

**Anchorage School Board
Legislative Candidate Survey**

Name: Pat Chesbro

District: House District 16

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?

This rate increase is not appropriate. The state needs to carefully examine the issues related to the PERS/TRS situation and find a reasonable approach to the situation. Districts cannot absorb this huge increase in employer costs. I am committed to ensuring that the legislature works rapidly to address these issues.

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

The state holds responsibility for funding programs that were instituted by the state. However, we must collaborate on a solution to this alleged deficit. Changing to a defined contribution plan exacerbates the situation; those who would be paying into the system for the next 25 years are not doing so.

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

This is difficult. We could change the law back to the defined benefit program. Or we could focus recruitment on those who are already retired. Or we could propose a retirement de-incentive, similar to our efforts in the 90's. Only this time we would pay people NOT to retire.

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?

An adequacy study was undertaken several years ago. We need to study it to decide adequate funding for the services we expect districts to perform and then fund appropriately. Education should also be forward funded so that districts no longer spend time in budget activities that may be ultimately fruitless.

- 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?

Education endowment could provide a steady revenue base for long term funding. The adequacy study should be examined to determine the true baseline for costs. Finally, state requirements that distract schools/districts from their missions to promote student learning should be removed so human resources could be used more effectively.

- 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?

Intensive needs special education students require extensive resources. Their funding should follow them from district to district.

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?

Debt reimbursement is a promise. It should be kept with full funding.

- B. What is your solution for meeting the long-term school construction and maintenance needs of school districts across the state?

The debt service reimbursement program should not expire. It is the best way to ensure that we keep up with the long term construction and maintenance projects in the organized districts. We must also ensure that the unorganized areas have adequate maintenance and construction funding through the capital improvement process.

- 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?

Schools should prepare students to live and work in a knowledge economy. This includes rigorous learning for all, renewed emphasis on critical thinking, and focus on learning to live with diverse people. Schools should be hotbeds of energetic debate about the issues of the day with global perspectives.

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

The most important role of the legislature is to encourage the wide view of education. Communities need to have the freedom to transform themselves. State agencies can be expected to provide technical assistance.

- 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?

Schools should prepare students to move into technical training and/or education. This includes rigorous coursework and hands-on learning in math, science, communication, the humanities, and the social studies. Knowledge should be applied. I do believe the schools' primary mission is to prepare students to enter the workforce directly.

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 is a tool that should be used in schools. It is not a separate subject, but a crucial ingredient for 21st century schooling. We must think

creatively about how to do this. Our biggest challenge is for educators to see the potential offered by technology and to use it appropriately.

- 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?

Any view of adequacy for school funding should take into account funding of the tools of technology. Actual decisions about the integration of technology should be at the district and school level as should the professional

- 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?

Though primarily a district issue, the state might help by negotiating with providers to offer reduced costs for districts, perhaps including contracts for ongoing support. Local systems should integrate with the state's student information system. Again, adequate funding should take into account district's needs for these services.