

**Anchorage School Board
Legislative Candidate Survey**

Name: Con Bunde

District: Senate District P

Please limit written responses to 50 words or less.

1. PERS/TRS cost Increases for Employers:

The state's actuary consultant has indicated the statewide unfunded liability for the PERS and TRS retirement systems is \$6.9 billion as of June 30, 2005. The Alaska Retirement Management Board recently established employer contribution rates for the Anchorage School District for FY 2008 to be 40.89% for PERS and 54.03% for TRS. This equates to approximately \$80 million increase in retirement costs for all funds in the Anchorage School District compared to the current year.

- A. Will you support full state funding of the state-mandated employer cost increased to PERS/TRS within the first 60 days of the legislative session so districts are not forced either to reduce core services or to give layoff notices to tenured staff while waiting for a solution?

Yes

- B. What is your solution for meeting the long-term funding demands of PERS & TRS?

The PERS/TRS deficit will be part of the operating budget for the next several years.

However, returning to the previous system that causes the deficit is not an option I'd support.

- C. What ideas do you have to help districts recruit and retain highly qualified teachers given the new defined contribution retirement program?

Encouraging U of A to increase the supply of new teachers will be helpful. Also increasing new teacher starting salaries should be considered.

2. State Funding for K-12 Education:

Education is a core, essential function of the state as established by the Alaska constitution. However, each year school districts must implore the Alaska Legislature for funds adequate to meet rising costs and increased mandates from the state and federal governments. The need to mount this yearly effort is disruptive, time-consuming, and wasteful, while leaving districts unable to do meaningful long-term planning due to uncertain funding.

- A. What are you willing to do as a legislator to ensure that K-12 education receives adequate state funding this coming year in order to meet both federal and state mandates?
State funding for education has increased over 30% in the past 4 years. I assume it will increase again this year.
- B. Aside from the PERS/TRS issue, what is your solution for meeting the long-term funding needs of K-12 education, providing for both adequacy and reliability?
I think the current system at school districts presenting their needs and showing their accountability to the legislature will provide for adequate and reliable funding.
- C. What would be your solution for helping districts meet the additional cost burden when intensive needs special education students enroll after the count date for funding?
We need to continue to seek adequate special ed funding from the federal government and schools have to continue to be thoughtful in their planning.

3. School Debt Reimbursement:

Funding of the state's school debt reimbursement obligation is subject to annual appropriation by the legislature. In addition, a program created by the legislature to reimburse 60% to 70% of debt service applies only to bond-funded school construction and maintenance projects approved by voters before November 30, 2008 and then expires.

- A. Will you support full funding of the state's existing school debt reimbursement commitments?
Yes.
- B. What is your solution for meeting the long-term school construction and maintenance needs of school districts across the state?
Support for school bonds should remain a local issue.
- C. Do you support extending the current state school debt reimbursement program to cover projects voters approve in the future?
Yes, if adequate state funds are available.

4. Changing Economy and Increased Academic Expectations:

The economy of our country and our state is changing. Even as state and federal standards require districts to bring all students to greater proficiency, employer requirements of graduates continue both to increase and to change in content.

- A. How do you think our schools/district should change to meet the needs of a changing economy and increased academic expectations?
School districts should bring back voc/tech classes that were part of previous school options.
- B. What, if any, is the role of the legislature in facilitating or implementing these changes?
Legislators can encourage school districts to try to meet new and growing employment by support for programs such as the current Dept. of labor voc/tech outreach. However, curriculum choice will remain a local option.
- C. What ideas do you have to help districts prepare Alaska's students to meet the current and growing demand for a trained and technically skilled workforce?
See above.

5. **Increasing Technology Needs related to Student Learning and Parent Access to Information:**

Like a foundation not highly visible but critical to the success of the whole education program, technology in our school system must receive the attention due to such an essential base.

- A. What role do you see technology playing in education of today's students for jobs of the future?
The ability to use current and new technology is an important tool for our students.
- 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?
This is and should remain one of the need presented to the legislature when districts request state foundation formula funds.
- C. How will you help districts update antiquated student information systems to, among other needs, allow educators and parents access to assessment and achievement information to make the best decisions for students' academic programs?
This need should be prioritized, in light of other school needs, by local districts in their fund requests.