

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?**
- V. 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?**

I grew up attending public schools, and earned my undergraduate degree from a public college in Wisconsin. My twin daughters attended St. Paul Public Schools, and graduated from Central High School. As a former legislator and candidate I've visited dozens of public schools across the state to hear and learn from educators and students first hand.

Public education helped shape my daughters and me. The educators that taught me, and the peers I went through school with were important and critical influences on the direction of my life. And as a legislator I always found school visits to be a critical grounding and centering reminder of what is actually at stake and actually important.

- 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, educators in St. Paul helped prepare my daughters and helped them grow into the people they are today. In addition, as a legislator, I worked closely with SPFE leaders, active members, and SPPS board members on issues related to funding and supporting the SPFE agenda.
 - b. How would you define "public education champion"?** A champion for education requires leadership that goes well beyond a strong voting record. To me it is about centering public education, and things that impact our students, in every aspect of budgeting and legislation, and thinking holistically about how we can best educate and serve students. For me, it means working in strong relationship in pursuit of the schools our children deserve.
 - c. How would you describe your current relationship with SPFE member leaders?** I believe it's a strong one. I work to engage regularly with Nick Faber and the member leaders I've built relationships with over the years, to say yes whenever I'm asked to engage or talk through something, and to support SPFE endorsed candidates. I trust SPFE when it comes to the issues and seek their advice and guidance with regard to the impact on St. Paul students, and those things have added up to what I believe is a powerful relationship.
 - d. Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?** Part of my interest in an endorsement is the answer to the question above. I consider SPFE a partner, and have worked closely with SPFE in all but one of my previous races. I want that partnership to continue and I want it to be one that we continue to strengthen.

The second part of the answer is that, for good reason, I personally, and most of the people I know, consider SPFE to be a critical validation that a candidate is truly committed to our students and to being a public education champion. It is

important to me that my potential constituents know that I've earned the support of our community's educators.

- e. **How do you envision working in partnership with SPFE? What does that look like when we disagree?** I envision our partnership continuing to build on what we've already built the last 12 years. To me that's a partnership defined by honest and open communication, a willingness to go to bat for each other, a commitment to talking before we act, and a bond that is more important than any one election. Through disagreements and moments of challenge, we have continued to work, to deepen our relationship and our ability to make progress. I am confident and committed to continue to do so.
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?** I think the Red for Ed Movement has reminded both union members and the public of the power of collective action, and the impact we can create when we stand united. I think it's also been a reminder that our students need and deserve to see us advocating for them and putting them first.
 - 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?** First and foremost we need to recognize that our schools are severely underfunded. Many of the answers to our challenges require the staffing and support levels our students need, and we need to fulfill our commitment to them. SPFE has been a leader (along with CTU) in recognizing and bargaining around class sizes, to create the schools our kids deserve, I'll join you in that fight. Second, we need to recognize the things outside of the school and school day that are impacting our kids, and ensure they have the housing, health care, food, and support they need to thrive.
 - 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?**

I'll support you the way I've supported countless other workers who've gone on strike, and the way I've supported you in walk ins and other actions, on the picket line. I do not support hiring replacement workers.
 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?**

My understanding is that much of the segregation of our schools reflects a combination of the segregation of our neighborhoods, large numbers of students from certain communities attending community-focused charter schools, and private schools appealing to students with the means to attend them.

If that analysis is correct, it seems to me the best way to combat school segregation goes back to funding. If any parent could look at the SPFS and see that students attending our schools receive the best education in the world, that at the same time would offer culturally relevant offerings to those seeking them, then I believe the natural outcome would be integrated schools.

That should be our benchmark, St. Paul kids deserve the best schools in the world, it's our collective job to ensure they have them.

- 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?** First off, I think we can come up with better and more effective ways to diversify our teaching core than the tiered licensure system currently in place. Minnesota has always had high standards for who we ask to educate our children and I think we need to revisit this discussion. But under the current standard with the folks already in classrooms we need to work with districts and local unions to make it possible for them to join the union AND to earn a full license

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?** I'd like to continue to make it harder to evict families with students who are enrolled in school. A safe home is a critical part of health and certainly of learning. Families are stretched thin, parents are not able to spend as much time as they'd like to with their kids, and kids deserve to be secure in their homes. Ensuring we don't kick students out of their homes during the school year would go a long way towards that.
- 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?** In 2014 I authored and worked to pass the HITA bill that has strengthened educators' voices in the insurance procurement process and lowered health insurance costs for educators and districts. This means healthier educators and more money in the classroom

- c. **How are you creating pathways for young and emerging political leaders?** I've made sure that my campaigns feature leadership opportunities for young leaders to learn, grow, take on big roles, and create their own paths. I've done similar work in the nonprofit sector, at the Capitol, and within mentorship and advocacy efforts
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?** Educators have taught me all about the education reform movement over the years. I'm clear on how they demonize educators, strip resources from classrooms, enrich private interests, and undermine our public schools.
- b. **What is your understanding of how charter schools differ from local public schools?** My understanding is that there is not one simple answer to that question. In general, I would say my understanding is that charters were originally meant to be alternatives to neighborhood schools that focused on a particular learning area or offered a particular set of classes or skills, but that some have stretched beyond that approach or structure and, in some cases, undermining neighborhood schools.
- 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?** I would support a moratorium as described provided that we committed to and funded the study at the same time. I'd like to discuss the idea of who should do the study and the stakeholders. Obviously educators should be part of the design and any table created to conduct the study, but I'd like to discuss your vision for how broad an effort like that becomes.
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 always have, and will continue to, support tax bills that ask those who can to pay their fair share. I have prioritized the things that matter to working families in our state and I've always opposed tax bills that stray from that. I will continue that approach and intend to be heavily involved in organizing around that commitment.
- 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?** Yes. As mentioned above, YES! In addition, I support encouraging the state Board of Investment to identify investments that BOTH meet the fiduciary responsibility of being sound long-term investments, AND reflect our values.
- 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. To me all of these conversations come back to the \$4.3 billion our schools need and our commitment to getting that done. If we think about funding as piecemeal or just for certain programs I'm concerned we may get some of those programs but lose the larger fight. So, absolutely, but as part of the fight for \$4.3B.
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?** I will work closely with SPFE, with the caucus, as part of my campaign, and in the legislature to make the case to both the public and my future colleagues. The revenue fight to accomplish this goal is going to be one of the biggest battles of our generation, and will take a serious and coordinated effort. I want to contribute to and be a leader in that effort.
- 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?** As noted in the previous answer, this is as much or more a revenue and tax fight as it is a budget and spending fight. They go hand in hand and I believe the campaign that must be run, and coordinated at every level, must make the case for public schools, with revenue as a critical part of that. I agree with your analysis of the policy side, a fairer tax structure is the only way to accomplish this goal, and I believe a coordinated inside and outside campaign is the path to achieving it.
- 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?** I'd refer to the answers above. The investment described is a modern version of the Minnesota Miracle. Making it happen, and doing it right, would not just fully fund our schools and make our state tax structure fairer, it would lessen or eliminate the reliance and burden on property taxpayers
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?** I believe co-governance is a commitment by candidates and elected officials to govern in true partnership with one or more organizations or people, committed to shared goals, and working in accountable partnership.

I think of people-centered democracy as a governing style truly focused on and committed to both a policy agenda that is populist and to campaigns and public service that engage, empower, and build up community and the people we serve.

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

I am running for the Minnesota Senate because I care deeply for Minnesotans and I hope to earn a seat to work with and for all of us.

12 years in public office and in seven campaigns have demonstrated the countless sources of information and the power of status quo brokers of information. I remain open to the ideas and discussion from disparate sources, practicing an open door policy. But I have honed a clear perspective on trusted sources of information. I look to those with lived experiences that inform my decision making, those with whom I share values, those with whom I have built trusted relationships, whether in conflict or alignment. I will continue to work, explore and deepen relationships in order to strengthen my capacity to lead and make decisions with Minnesotans at the center of my consideration.

- c. **What steps will you take to make sure decisions are made with communities, instead of for communities?** My campaign is regularly engaging in house parties, and I am working on setting up office hours at coffee shops and other activities to be both present and responsive to the people of SD 64. If elected I will continue those things, and expand them to include town halls and listening sessions, and make sure that work happens not just in election years but while I'm in session as well

- d. **How will you separate your accountability to the public good from your personal feelings?** It's rare in my public service that I've felt the two be in conflict. It's a great question. Ultimately, not every decision is black and white and many are not easy. I will listen, think, consult, and trust myself and the people around me.

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?**

To the first question, I will never support a bill that takes away or diminishes collective bargaining. And I will work with both labor and within the caucus, if I'm elected, to ensure that we stop any such measure from becoming law.

My campaign for governor was the first such campaign in the country to unionize. While I didn't win, I'm proud of that. To answer your question, I'll both take every opportunity I can to encourage people to join, participate in, and fight for their union, and, if I'm

elected, work to ensure that we expand collective bargaining and make it easier for people to join the movement.