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Candidate endorsement questionnaire - Duluth office

Candidate name

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Election district

8A

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?

This is an issue that I am actively learning more about. Last fall, while representing the Minnesota Professional Firefighters, I attended a meeting of the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement in Duluth. I was deeply impressed by the turnout

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of teachers advocating for changes to the current two-tier pension system, which creates significant disparities in retirement benefits. In February, at the invitation of Jim Olson from the Duluth Federation of Teachers, I attended an informational meeting to gain further insights into the challenges faced by educators. The severe early retirement penalties of up to 65% and having the oldest retirement age in the region are unfair and undermine the promise of a secure pension after a career of service. As a future recipient of a defined benefit pension PERA, I understand the critical importance of this commitment and the need to address these inequities.

Our students deserve high quality and dedicated educators, and to achieve this, we need to give teachers a competitive living wage, good healthcare benefits, and meaningful retirement at an appropriate age. Many teachers will not be able to work an entire career in a classroom due to the increased demands and toll on physical and mental health that teaching has become. We need to offer teachers flexible avenues to retirement benefits wherever they may end their career. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to be teaching at age 62/64/65 when kids expect and need higher energy. Education is a passion that can't be phoned in at the expense of our youth.

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

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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

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?

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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?

Higher education has evolved since I attended St. Cloud State over 25 years ago. At that time a state education was still affordable and I was able to graduate without crippling debt. Today, that is not the case for many Minnesotans. We need to expand opportunities for those who wish to pursue two and four year college degrees, whether that be fixed tuition, expanding college in the schools (CIS), or increasing options for student loan forgiveness.

We are also starting to recognize that a college degree is not the end-all, be-all answer to be successful. The apprenticeship model that many of our trade unions employ is an amazing job training opportunity that not only provides the necessary training and education, but also allows the students to work in their trade and, importantly, earn a living while they are training.

As a state, we should work with stakeholders to forecast where Minnesota has - or anticipates - an undersupply of workers. With that knowledge, we can explore avenues the state can take to assist, supplement, and emulate these apprenticeships so that we can ensure we have enough workers to keep building Minnesota. For example, currently, there is the Minnesota Paramedic Scholarship, which is a temporary scholarship program targeting the lack of paramedics. State-supported programs like this can help produce the workers that will be the backbone of our state's middle class.

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?

We often see well-intentioned legislation revealing other issues or creating unfunded mandates that need to be addressed. The North Star Promise (NSP) aims to support students from families with an adjusted income below \$80,000, but it does not cover expenses beyond tuition and associated fees. This leaves students responsible for books, housing, transportation, food, and other living costs. Many potential students will not feel capable to take on these expenses, even with the tuition scholarship. As a legislator, I would advocate for expanded financial assistance options to ensure these students can meet their basic needs while pursuing higher education.

Additionally, providing robust support services is crucial. Establishing a network of guidance counselors specifically trained to assist first-generation students and those from historically underserved communities would be a significant step. These counselors can help navigate academic challenges, financial aid, and personal issues. Furthermore, creating mentorship programs that pair incoming students with upperclassmen or alumni who have similar backgrounds could foster a supportive community and enhance their college experience.

Investing in comprehensive support services and expanding financial aid will help ensure that students benefiting from the North Star Promise have the resources and guidance they need to succeed.

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

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High-quality professional educators

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

There are a number of things that can be done and that I would support as a legislator. To recruit and retain high-quality educators we need to:

Pay them what they are worth. Educators have a tremendous responsibility in teaching and caring for students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2017-2018 over 68% of teachers had a master's degree or higher. With this combination of responsibility and education, we need to pay teachers more.

Improve working conditions. Teachers are working in decaying infrastructure without proper ventilation, air conditioning, or functioning spaces. We see many teachers sicker more often and longer, and we have all heard the recent calls to give educators a bathroom break. Teachers deserve better, and I believe Minnesota should be a leader in this area.

Provide resources. We need more counselors, paraprofessionals, ESP, technology updates/improvements, and materials so that teachers can focus on teaching.

Stop preying on teacher compassion. Schools survive on the fact that teachers, because they feel obligated to do what's best for their students, will invest their own time and money so that students' needs are met. It is telling that when, as a form of solidarity, teachers enmasse will teach to their contract hours and it is the equivalent to a strike. I cannot think of another profession where year after year people are expected to give so much.

I don't think the next generation of workers is going to live to work and they won't be entering professions where they are expected to continually be under-resourced and under-appreciated. We cannot continue to ask for teachers to do more with less.

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 are a flawed and imperfect measure of student learning under perfect circumstances. When you factor in the immense challenges facing so many of our school children, particularly circumstances outside the school environment, then the use of standardized tests as a measure of student ability or teacher success becomes laughable.

That said, I think we can all see that there has been a nationwide drop in literacy levels over time, requiring a systemic reboot and a hard look at what we prioritize in education. Standardized testing can demonstrate when there are accumulating deficiencies in a topic area across a large geographical population. It serves a very limited purpose.

Under no circumstances should we tie school funding to testing scores. Likewise, we should be mindful of not holding public schools to higher standards than we do charter schools — both receive public funding and both should be accountable for providing robust educational opportunities.

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?

Minnesota is off to a great start with the new legislation that was passed last session that bans book bans, but there are more proactive steps we can take that go beyond the freedom to read, that ensure students have books they can see themselves in. My wife is an elementary school teacher and was told to remove posters, not celebrate Black History Month, and not read age appropriate books on these exact topics because it upset some of the parents (not students). At that point, she was not tenured and complied out of fear of retaliation, and because her principal and superintendent told her she was required to. We know we have students facing a variety of questions about culture, identity, sexuality, and more. What better way to support and provide an inclusive environment than by reading books about and by authors of many perspectives? This is just one example I'm aware of, a

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teacher being censured and students missing a learning opportunity as a result. Teaching children about our history, the good and the bad, will allow those students to develop a sense of who we are, where we came from, and be sure that we are always heading somewhere better.

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

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

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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 have been a union member for 22+ years and a union officer for over 16 years, this has helped shape my mindset and who I am. Unions do so much, not only for their members, but for the people and communities that they serve. Unions like Education Minnesota often are negotiating for so much more than the “basics” of wages, benefits, and working conditions. They use their collective power to fight for smaller classes, resources for their students, as well as equity in the schools and classrooms. As a legislator, I will be committed to protecting and expanding the rights of public and private sector labor unions. This will involve actions such as bolstering and safeguarding the Minnesota Public Employer Labor Relations Association (PELRA), forcefully promoting project labor agreements (PLAs), and backing card check neutrality agreements. Personally, I find the most exciting developments in the labor movement to be the successful organizing efforts in traditionally non-unionized sectors and locations. Notable examples include the unionization of the Volkswagen plant in Tennessee and the wave of Starbucks workers nationwide voting to form and join unions.

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?

In the last year, I have regularly visited my wife’s and daughters’ schools (Proctor School District). For the last eight years, I have brought the fire truck that I am working on to Bay View Elementary where we give a presentation to kindergarteners and first-graders on fire safety. I am always amazed by the care and compassion the teachers and staff have for the students. After giving presentations and being “on” for two hours, I am exhausted; the fact that teachers can do this all day, every day is truly extraordinary. Teachers are regularly put into the untenable position of being an educator, social worker, counselor, therapist, and caregiver to students and it is taking a tremendous toll. By knowingly underfunding and understaffing our schools, school districts have preyed on the compassion and self sacrifice of teachers for years. I would happily visit more schools in the district!

What have you done to become informed on issues relating to public education? What organizations and individuals do you go to for your information?

Most of my information on public education comes from my wife, Dehlia, who is an elementary school teacher (currently teaching 3rd grade) and serves as the vice president and lead negotiator with Education Minnesota-Proctor. Her active involvement in the local union keeps me informed on numerous issues. As an active member of the Central Labor Body in Duluth, I also receive

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regular updates from teachers and support personnel at our monthly meetings. Additionally, I have attended events such as the University Education Association-Duluth rally for a fair contract, the Duluth Federation of Teachers (DFT) informational meeting on pensions, and the DFT elected official meet and greet. Furthermore, I maintain relationships with several school board members and other elected officials in the area, which provides me with additional insights and information.

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 envision our relationship as one built on trust, respect, and regular communication. My goal is to engage in ongoing conversations about issues and legislation that affect both teachers and students. This includes attending meetings, participating in discussions, and staying informed about your concerns and priorities. I am committed to transparency and will always be honest with you about what I can and cannot accomplish. If we disagree on an issue, I will communicate openly and respectfully, explaining my perspective and the reasons behind my stance. I also pledge to listen carefully to your viewpoints and work to find common ground or compromise.

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

If elected, I will balance competing priorities between Education Minnesota and other education groups through thoughtful deliberation and open communication. Generally, I align with Education Minnesota because I believe unions play a critical role in advocating for teachers and students. Teachers are on the frontlines of education and interact with students daily, and both need strong advocacy and political support. In cases of differing perspectives, I will try to understand all viewpoints and work to find common ground. My commitment is to be transparent and accountable, ensuring that all stakeholders feel heard and respected.