

**Anchorage School Board  
Legislative Candidate Survey**

Name: Ray Utter

District: Senate N

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?

**As you know the legislature does very little early in the Session. I will gladly advocate for prompt consideration of this matter.**

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

**In a year of windfall revenue, it was irresponsible not to address this funding problem. Now we must devote a portion of each year's budget toward resolving this matter.**

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

**Recruitment is not an area of expertise for me. I suppose districts will have to compare our system with those in effect in communities with which we compete for teachers. And, it sounds like there are many candidates and**

legislators, including myself, who want to push for a return to defined benefits.

## 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?

Re-examine the formula and work with the district to develop clear information and arguments about the 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 have no particular method in mind although I know there have been proposals in the past that would have lessened the dependence on last minute allocations. Again, we need to work on gaining agreement about what constitutes adequacy. Reliability will probably remain the effect of who is elected.

- 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?

I have no idea how severe this problem is. Perhaps there should be a second, later count date to handle this.

### 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?

**Without an estimate of the costs we would have to look at the possibility of payments over time which might require rescheduling of some projects.**

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

**Use the priority lists of districts instead of the whims of legislators.**

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

**This deserves consideration in light of the State's responsibilities for education and I suspect it will receive it as it has in the past.**

### 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?

**How is the work to schools program? Was it useful and is it still in use? I would expect the university and the Department of Labor to assist the districts in assessing such information.**

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

**Through legislative oversight of funding.**

- 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?  
**I can offer no new ideas at this time. The usual process of identification of need, analysis of existing effort and seeking modifications as necessary are certainly part of the process.**

**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?

**Education through technology and training in technology.**

- 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?

**Maximizing the participation of the technology industry in helping schools keep up to date and expecting technology to be a regular part of the annual budget process.**

- 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 would examine the relationship between the data kept by the Dept. of Education and the districts. Exploration of the ability of the Municipality, the University and the Dept. of Administration to assist in setting up an update schedule.**