

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

Page

Candidate endorsement questionnaire - Apple Valley office

Candidate name

Bianca Virnig

Election district

52B

Party endorsement

DFL

Email

biancaforhouse@gmail.com

Phone

6512788605

Educator Pay

1. ESP living wage: Will you support legislation to ensure that all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour?

Yes

2. Due to significantly below-market compensation for teachers, most school districts in Minnesota are having difficulty filling teaching jobs, and state colleges report a continued decline in the number of graduates from teacher preparation programs. Would you support creating a minimum salary for all licensed Minnesota teachers of \$60,000 a year and an \$80,000 minimum salary for licensed teachers with 10 years of experience and a master's degree?

Yes

Pensions

3. Will you support increasing state funding to ensure the financial sustainability of public pension funds?

Yes

4. Will you support exploring the necessary benefit improvements in order to provide educators with a secure retirement, including reducing early retirement penalties, lowering the normal age of retirement and a career threshold that will help recruit and retain educators?

Yes

5. How will you support efforts to lower inequitable penalties in the Teachers Retirement Association in order to expand retirement options?

Has there been an OLA report on this at all? If not would a comprehensive review of the existing retirement policies and penalties within the TRA to identify areas where inequities exist and where retirement options can be expanded be worth exploring? I don't

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

know a ton about TRA but maybe pushing for the expansion of retirement options within the TRA, such as more flexible retirement dates and part-time employment opportunities for retirees. I would look to you for more ways to support this.

Health care

6. Do you support educators having access to a mandatory statewide health insurance pool, just like other state workers?

Yes

7. 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

8. All Minnesotans deserve access to affordable health care and publicly managed plans like MN Care and Medicare are some of the most efficient plans out there. The legislature is currently seeking a federal waiver to expand MN Care to more residents. Do you support expanding all public health care programs to include more working people?

Yes

Education funding

9a. Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula.

Yes

9b. SPED cross subsidy: The state must fully fund special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.

Yes

9c. EL cross subsidy: Fully fund the costs districts pay to provide quality English learner programs and instruction.

Yes

9d. Lower class sizes: Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.

Yes

9e. Full-service community schools: Expand access to full-service community schools across the state.

Yes

9f. 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

9g. 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

9h. 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.

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

Yes

9i. Professional development: Provide professional development to all staff around cultural competency and trauma-responsive classrooms with aims of closing the discipline disparity gap.

Yes

9j. Education debt relief: Provide debt relief to retain teachers so they can afford to stay in the classroom.

Yes

Taxes/revenue

10. 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

11. 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?

Yes

12. Fully funded schools require adequate and stable revenues. Will you oppose tax cuts and carve outs that lower tax collections or narrow the tax base?

Yes

13. A balanced tax code draws revenue from a mix of income, sales, and property taxes. Will you support policies that maintain both adequate funding and a sustainable balance between revenue sources?

Yes

Higher education

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

Yes

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

Yes

16. Do you support DEI efforts on our college campuses and universities?

Yes

17. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with the cost of higher education?

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

First, I'm appalled that LSN graduate students cannot be paid for their time as an intern. We've had 4 nurses with various higher ed institutes do internships with us and not one could be paid. It stipulated in their higher ed contracts that they not be paid for internship hours. Also, LSNs who go to school to be a Psych DNP do not qualify for the \$75,000 tuition reimbursement if they work in schools. This needs to change.

I would support more apprenticeship opportunities and tuition forgiveness for service in education (not just teaching but all fields). Also, many organizations don't pay tuition reimbursement for career tech ed courses. The perception that these are less valuable needs to change. I would support more efforts to cancel student loan debt and we need more funding for grow your own programming.

I would love to hear what ideas you have.

18. The North Star Promise is expected to result in an increase in enrollment on our campuses. Many of these students are projected to be disproportionately first-generation students and students from historically underserved communities. As a legislator, what would you do to ensure these students had the support they needed to be successful?

My first answer was, I am not sure...tuition reimbursement would help but then I asked ChatGPT. This seems reasonable however I would love to learn more about this.

Ensuring that first-generation students and those from historically underserved communities have the support they need to succeed in higher education is critical for the success of initiatives like the North Star Promise. As a legislator, here's what I would do to support these students:

Financial Aid and Scholarships: Advocate for increased funding for need-based financial aid and scholarships specifically targeted towards first-generation students and students from underserved communities. Access to financial resources can significantly impact their ability to afford tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with attending college.

Academic Support Programs: Allocate resources for academic support programs such as tutoring, mentoring, and academic advising, which can help first-generation students navigate the challenges of higher education and develop the skills needed for academic success.

Cultural Competency Training: Support initiatives to provide faculty and staff with cultural competency training to better understand and support the diverse needs of first-generation students and students from underserved communities.

Retention Programs: Invest in retention programs that provide ongoing support and resources to help first-generation students persist and succeed in college. This may include initiatives such as peer mentoring programs, success coaching, and targeted interventions for students at risk of dropping out.

Career Development Services: Ensure that first-generation students and students from underserved communities have access to career development services, including internship opportunities, job placement assistance, and networking events. This can help them transition successfully from college to the workforce.

Community Partnerships: Foster partnerships between colleges and universities, K-12 schools, community organizations, and employers to create a supportive ecosystem that provides wraparound services for first-generation students and students from underserved communities.

Culturally Responsive Curriculum: Encourage the development and implementation of culturally responsive curriculum and teaching practices that reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. This can help create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Data Collection and Evaluation: Advocate for the collection and analysis of data on the academic performance and outcomes of first-generation students and students from underserved communities to identify areas for improvement and measure the effectiveness of support initiatives.

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

By prioritizing these efforts, we can help ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have the support they need to thrive in higher education and beyond.

19. There are efforts to expand the North Star Promise to Minnesota's private colleges and universities. This would dramatically increase the amount of public money going to private institutions. Do you support the expansion of the North Star Promise to include private colleges and universities?

No

High-quality professional educators

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

I would advocate for fair compensation, quality professional development, streamlining paperwork, mentorship programs and affinity groups, increased funding, safe, healthy and supportive working environments, and smaller class sizes. Let me know if there is anything else I could be doing.

Standardized testing

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

Standardized test scores, when done well, can be a useful tool but decisions should be made carefully, and scores should not be the sole factor in making decisions. They should be used in conjunction with observations and other assessments to understand a student or system's performance. Relying heavily on test scores leads to a narrow focus on test taking and neglects things like critical thinking, creativity, social and emotional development and belonging.

Standardized testing can be a tool to determine if the broad system is functioning, but more and more people are opting out. Also, the MCAs are not a priority for high school students who often choose to focus on the ACT/SATs and taking MCAs while fasting is not an accurate picture of a student's ability.

Overall, no decisions should be made solely based on standardized tests.

Honesty in Education

22. Most educators believe students should have access to a wide range of age-appropriate books that include relatable characters and situations that reflect the diversity of Minnesota families. However, certain politicians and big money groups are trying to remove books from school libraries across America, particularly books with LGBTQ+ characters or those that deal with racism in America. How should Minnesota protect its students' freedom to read?

Minnesotans need to be showing up and pushing back against groups like Mom's for Liberty, electing candidates up and down the ballot with shared values, supporting candidates from school board to the national stage and supporting their local educators.

23. Education Minnesota believes all students should have the freedom to feel safe and welcome in their public school, no matter what they look like, where they're from, how they pray, transgender or not. Do you agree?

Yes

24. Students bring many needs into their public schools, but our union believes they all deserve the freedom to grow with the help of support for their mental health and with lessons in how to recognize and control their emotions, which is sometimes called social-emotional learning. Do you support increasing support for students' mental and emotional health in public schools?

Yes

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

Time to Teach

MoveDuplicate Settings Delete 25. 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

26. 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

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

Yes

School safety

28. Creating incentives for school administrators to enforce districts’ codes of conduct without bias and/or creating accountability measures for those who don’t?

Yes

29. Increase reporting and transparency in worksite safety when reporting physical injuries and emotional trauma in the workplace?

Yes

Union Rights

30. The ability of workers to come together in union and bargain collectively has been vital for reducing wage gaps by gender, building the middle class, and limiting wealth inequality in Minnesota. Do you support expanding and strengthening workers’ rights to join a union and bargain collectively?

Yes

31. 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

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

I'd like to think of myself as a labor friendly legislator. I voted for and signed on to many bills that support unions. I came in halfway through so wasn't able to carry any labor specific bills but I reached out to labor groups several times on issues. As a member on the Human Services Finance Committee, I advocated for the position of labor which prevented the closing of CARE Carlton.

I would not support legislation that erodes collective bargaining rights. It is essential that workers have the right to negotiate with their employers over wages, benefits and working conditions. I would work to ensure fair wages and benefits including expanding access to healthcare. I am a strong supporter of worker safety and I support fair labor practices. I would advocate for laws that address unfair labor practices such as retaliation for engaging in union activities.

2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry # 1472

I would support expanding initiatives that provide workers with opportunities for skills development, training and education to improve their careers.

I am a connector and a collaborator. I would work with other legislators, unions, employers and community groups to find common ground and develop policies that support workers' rights. I like to have open lines of communication with unions and workers to better understand their concerns and I actively engage in discussion to help shape policies.

I would like to address question #2. I support question #2 but know that ISD 196 has 50/100 in their current contract. I would like to make sure that supporting 60/80 doesn't negatively impact the staff in 196.

Privatization

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

Yes

34. 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

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

Yes

Your role as a legislator

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 visited many schools in my district from elementary to high school including our ALC and special education buildings. I have also visited multiple schools outside of my district in the last year and hundreds of schools across the metro since 2019. When I worked for OSHA, my specialty was inspecting schools and healthcare. One of my last school visits as a school board member was to East Lake Elem on Sept 29th and the last school event I attended was handing out popsicles to kids at Deerwood Elementary to celebrate the end of the school year as a parent on the PTO. I recently toured Dakota Ridge and Transition Plus. I have spent a lot of time in schools for work, as an elected official and as a parent. As a parent and the PTO secretary, I can often be found volunteering for the annual fundraiser, doing Art Adventures or helping teachers in the classroom.

As an elected official, I frequently tour schools with the superintendent, other board members and staff. I attend events and several graduation ceremonies. I have participated as a reviewer of students' pitches for a project they are working on in science and I have attended robotics events at the request of students. I participate in tours related to bonding work as well. This has included touring our locations in greatest need and touring other schools' activity centers.

As a professional, I inspect schools for safety or accessibility related issues. This includes touring schools to see the innovative work being done. For example, I am very passionate about single-user gender neutral bathrooms. Recently, I visited Two Rivers high school to look at what they have done. Their set up is the best I have seen yet and I often share what I have learned with member districts.

I have set up several COVID vaccine clinics in schools across the metro. After seeing that so many families and students needed more than just COVID vaccines we began to include all childhood immunizations and well child exams for free. One nurse from ISD 191, told us how thankful she was because we were able to get all of her students vaccinated. It meant she didn't have to call "non-compliant" families anymore and could focus on serving students.

Observations from my visits have included observing some of the wonderful tactics staff have to redirect students in a positive way. As a mother, I often say "no" but teachers have so many great ways to redirect. I have observed some of the challenges

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

facing aging infrastructure and crowded schools and these visits have really highlighted some of the disparities across districts and within districts. For example, one school may have a beautiful new playground because the PTO raises so much money vs another in the same district with a deteriorating playground because there isn't enough money to support new equipment. In fact, I helped Dakota Ridge get its first ever PTO.

All of these experiences help shape the work I do now and at the legislature. The challenges facing rural schools with declining enrollment are different than those in districts who pass half a billion dollar bonds. My experiences working with facilities staff, nurses, teachers, and front-line staff often differ from those in administration. Seeing firsthand really helps inform my decision making.

I would gladly join you on any school tour.

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 work for an educational services cooperative, I was on the school board and I serve on my elementary PTO. My life is deeply entrenched in public education. I was also the regional COVID coordinator for metro area schools and I got to work with most metro area superintendents and many charter school directors. This really opened my eyes to how district leaders, organizations and state leaders work together, individually and with their teams. I had a unique perspective on decision making by leaders across Minnesota.

I attend conferences (MSBA, AESA, COSSBA, MASMS, behavioral health conferences, emergency preparedness and more) and participated in the Special Ed Advisory Council, Community Ed Advisory Council, Budget Advisory Council and district wellness committee. I am part of a Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN) on school-based health services and I attend meetings on school health in transition education. I talk to neighbors, parents, students, staff and the DCUE President. I also connect with district leaders across the metro from school board members to administrators. I am a member of MASMS, MSBA, MASBO and an ally with SNOM, MSSWA and MASE. I work with MDH on school health and MDE on school health and mental health.

I connect with organizations like AMSD, consultants who serve districts like IEA and JQP Inc, local public health organizations across the metro, and service coops across the state. I have reached out to Chris Williams on occasion as well. I also follow Ed MN on FB, read local and national publications and connect with lawmakers around education related legislation. Often the best information is from the people doing the work or from those who are impacted by the decisions. I try to connect with a variety of people to hear about issues from multiple perspectives.

Finally, as a Humphrey Policy Fellow last year, we helped pass legislation that allows schools to bill Medicaid for social worker services to students with IEPs. We met with a lot of stakeholders and this work helped identify the major disconnect with DHS around this subject. I often dig in when I see a problem and getting input from people, especially those doing the work, is critical to making informed decisions.

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?

Currently, I reach out to the DCUE President routinely to hear from her how the members are doing and what the state of affairs is. I've reached out to several people at Education Minnesota regarding issues. I would hope that open lines of communication would exist at this level as well with both unions in district 52B and Education Minnesota. We may not always agree on an issue but I suspect that there is common ground we could find or at least we could understand each other's viewpoint. I think I would hear more from educators as a representative than as a school board member. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't like to share their thoughts with board members for fear of retaliation (which is a legit concern and not ok).

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

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #
1472**

It feels like education is often a juggling act of competing priorities urban/rural, academics/athletics, parents/administration. I would like to work together to find common ground and I know that sometimes it isn't personal. I would rely on you to help me better understand the position of Education Minnesota. I would rely on the district union leadership to help me understand what is happening on the local level and together we can find a path forward.

Sometimes the competing priorities are more of a messaging issue, and we need to get everyone rowing in the same direction to be the most effective.