

ALASKA PARENT HOMESCHOOL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Candidate Questionnaire

On Education and Parental Authority

Written answers from Senator Cathy L. Tilton, Senate District M

My own schooling, and my children's

I attended public school: Christian kindergarten, then Mt. View Elementary for first grade, Tudor Elementary, and Service High School in Anchorage. In the 1970s most Alaskan families used public school. That is why I want every family — not only those next to a strong neighborhood school — to have a real choice.

We raised Jordan, Damian, and Tylor in the Mat-Su. They attended a variety of educational opportunities including Christian school, public school, correspondence, and alternative school. Each of my sons had different needs, and I have found that no two children learn the same way — which is why I have supported and will continue to support expanding charters, correspondence, and homeschool options.

What school choice means

School choice means the parent — not a central office, Juneau, or a union — decides where and how a child is educated. Alaska already includes neighborhood public schools, public charters, district and statewide correspondence, and independent homeschooling. I have supported all of those as Representative, Speaker, and Senator. Choice is not an attack on public schools; competition raises the floor. I will protect charter authorization, keep correspondence allotments with families, and oppose bills that skim those dollars to pad district administration.

Testing

I do not support mandatory statewide testing for every Alaska K–12 student. I support honest accountability for schools that spend public dollars. I do not support a one-size-fits-all mandate that treats a homestead homeschool the same as a large urban district. Correspondence and independent home-education families should not be forced into state assessments as a condition of educating their own children.

Who directs a child's education

Parents and guardians are ultimately responsible for directing a child's education. That is a settled constitutional principle and a fundamental right. Teachers are essential partners. The State is a servant of the people, not a substitute parent. The State has an interest in literacy and civic competence; it does not have the right to raise someone else's child.

I was the only Senator to vote no on SB 41, which would have given the Board of Education mental-health guidelines for every public-school student under an opt-out, not an opt-in. Notice that requires a parent to chase the school is not parental authority.

Parents have the right to opt out of content they do not believe is in their child's best interest. Alaska statute already recognizes that authority. Sensitive instruction should be opt-in, not a scavenger hunt

for an opt-out form after the fact. No school employee should hide curriculum, surveys, or social-transition decisions from the people legally responsible for that child.

Correspondence schools

Correspondence-school law should start from the reason the program exists. Protect the family allotment. Do not let districts treat correspondence students as a funding stream to recapture, or force a family that chooses a program outside its home district to route that choice back through a local bureaucracy that may not want the competition. Keep administrative skim low. Correspondence was built for Alaska's distances and for parents who want to direct learning.

Families should not have to use a non-local correspondence program only through their home district. That is a veto dressed up as process. Choice that requires permission from the institution you are leaving is not choice.

Gender identity, girls' sports, and girls' spaces

Schools must promptly inform a parent if a student requests to change gender identity. A school that socially transitions a minor behind a parent's back has taken a side against the family. That is concealment, not counseling. If a student is struggling, the parent is the first call.

Biological males do not belong on girls' teams or in girls' spaces. Girls' sports and private spaces exist because of biological sex, not self-identification. Fairness and safety are not bigotry. As Speaker, the House passed a bill limiting girls' teams to students whose original birth certificates identify them as female. The principle has not changed. There are no circumstances I would write into statute as an exception. Expand co-ed opportunities if you want — do not erase the girls' category to do it.

Athletics, chaplains, and self-defense on campus

Non-district students should be allowed to play competitive athletics with local peers. A homeschool or correspondence student is still a kid from that community. Eligibility and safety rules should apply the same way. Do not punish a lawful education option by locking a child out of the team.

A school chaplain should be available on campus as a voluntary resource, not a mandatory program and not a replacement for parents. I am a member of the Alaska Police and Fire Chaplains. Students and staff who want that support should not be denied it. Participation must remain voluntary.

Teachers do not lose the right of armed self-defense by working on a campus. They retain that right. They do not surrender self-defense by walking onto a campus. I am a member of Women for Gun Rights and support Alaska's Castle Doctrine and stand-your-ground laws. A teacher is not a second-class citizen. That does not require every employee to carry, or prevent training and storage standards. The default is not that you surrendered your rights when you took the job.

Scholarships, charters, diplomas, and hiring

Alaska Performance Scholarship eligibility should rest on ACT, SAT, or WorkKeys scores alone, regardless of whether the student came from a district school or a homeschool. The scholarship should reward readiness, not letterhead. Locking out a homeschool graduate who earned the score punishes a lawful education choice.

Charters should be able to choose accreditation through the local district or through DEED. Forcing every charter through a single local district that may not want it freezes the map. A DEED or statewide pathway grows high-performing charters instead of protecting the status quo.

The State should end discrimination against non-accredited diplomas for corrections and law-enforcement hiring. If a graduate can pass the same background check, physical standard, and academy, the State should not disqualify that person because the diploma came from a homeschool or non-accredited program.

NEA endorsement

I have not requested an NEA or NEA-Alaska endorsement, and I have not received one. I work with teachers every session. I do not take direction from an organization that treats parental rights, charter growth, and correspondence as threats. My obligation is to the families of District M.

Closing

Quality education is the cornerstone of a strong Alaska. I have supported the largest student-funding increase in more than a decade and educational choice through charters and correspondence. Those are not opposite goals. Parents are not “stakeholders” in their own children. They are the authority. If you want a Senator who will keep correspondence intact, grow charters, require schools to tell parents the truth, keep girls’ sports for girls, and refuse to outsource the raising of Alaska’s children to Juneau, I am asking for your support.

— *Senator Cathy L. Tilton*
Alaska State Senate, District M