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Candidate endorsement questionnaire - Duluth office

Candidate name

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Election district

8B

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 will continue working in partnership alongside educators, bill authors and coalitions, the committee members and Chairs, and leadership to direct pension investments that expand and stabilize retirement options. If re-elected, I'll be proud to continue

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advocating with you and for investments such as the 2023/2024 Pensions Bill that provides millions in state aid dedicated to helping our educator pensions plans that will fund earlier retirement dates, reduce teacher contribution rates, and enable more educators to enter the TRA plan. My grandmother was an esp for Duluth Indian Ed for 25 years and I understand deeply how pensions are a promise, show of respect, and a reciprocity to take care of educators who take care of our kids and communities. That was only possible only because the union fought for full-time benefits for ESPs who were historically denied pension, health insurance, as well as livable wages. If re-elected, I'm fully Ready to renew my commitment alongside my House DFL colleagues to prioritize teacher pensions and continue progress towards aligning our teacher pensions with other teacher pension funds across the nation and make Minnesota more competitive with surrounding states.

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

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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?

Yes

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

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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?

As someone who was the first in my family to graduate from high school and college, I know the challenges first time college students have when it comes to tuition, wrap-around supports, and more on the path to graduation. Legislation and investments matter when it comes to intentionally funding scholarships to support post secondary education access, so that our students leave debt-free and resource-abundant from public colleges and universities. I will continue to support funding that expands equitable access, success, and opportunity for students who have historically been unable or discouraged from attaining higher education. I will support the expansion of the North Star Promise to more students in public campuses, existing federal and state debt forgiveness programs and ensure that state programs like Minnesota's Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment Program are funded and expanded to cover more teachers and more costs, student teacher stipend and reimbursements. I was proud to carry the Teachers of Color bill in the Higher Education committee that seeks to increase funding to recruit and retain educators of color by lowering the cost of tuition and related expenses for students.

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?

In my first term, we've been focused on delivering historic new investments in education while providing Minnesota schools sustainable funding to meet the needs of all students and educators. As the Vice Chair of the House DFL People of Color and Indigenous Caucus, we believe that when we say achievement gap, we're talking about opportunity gap. We're people who have done more with less, in the face of systemic failures. There's an opportunity gap, there's a hope gap, and there's an investment gap. That's why I'll continue working in the Coalition for TOC, Ethnic councils, Tribal Nations/urban communities, partnership with school board members, teachers and ESP's, and parent leaders to fully and equitably fund our public schools in a way that focuses on providing public education that alters the arc of children's lives by addressing academic, social, and cultural needs that allow every student to thrive. I would continue that fight forward for more state funding for post secondary education opportunities and higher education to help keep tuition costs from rising, and investing in facilities and school environments that are culturally affirming, including by serving on the Capital Investment program where we are preserving and investing in modernizing facilities in ways that seek to reduce tuition burden on students, better reflect students, and are gender inclusive. It's also vital that support and funding be available for hyper-localized solutions such as on-campus mentoring, training and professional development opportunities, digital inclusion, bolstering early childcare so our families and non-traditional students can obtain education barrier-free. I'll also continue working directly with students, institutions, and partners - for example as I did with the University of Minnesota system - to advance tenant rights and housing affordability so they can focus on their education and live their fullest lives inside and outside of the classroom.

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 will support the expansion of the North Star Promise to more students in public campuses, existing federal and state debt forgiveness programs and ensure that state programs like Minnesota's Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment Program are funded and expanded to cover more teachers and more costs, reimbursements/stipends for student teachers who are learning to educate

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our future workforce and they deserve economic security, and will continue to champion bills such as the Teachers of Color bill in the Higher Education committee that seeks to increase funding to recruit and retain educators of color by lowering the cost of tuition and related expenses for students. I'm incredibly proud of the gains made together and excited to build on the investments we've made in paying student teachers. For example, the E-12 Finance Bill created a one-year pilot program to pay the entire student teaching cohort of eight schools, including for UMD and Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in our communities. This will help about 900 student teachers complete their teacher preparation programs with less stress and undue burden because all students deserve a world-class education and an opportunity to succeed. My other cousin is a special ed teacher who has to also moonlight in other side jobs to be able to be in the classroom, with the students she loves, cares about, and is most passionate just to make ends meet for her family. We need to fully fund the public education system: support paid, dedicated time outside of student contact time for special education teachers to complete their sometimes redundant and burdensome paperwork and required meetings, that take time away from their students. A recent survey of more than 900 special education teachers and paraprofessionals found 98.4 percent were "moderately to extremely frustrated" with paperwork. In addition, we need high-quality and healthy support staff which is why I support building and diversifying our career force such as by creating a special education teacher pipeline program and aid training for our paraprofessionals/ESPs, fully funding education so schools can plan for the future, and establishing higher minimum salaries to recruit, retain, and respect educators across the state.

Standardized testing

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

Our schools can't thrive unless we make them a top priority, so I'm committed to fully funding our public schools so they have the resources they need to deliver the education all of our children deserve. Teachers can't give individual attention in packed classrooms, so it's crucial we fund smaller class sizes so teachers and ESP's can teach and support to individual student needs and foster strong relationships. Professional development and pathways and rewards for career advancement, testing regimes that make sense for student growth, and proper supports such as fully funded and staffed esp's paraprofessionals, mental health services, social workers, counselors, and nurses – so these critical student needs are not ignored and by default fall back to teachers. As a parent of a student in the Misaabekong Ojibwe immersion program, I know that testing is stressful for students and educators alike, let alone when you add in language barriers. Although effective testing is essential for educators and local districts to effectively develop learning plans for students, collect feedback on student learning, and identify system-wide areas for improvement, state and local district standardized tests are usually blunt and poor tools for such evaluation. Too often these tests are used more to punish than to illuminate and diagnose, and they tend to put higher priority on certain subjects or learners over others, and perhaps a better shift is to move focus from so-called "achievement gaps" to opportunity gaps by collecting qualitative information that is close to the learner, highlight student strengths, and and community voice to develop equity-centered data and approaches.

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?

As book bans spread across the country, in another form of bullying, it is more important than ever to cultivate inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities. For example, The American Library Association has reported a 20% increase from 2022 to 2023 in attempts to censor library materials and services, with most book challenges including writing by a person of color or LGBTQIA+ individual. In my first term, as the first trans non-binary/Two Spirit person to serve in the MN House DFL, together with our POC/Queer Caucuses, we have been focused on making investments in libraries, READ act curriculum, and leading game changing legislation such as Indigenous Education for all. We passed the ban on book bans in the E-12 Policy Bill that prohibits a public library from banning, removing, or restricting access to a book based solely on the viewpoint, messages, ideas, or opinions it conveys. We've also taken a holistic approach and taken the lead of Minnesota youth in passing the Ethnic Studies Curriculum, health studies standards, accelerated gender inclusive restrooms, increased the number of school counselors and mental health

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supports in the face of bullying, and beyond to protect students freedoms and right to see themselves fully, authentically, and accurately reflected and included in Minnesota schools.

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

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

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policies backed by anti-worker groups?

Yes

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

I will do all of the things checked above, and I will be a vocal supporter and champion. I grew up in a union family and was raised by my grandmother on a public union pension. I believe all working people, in both the public and private sectors, have the right to join in union and bargain collectively in an environment free of interference, intimidation, or reprisals. Unions are about more than secure employment, better wages and benefits, and workplace safety. They also serve the public interest by providing professionals the security and protection to use their professional judgment to advocate for and serve the public good. In addition, I will support workers' efforts to organize by issuing public statements, attending rallies, supporting organizing, and sponsoring public forums. As a member of the Labor and Finance committee, I will provide an effective and strong voice for the working people and their families in our state and work to increase the visibility of working families' issues, the union movement, and oppose all anti-labor legislation that seeks to roll back our historic labor victories.

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 participated in the Lowell Elementary for Principal as a Day and have done many visits in my former role in Mayor's office, Meyer Wilkins, Laura MacArthur, East High School, among several others. My observation, most broadly, is a feeling of gratitude for the amazing, resourceful, and dedicated educators I've seen in action – from teachers, to paras, to food service workers, social workers, school nurses and counselors, special education, and custodians.

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

In both my previous job at St. Scholastica and in my current job, I've had the opportunity to work with schools across the state, especially around families and students in transition. I've worked with Head Start, ACE, Indian Student Services, Office of Equity, school principals, the Superintendent amongst others to get struggling families what they need so their children can be in the classroom. Simply said, as a legislator there are things I can do and fight to ensure schools are fully funded, that educators are paid fairly, and that schools have wrap-around supports we know make successful learning and good working environments from small class sizes, mental health supports, prep time, ESP Bill of rights, and special education. As a legislator, I spend time with Education Minnesota members, visit student groups like the Duluth Schools Gay Straight Alliance and youth against commercial tobacco meetings, actively engage with local electeds and school board, consult with families and students on issue that directly impact them, built relationships and policy with organizations such as Minnesota School Board Association, and developed close

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working relationships with the Chairs of Education in the House and Senate to better advocate and stay informed on legislation, as well as to take immediate action on gaps in policy and funding.

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?

As a state legislator, I approach issues collaboratively, able to hold tension, work across lines of difference, and look to the people doing the work for ideas, insights, and solutions. I've been clear that my approach are my 4 "R's": respect, relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility to each other and our communities. That means I will carry forward communicating with Education Minnesota on issues impacting educators come before me or that I'm leading on. While I can't promise that I will support every position of Education Minnesota (though I believe we have been entirely aligned in my first term, I will proactively seek out and listen to your ideas and explanations, and I will not sit back and wait to be lobbied or try to hide if we disagree. If we disagree, you will know where I am coming from and why, and I will know where the union is coming from and why and that we are all in this work as champions for education and students.

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

No other union or association comes close to the 84,000 educators represented by Education Minnesota represents over 84,000 educators. As we pace forward in the face of unknown budget and policy agendas, Education Minnesota will no doubt remain a central and significant voice based on both numbers, expertise, and reputation in this work together.