

**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD
LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE SURVEY**

Name: Berta Gardner

District: HD 24 Midtown Anchorage

Please limit each response to no more than 50 words.

1. 21st Century Challenges:

The economy and demographics of Alaska are changing in the 21st Century. Even as state and federal standards require districts to bring all students to greater proficiency, employers demand graduates with continually increasing and changing content competencies.

- A. How do you think our schools/district should change to ensure that all students receive an education that will equip them to succeed?

We know that reducing class sizes, particularly in the lower grades, improves outcomes. I'm concerned about the chronic focus on testing and would like to explore eliminating some of the testing so that teachers can focus on mastery of the materials. Finally, we need to reduce our drop-out rates by increasing non-academic opportunities including athletics and job skills training to keep kids in school and perhaps by instituting consequences for truancy.

- B. What, if any, is the role of the legislature in implementing or facilitating these changes?

I'm exploring the truancy issue and also possibly a 13th grade for students who have recently graduated high school with good grades and a good attendance record but who need remedial work to participate at the University at the freshman level. I also support increase work force development programs such as those at the King Career Center.

- C. What ideas do you have to help school districts prepare Alaska's students to meet the current and growing demand for a trained and technically skilled workforce?

Yes, incentives for staying in school, consequences for not attending school and opportunities for skills development at school.

2. Increasing Technology Needs for Student Learning and Parent Access to Information:

Not always visible, but critical to the success of the whole education program, technology must receive the increased attention required to keep up with ever-expanding demands.

- A. What role do you see technology playing in education of today's students for jobs of the future?

This year the legislature declined to fund request by the Dept of Labor for portable job skills training modules. This is short-sighted.

In a state like Alaska, with a small wide-spread population, distance learning, dependent on technology, is especially important to increasing opportunities, experiences and training.

- B. What is your plan for providing adequate funding to meet the growing and ever-changing need for technology in our schools to keep our students competitive in the global market?

As a PTA President I was involved in retrofitting our local elementary, middle school and high school for internet access. This many years later it seems silly that PTA's had to do that when it is evident that without access to current technology our students cannot be competitive.

3. Early Childhood Education:

Alaska is one of only ten states that do not offer early childhood education for 3- and 4-year-olds. What are your thoughts about providing early childhood education opportunities in Alaska?

I believe that any child who meets the Head Start requirements should have access to pre-school and other assistance as needed. I believe we should have no wait lists for Head Start and programs in every community with unmet needs.

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4. Highly Qualified Staffing Needs:

What ideas do you have to help Alaska school districts attract and retain highly qualified and ethnically diverse teachers, principals and other professional staff?

We should work to recruit and train from inside the communities where we need teachers, administrators and staff. I support needs based tuition assistance for all students and loan forgiveness for students in target fields and communities.

5. Capital Needs:

The State of Alaska currently estimates that school districts need about \$1 billion this year to meet current requirements for new schools and major maintenance to existing facilities. Anchorage alone has \$800 million in identified needs (at today's costs) over the next ten years, but outstanding bonded indebtedness has become a concern to local voters. As a legislator, how would you propose that we address this need?

Anything given for free is undervalued. We need to find a way to ensure that all communities participate in some way with their schools.

6. Ideas for Improving Alaska's Public Schools:

Please discuss any ideas you have about improving Alaska's public schools or the way we fund them.

I'm excited that from now on the Education Committee will be a full standing committee. I'd like to move away from just talking about more money when we consider education. I want to know why our graduation rate is so low. I want to find ways to improve identification of learning disabilities before students are failing, and offering appropriate services before they've given up.

I want to explore instituting consequences for truancy and I want to be certain that high school diplomas means students have mastered basic materials.

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