

**Anchorage School Board
Legislative Candidate Survey**

Name: Pat A. Abney

District: 32

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?

Repair the old system and increase the employer's contribution slightly. Use State funds to reduce/pay off the deficit. We also need to address rising health care costs, but in the end, the State has a mandate to fund education and should do so. Being able to attract and retain qualified teachers should certainly be a part of that funding.

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

Decrease classroom size, increase teacher compensation and return to a defined benefit retirement system.

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 willing to forward fund education, inflation proof that funding, and fund all mandates.

- 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 believe that an educational endowment fund with an inflation proof foundation formula would provide this and I will work towards such a fund.

- 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?

Funding should follow students and we should provide supplemental funding for special education students and programs.

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?

The State needs to continue to support funding for new construction and new construction should be built with low maintenance as an objective.

Additional State funding is needed for both deferred maintenance and on-going maintenance needs.

- 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?

Increased technical and vocational training opportunities are necessary. Also important are School Business Partnerships and the use of increased technology in our schools.

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

The legislature should provide technical resources and increased funding. Decisions on programs should be made at the district level.

- 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?

All graduates should be prepared for continuing education and we must expand our vocational and technical training to assist in meeting the demand for skilled workers. We also need to expand programs offered in-state so that high school graduates do not find it necessary to leave the state for the training/education they desire.

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?

We must enhance technology in the classroom as a tool for teachers and students. Technology will play an ever increasing role in the world and our students must be prepared and comfortable with its use.

- 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?

The State must have a long term fiscal plan and a "true commitment" to providing adequate funding for education. I feel that we have the funds to do so, and the State will continue to have those funds through careful management of our resources and a commitment to fund education over other "special interest" programs and issues.

- 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?

Listen to recommendations from districts and ensure adequate funding to achieve this goal. The State should also fund adequate numbers of counselors to assist students and parents in assessing this information.