

**2024 Candidate endorsement questionnaire : Entry #  
1657**

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Candidate endorsement questionnaire - SPFE office

**Candidate name**

Leigh Finke

**Election district**

66A

**Party endorsement**

DFL

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**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?**

I would support the position of the union in this matter.

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**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.**

Yes

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**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?**

Among other things, free four year college for all in-state students at public schools.

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**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?**

Among other things, ensure they are not overburdened by secondary costs so they can focus on education, rather than work.

**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?**

Ensure strong work conditions, small classrooms, quality pay, and other strong contract items.

### **Standardized testing**

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

no system-level decisions should be fully based on standardized tests. test scores can be useful to help understand individual student learning, and what supports may be necessary for SPED needs.

### **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?**

protect access to books, ensure schools have inclusion policies to keep students feeling safe, among others.

**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

### **Time to Teach**

**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

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**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?**

Anything I can do to support our unions, I'll be there.

**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

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**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?**

JJ Hill Montessori, Murray Middle School.

**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 have students in SPPS, and know many educators. I've also previously served three years on PTO. I work with our school board, and w friends with several.

**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 am an honest and direct communicator. If there are issues that arise, I will be sure to let you know.

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

My primary concern for our schools is protecting trans, nonbinary and 2-spirit students, and there will likely be times when disagreements with LGBTQ advocacy groups and others on this issue. I understand that issues are complicated and require open communication and compromise.