

**Anchorage School Board
Legislative Candidate Survey**

Name: Johnny Ellis

District: Senate District L

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?

Over the next two decades we will need to make state appropriations to address the unfunded liability. The systems need to be modified to again allow all employees to contribute.

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

I support a return to a defined benefit plan.

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?

I am planning to make K-12 funding a top spending priority and will advocate that position and vote accordingly.

- 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 favor creation of an Educational Endowment using oil and gas revenues.

- 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?

The state should make an allowance for these students in the foundation funding formula.

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?

Every session I prioritize these needs in the capital budget and will continue to push them to the top of the list.

- C. Do you support extending the current state school debt reimbursement program to cover projects voters approve in the future?

Yes.

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?

I would like to see more seamless connections between ASD, the University and private sector employers.

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

Truly adequate, timely and predictable state funding are our state obligation.

- 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?

In order to meet the future demands of a knowledge based economy, I believe we may well need to fundamentally redesign the classroom and provide appropriate technical training for teachers.

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?

Technology will play a vital role in the lives of today's students. Almost every industry now requires some technological proficiency and that will only increase over time.

- 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?

An Education Endowment together with other funds should cover these costs.

We should set a goal of all sophomores having a laptop computer for their academic work.

- 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?

I will do my best to accommodate your capital request to perform these needed upgrades.