

Rep. Andy Smith - MN House, district 25B

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

(I just got to talk with someone at the doors about this the other day!)



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.

Absolutely support expanding professional development for MN teachers, and funding those efforts from the state level. I don't know enough about the Q comp program to give a definitive answer on that part of the question.

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

I'm very interested in working to expand and reform PIEP.

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?

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I am interested in a variety of ways to raise our state tax code. Last year I wrote a bill (and will submit this upcoming term) the Tax Excessive CEO Bill of MN that would impose a tax penalty on corporations that pay their top executives significantly more than their median employees. I think we need to add higher income tax tiers for high income earners (at the very least a “Millionaire’s tax” for those making more income than \$1m), as well as raising our corporate tax rate for larger corporations. I’m also a big fan of expanding some of our sales tax base in certain areas like beer/wine.

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?

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

In general, I think the Democratic Party should make canceling student debt a greater part of our platform, while also working to fund tuition-free higher education so student debt doesn’t plague new generations of learners. As a state legislator we are a bit limited on canceling student debt,

though I hope to be a part of expanding our existing student debt programs, which are normally limited to healthcare professionals in rural areas, to all those with student debt. I also think we should change our model as a state from giving money to individuals to pay off their student loans, to negotiating with loan companies to buy whole debts off and have individuals pay the state back interest-free. In most discussions with those struggling under student debt, they would have the means to pay back the debt if not saddled with predatory interest payments.

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?

Click or tap here to enter text.

I admit I am not a specialist in this area, but I believe teachers want what all workers want: good pay, benefits, and a work environment that respects and values them. By doing many of the things discussed above (funding cross subsidy, help student debt, reform PEIP, etc.) will help us recruit and retain educators.

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

This is another area where I'm open to have dialogue about, as I'm not intimately familiar with the teacher licensure process. It seems logical to me that teachers should be working towards completing a teacher preparation program, while also valuing in-classroom experience when evaluation teacher licensure.

Standardized testing

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

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Generally, I think standardized testing is a helpful tool in evaluating students, staff, and schools, though they certainly shouldn't be the be-all-end-all when it comes to decision making at higher levels of education, particularly when it comes to resources and funding. Particularly with current research showing the racial and cultural bias that standardized tests often have.

Honesty in Education

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

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Education policy at the state level should always seek to find a unity between two basic concepts of curricular consistency for learning excellence throughout the state and providing space for teachers to creatively teach that material in the best possible way.

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?

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Yes, students should get an honest and accurate education about the complicated history of race, as those mistakes still affect the students' day to day lives (whether they are benefitting from those mistakes or disadvantaged by them).

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?

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✓ Yes All of the above mentioned initiatives of expanding and defending collective bargaining rights, the right to organize and strike, automatic payments, etc. Also continuing to eliminate anti-union corporate tools like forced-meetings on work time, etc.

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

I have a lot of thoughts on PEIP; but to be able to be a stable pool, there need to be more limitations on leaving and re-entering the program.

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?

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I believe a single-payer, state-sponsored healthcare system for all is the best thing for Minnesota. However, as we steadily move towards that direction, there are many ways to lower the cost of healthcare. One of the ways to do that is working on reforming and expanding our current pools of public employee healthcare (like PEIP), to provide excellent benefits at affordable rates, and also cutting out the middlemen profit-hunters of HMOs and insurance companies.

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?

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Yes, I was able to visit Mighty Oaks Early Learning School, which is our district's first all-preschool facility. It was a wonderful experience and even got to spend some time with students playing, as well as talk to teachers, staff, and administrators. I would love to visit more schools in the district!

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?

Thankfully, being in the House DFL Caucus, I have a team of knowledgeable Representatives with years of experience in this space to ask questions, and as a first point of contact. Chair Youakim is great at getting back to me about questions, as is Chair Her concerning pension questions. I also have a couple reps in my class active in the education space (and are educators themselves) in Reps. Hill and Clardy that have been helpful in this space. There are a couple teachers in rochester I always reach out to first for a local angle, one is a teacher and one is a community school administrator, as well as a couple of our school board members. EducationMN is certainly a group that provides good resources, as are our house research staff.

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?

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Disagreements are always best if done privately, but openly. If I was a no on a particular issue, I would certainly be open and forthright to representatives of EdMN. I hope to work closely with Education Minnesota in reforming and expanding PEIP.

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

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My first loyalty is always to the people of Minnesota, and in this particular arena, that they have access to free and excellent public education. This excellent education can only come from teachers, staff, schools, and administrators that are well-paid, well-cared for, and well-trained. I believe EDMN aligns with these values, which is why I value your endorsement, but my decisions will always, at the end, be what I feel is best for the students and people of Minnesota.