me understand issues surrounding public education.

31. 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?

I plan to have a working relationship with Education Minnesota if I am elected. I would like to be able to use your organization as a resource for educational issues. If I disagree on an issue, I would have an open conversation with representatives from your group.

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

I would work to fully understand all sides of an issue and use that information to make the decision that I feel is best and also attempt to compromise so each side can benefit as much as possible.

Extra note about my questionnaire: While I fully support the questions/issues proposed in this survey, I want to make sure that I reiterate how important it is we don't push unfunded mandates on our school districts. MN has been underfunding our public schools for more than 20 years and while the 2023 investments in education were amazing, one year can't undo those years of underfunding. For example, if the legislature increases pay for teachers and support staff (they all deserve to be paid way better), we need to ensure we as a state are providing those funds to do so. My home school district of Byron is usually in the bottom 3 in the entire state in per student funding. In turn, it costs our local homeowners a lot through our property taxes in referendums

and now a probable operating levy that we need to go out for. We struggle to maintain programming and are going through a major budget crisis at the moment. I will support any of the proposed changes as long as the state is able to fully fund those programs. I know there are so many throughout our district that feel the same way.

Also – I would love more info about the issues with oversight surrounding charter schools. I've never dealt with charter schools and am unfamiliar with those issues.