

## 2020 SPFE Public Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

**Please limit the following questions to a yes or no response.**

- I. The Saint Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) believes parents, educators, community members, and students should be at the center of decision making around educational policy. However, increasingly out of state millionaires with a vested interest in pursuing a corporate education reform agenda have poured money into political races with the goal of removing local voices from discussions about our children's education.

- a. **Will you and your campaign reject contributions and independent expenditures from wealthy donors who live outside our community and from market-based education reform organizations?**

**Yes.**

- II. Despite recent increases, public education statewide is severely underfunded, and has not kept pace with inflation. Communities have increasingly been called on to make up the lack of funding by passing levies that increase property taxes for home owners, while wealthy corporations continue to receive tax cuts – allowing them to benefit from our communities without contributing to them.

- a. **Will you as endorse, support, and campaign on increasing revenue that will go directly to public education funding?**

**Yes.**

- III. SPFE members already participate in rigorous educator evaluations and have indicated that they do not want to participate in Q-Comp (Quality Compensation). The core components of Q-Comp include: performance pay and salary schedule reform, teacher evaluation, and job-embedded professional development. Each Q-Comp plan must include all of the core components. The implementation of Q-Comp requires performance pay to be based on standardized test scores. This funding is dependent on action by the state legislature.

- a. **Would you support moving the funding and capacity put into Tim Pawlenty's failed teacher merit pay scheme commonly called q-comp, into equitable funding for all Minnesota districts general budget?**

**Yes.**

- IV. **Do you support collective bargaining for public sector unions and will you fight to protect them?**

**Yes.**

**Please limit your response to 150 words or fewer for each part of the questions below.**

1. **What is your personal experience with public education as a student, or parent? How has public education benefited you personally?**

My parents were very concerned about putting me in public school in Hawaii, so I didn't get to attend public school until high school. I ended up having a phenomenal experience in school-- I am still close friends with many of the people I met there, and I have remained friends with many of my teachers, who continue to influence and inspire me until this day. In fact, one of my English teachers, Dr. Hughes, claims that I am her favorite student of all time.

As a parent, I insisted on sending my daughter to SPPS. I love that she gets to be in a French Immersion program and still attend a public school. She is exposed to all sorts of amazing students from every walk of life. Her teachers have been fantastic; they have bent over backwards to work with us and make her experience as positive as possible.

2. An endorsement from SPFE is only given to candidates that show they are a champion for public education. We do not endorse in all races.
- a. **What are your direct connections to SPPS, SPFE, and/or public education?**  
As I mentioned above, I am a proud graduate of a public school (go Waiakea Warriors!) and I now have a child in SPPS. My husband is a graduate of SPPS. I am also personal friends with members of the SPPS Board as well as several educators in the public schools.
- b. **How would you define "public education champion"?**  
A public education champion knows that each and every child deserves a quality education and schooling experience, regardless of their needs or means. A champion recognizes that fully funding out public schools isn't a waste of money, but an investment of our resources to create a better future for our children, and ultimately our city and state. Finally, a public education champion knows that our education system is fundamental to creating successful communities.
- c. **How would you describe your current relationship with SPFE member leaders?**  
To be honest, I didn't know most of the leaders before starting this campaign. But so far, they have been amazing, helpful, and very friendly. Regardless of whether I get endorsed, I look forward to partnering with them going forward.
- d. **Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?**  
I am seeking this endorsement because I believe that I am a public education champion, and I would like everyone to know it. I love and support SPPS, and I am always appreciative of their efforts to be accomodating and inclusive. I also think that all elected officials (especially DFL elected officials) need to recognize the importance of public education, and how we (as elected officials) can help to create more stable schools and support excellent teachers.
- e. **How do you envision working in partnership with SPFE? What does that look like when we disagree?**

I'm excited to work with SPFE, because I believe that our values align. However, I know that working with this group will require me to talk less about myself and what I believe, and will require me to listen closely to the issues and needs identified by the SPFE members and leadership. I hope that when we disagree, we are able to hold each other accountable, but also continue to work together. I like to keep communication open and frank, and I would hope that we could work together as partners at the legislature, knowing that we may not always be 100% in sync, but also knowing that we start with similar values that will guide us moving forward.

3. Over the past year, educators across the country have gone on strike. Just one year ago, SPFE narrowly avoided a strike by reaching a last-minute contract with the district.

- a. **What have you learned from the Red for Ed Movement?**

The Red for Ed movement has helped raise awareness of the superhuman efforts our educators take on behalf of their students and communities. We ask teachers to give so much, both in and out of the classroom. Those efforts need to be recognized, and more importantly, supported through policy. It also shows the strength of educators working together to bring about change. The value in strong organizing is that it builds more power and recognizes the power you already have. Red for Ed's organizing has galvanized potential power and has turned it into action. Collective action, from awareness campaigns to strikes, supports the important work that educators do, and it is necessary in order to show management what needs to be done.

- b. **CTU (Chicago Teacher Union) recently ended their strike. In addition to much-needed pay increases, the challenges facing their students are similar to the students of SPPS. How can you use your position to support educators, parents and students in addressing these concerns?**

I can be a visible and vocal champion for students and their educators. I can trumpet our shared values from my platform. I can push for changes in state law that give public schools the opportunity to respond and be more nimble while continued efforts by market education actors threaten our public schools. We need both the policies and the funding to support our students, help fulfill the needs of St. Paul parents, and make sure educators are treated like the professionals they are. I regularly talk to voters at the doors about the challenges our schools face, and we must make sure that the state does its part to support educators' commitments to racial, socioeconomic, sex and gender, and language equity issues, in addition to teaching and caring for our children.

- c. **Across the country, educators have been willing to strike so they can bargain for the things they know their students need. While no one wants a strike, sometimes this drastic step is necessary. How will you support Minnesota educators that avail themselves of this tactic? Under what circumstances would you support the hiring of replacement workers?**

Union workers only pursue a strike when it is absolutely necessary. In that situation, it's clear that change is needed in order to move forward. In the case of

a strike, I will stand shoulder to shoulder with educators. Hiring replacement workers is never acceptable.

4. Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) has a diverse student population, with over 75% of students identifying as People of Color. Parents and educators agree that in order for students to be successful, we must have culturally competent curricula and educators that reflect the diversity of our city.

- a. **Segregation and poverty are harmful to all of us, especially our students and their families. How will you work to integrate our city and our schools?**

We need to give our schools the flexibility to shape curriculum and programs that can serve all of our students. We also need to ensure that principals and other district leadership embrace that flexibility and make necessary changes so we don't continue losing students to charters that cater directly to specific student communities.

- b. **Our students of color deserve educators that look like them. While tiered licensure provides pathways to bring People of Color into relationship with students, it also prevents many from accessing the benefits and important worker protections of union membership. What are your ideas for expanding protections for these educators?**

While improvements to the Minnesota licensure process have to be made, they must be done with clear guidelines for how those workers can be brought into full union membership. Expanding access and representation in our workforce shouldn't come at the expense of union membership. I will listen to work with union leaders to expand this in whatever way I can - strong unions make a strong Minnesota.

5. At a time when our country and our state are facing many challenges – workers struggling with stagnant wages, People of Color facing increased instances of race-based discrimination, communities being devastated by gun violence, and an upcoming census to name just a few examples – SPFE believes that bold steps and leadership are required to create a more just and secure society. It is no longer enough to “take the right votes”.

- a. **Aside from increased education funding, what one piece of legislation will you bring forward to improve the lives of working families? How will this improve the lives of our students?**

A statewide \$15 per hour minimum wage is one of the most important things we can do for working families. It will help make families more financially stable, especially those who are struggling the most. An increase in income helps families meet their basic needs, which allows their children to better be able to learn and grow. Financial struggles are also correlated with health problems and family strife, which provides a better home environment for children to learn. Increased wages will allow families to have at least some greater housing stability, which enables students to grow and thrive with their teachers and peers

in one place. Raising up those earning the least will help all of us. An increased minimum wage drives other wages higher, which will benefit even more families. It will also likely increase state revenue from the economic activity stemming from families being able to spend more.

- b. **What past work (either at the legislature or your capacity as a private citizen) would you point to as bold leadership? How has this work positively impacted public education?**

I am currently the Chair of the Payne Phalen Community Council board. If you are not familiar with district councils, we provide community feedback and suggestions to the St. Paul City Council. In this role, I am always seeking participation and engagement with local high school students. I am also currently trying to figure out how we can create opportunities with the Payne Phalen Community Council that could provide high school or college credit for students.

- c. **How are you creating pathways for young and emerging political leaders?**

I honestly believe that young people have the power to shape our future, and I know that they are eager to. As a (relatively) young person, I understand common frustrations and roadblocks that young political leaders face. Since its inception, my campaign has been working with organizations to get new leaders doing meaningful campaign work. We know that young people are often seen as door-knockers and nothing more, so in addition to traditional organizing, we have worked hard to provide every member of our team with more complex tasks that are of interest to them and as much training and mentoring as we can provide.

6. The current federal Secretary of Education is well-known for her support of “disrupting” public education through “school choice” and privatization in the form of online learning, charter schools, and vouchers.

- a. **What is your understanding of how education reform policies impact public education?**

Market based education reforms, like school choice, open the door for private companies to line their pockets instead of putting the needs of students first. Even when intentions behind them might be good, opening this door is dangerous because of the power of these companies. Given the myriad of roles we expect our schools to serve, a profit-maximizing focus will fail our communities, our students, and our educators. These reforms also are used as an excuse to abandon support of public education by making it disposable. We must work to improve our educational system, not abandon it. More insidiously, these reforms are being purposely pursued to undermine public education unions to try to dilute their political power. On this basis alone these reforms should be rejected - the goal is almost never good policy and nearly always can be traced to union busting.

- b. **What is your understanding of how charter schools differ from local public schools?**

Though charter schools may technically be open to all students, they are not held to the same standards as local public schools, or required to provide the same level of special education and other student services. Many charters lack the

financial and democratic oversight that public schools have, which has lead many charters to financial mismanagement and questionable gains in student achievement.

- c. **Will you support a moratorium on new charter schools and charter school expansions so that a comprehensive study can be done on the impact of charters schools in our communities (including segregation, tax base, land use, and neighborhood impact)? Who would you partner with for this study? Who would you include as stakeholders?**

Yes. I would work with parents, teachers, education union leadership, administration officials, community members, and academics to try to provide the most comprehensive basis as possible to better understand all of the ways in which charter schools impact our communities.

7. The state of Minnesota presently does business with institutions that engage in practices that destabilize our community through predatory lending practices, investing in private prisons, and corporate tax avoidance. These practices have led to economic injustice and racial discrimination in our city.

- a. **How will you use your role to make sure that the largest corporations in Minnesota pay their fair share?**

I will proudly fight for the wealthiest people and corporations to pay their fair share to ensure that our families and communities have the support that they need. I'd support closing tax loopholes, a state capital gains tax on those with substantial investments, an increase in rate for top wage earners, and increasing taxable rate of the highest end of the estate tax.

- b. **Predatory lending practices increase foreclosure rates, destabilizing families. Will you join with SPFE in calling on banks to refrain from foreclosing on homes of school age students during the school year? What steps will you take to separate the state of Minnesota from institutions that participate in predatory lending?**

Minnesota needs to end any existing financial relationship we have with these banks immediately and I will proudly support any legislation to ensure these practices are outlawed within our borders.

- c. **Will you commit to working with SPFE to seek the revenue we need to have racially equitable schools? What does this look like to you?**

Yes. Racial equity means that students and families of all backgrounds are treated with respect and given substantive equality. It means that students, regardless of background, can achieve at the level of their white peers. Racial equity requires us to identify and dismantle the structural and implicit biases in our educational practices. It means we need curriculum that is culturally competent, more teachers that reflect the students in their classrooms, and more EL assistance. It means creating policies with the goal of more equitable graduation rates and narrowing achievement gaps. It means that input is actively

sought from all backgrounds, especially those that may not typically be as engaged in discussions on education policy. It means that we need to be vigilant to address racial disparities in factors that we can measure and be mindful of areas that may be overlooked. I'll fight for all of these.

8. The legislature increased E-12 funding by \$543 million dollars last year, which included \$90 million to address the special education short fall, and an increase of 2% to formula. Yet education funding hasn't kept up with inflation since 2003. Consistent underfunding by the state has mean that local school districts must ask local tax payers to increase their education levies.

- a. **It will take an additional investment of \$4.3 billion over the next two years to say that we are fully funding public education. How will you be a leader in securing this funding?**

First, I will work within the St. Paul delegation to ensure we are fully utilizing our power. Up until this point, St. Paul has not come even close to fighting to its full potential. Next, I will ensure we coordinate our house caucus position with the Walz administration to get two of the three conference committee players in sync. My ability to be a team player is one of the reasons I've already been endorsed by both of the Ramsey County Commissioners in 66B, as well as school board members Zuki Ellis and Steve Marchese. In my conversations with voters, I am already doing the work of explaining how increased state aid helps take some of the pressure off of local taxes, which means more of this organizing and leadership needs to be done in the district. I would plan to continue this leadership.

- b. **Everyone says they want to fully fund public education. Doing so would require new taxes, and it would only be fair for those to come from corporations and the wealthiest Minnesotans that currently don't pay their fair share. How will you support the move to a more fair tax structure in Minnesota in order to fully fund public education?**

I will support the move for more funding similar to Governor Dayton. We should focus on taxing large corporations and the wealthiest families that can afford to pay for the educational system that is the economic backbone of their wealth. I will be a visible and vocal champion for this cause. I'd fight to increase the rates on top earners, create a capital gains tax on people with substantial investments, and expand the estate tax to help fill the funding gap. This system of taxation is more fair and equitable instead of relying on local taxes that may have a greater impact on struggling families - those with a greater ability to pay should contribute more.

- c. **Using property taxes as a stopgap measure to fund public education is unsustainable. How will you bring urban and rural legislators together to end this practice and fully fund public education statewide?**

There are plenty of communities across the state who are in similar situations to St Paul. We need to start by bridging relationships with regional centers like Duluth, Rochester, Mankato, St Cloud, and Moorhead and expand from there.

I'm specifically strong as a partner and in relationship building and I believe that's something this district has been sorely lacking. As the diversity director at the Minnesota State Bar Association, I have extensive experience in bringing more progressive ideas to areas in greater Minnesota so that we all can share in Minnesota's prosperity. More work must also be done to communicate how local revenue increases are not sustainable and are generally less progressive than a statewide approach. I plan on continuing to have that conversation with every voter I talk to when they raise concerns about their taxes.

9. In 2018, SPFE joined our institutional partners in calling for elected officials to engage in co-governance and people-centered democracy. As a practice, this means engaging with your partners in all areas of public work, a willingness to be held accountable to promises, and on-going, open communication.

a. **What do the terms co-governance and people-centered democracy mean to you?**

To me, co-governance is engaging community groups and social actors to help in the decision making process. It is a goal and process that allows elected officials and community entities to hold each other accountable, and share in the responsibility of governing. I see people-centered democracy as a key aspect of co-governance, as it requires both elected officials and citizens to understand that people, not corporations, must be the focus of effective governance. For too long, our communities have bowed to corporate interests, and our politicians have been aloof and unresponsive. People feel disconnected from their government and their governance; that's where people-center democracy helps us create a government by the people, for the people.

b. **What groups and individuals will you look to for guidance?**

One of the most important things my father ever taught me was, "You don't need to have all of the answers. You just need to know where to find them." I believe that the people of St Paul, including parents, educators, and even students, have the best concept of their needs, and how to have those needs met. I also know that we are most powerful when we respect and acknowledge our respective needs, and work together to achieve them.

c. **What steps will you take to make sure decisions are made with communities, instead of for communities?**

I believe that one of the most important aspects of governing is listening. I plan to hold monthly listening sessions in the community; and it's essential to note, these will be actual listening sessions, not a report out about what I have been doing. My campaign has already started engaging the community in this way-- being present for community meetings, meet and greets, and union meetings-- with the understanding that we are there to listen and learn; not to speak.

d. **How will you separate your accountability to the public good from your personal feelings?**

I think this goes back to people-led democracy. As elected officials we need to trust our communities to let us know what they need. Doing this requires



openness, some vulnerability, and empathy. For example, I am compelled to run for office, because climate change is horrifying me. But I also recognize that it is a privilege to be thinking 10 years into the future, while some of my community members are wondering how they will pay rent next month. My housing is secure, but that reality is not everyone's. So I've made affordable housing a central aspect of my campaign. And, of course, I can make my affordable housing goals to reflect my climate change concerns, by focusing on energy efficient housing, recyclable materials, and green rooftops. But, most importantly, I've heard the needs and concerns of the community and I am reflecting those needs.

**10. What specific steps will you take to protect the right of workers – especially public sector workers – to bargain collectively? How will you encourage all workers to be part of a union, should they choose to?**

The ability to form a union is a logical extension of our right to speech and assembly. People attempting to organize a union should be protected from retaliation from their employers for exercising their basic rights. I will fight to make sure that any one who wants to be in a union can be in one, and as an organizer, I'm always glad to connect and empower people with shared struggles and interests. I'll also work to simplify the approval process for union contracts so there is less interference by politicians, and put basic protections and guidelines in place so that all of our state review processes - from environmental policy to purchasing to construction - take union hiring and membership into account.