

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 benefitted you personally?**

My siblings and I attended Minnesota public education through ISD 279 (Osseo), my oldest daughter is a proud graduate of Saint Paul Central, and we intend to send our two youngest daughters to SPPS. My public education has enabled me to go to college, obtain a law degree, try hundreds of cases to verdict, and serve my community in the legislature. In this role I have become familiarized with the nuances of state education funding, and in the education policies which serve to better every member of our community, no matter their race, their color, their gender, or their wealth. My experience in MN is that a healthy public education is vital for a free democracy.

- 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?**

Throughout my adult life in Saint Paul, have been a supporter of and have co-chaired levy referenda to boost funding. I was endorsed by SPFE the first time I ran and have been endorsed most times since. I have always worked to be engaged with SPFE, having been hosted in SPPS classrooms every year for over two decades. In serving at the legislature, I have learned that highest portion of the state general fund budget is Public Education, which means it is a heavily debated topic, and over 17 years in the legislature teaches one a lot of information, as well as wisdom, about how we could better fund public education.

- b. How would you define “public education champion”?**

A public education champion is someone who speaks for the need and responsibility of state and local governments to provide both educational opportunity and, where needed, assistance to improve educational outcomes. They see past the false promises of high stakes testing, and the embrace a vision where every child has the opportunity to succeed, on a level playing field, regardless of their circumstances they bring to the classroom.

Why does “equality” (per republicans) not translate to educational outcomes.

- c. How would you describe your current relationship with SPFE member leaders?**

In my district I serve a large number of SPFE members, some of whom are leaders, others are active teachers. For almost 2 decades I have actively sought out advice and wisdom from my constituent SPFE members, and on other occasions I have been approached by members on legislative issues that affect education or other topics. Educators are some of my most engaged, and most informed, constituents. Accordingly, my education policy votes are guided by educators.

- d. Why are you seeking an endorsement from SPFE?**

As a legislator, I have always sought the SPFE endorsement because I support the work of teachers in politics. I have been a consistent and reliable legislative supporter of SPPS for my entire career – even when my own caucus leadership have asked me to tone it down due to swing seat DFLers being uncomfortable with our pro public education messaging. I can be counted on to continue the fight, even when pragmatists have left the field. In me, SPFE has a tested ally who doesn't shrink from a fight, and who will remain loyal to the vision of educational opportunity even when moderates slow down. In this, SPFE and I are kindred spirits, and I seek endorsement because we are on the same side of the issues.

e. **How do you envision working in partnership with SPFE? What does that look like when we disagree?**

Working in partnership looks like working with teachers on levies, being a major player on the tax committee in increasing LGA, fighting for an increase in minimum wage debate, doing the heavy lift on earned sick and safe leave, making health care more affordable for all. Disagreement? You do not stay in politics as long as I have without having disagreements with your friends. We always reunite in a common cause. I do not feel that if there is a disagreement that parties need to hold grudges or trash talk. When that happens, it's more about egos than it is about our shared mission. People disagree – either on substance or process, but when adults disagree, they talk it out, and they don't bear ill will. As long as their ideas mesh, then egos should be set aside in favor of common purpose. That requires communication before matters go sideways, not after.

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?**

Red for Ed has been a powerful educators' tool alerting community and the labor movement of the funding crisis that is facing American schools, especially those schools in the city. Educators wearing red highlights that funding is the most important hurdle in our complex and dynamic modern educational system. If we do not address the chronic underfunding of our public schools, we cannot build on the myriad of ideas for education policy success.

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, please see my previous answer on what it means to be an education champion - to improve educational stability as we make communities more stable and families more secure. There is ample evidence that students will have better educational outcomes. Second, it is clear that in recent generations we have not been able to completely fund our schools. We must move the dial to increase our funding. This requires the political will to advocate for income tax rate hikes. If we do not do that, opponents capitalize on various public interests fighting for a dwindling pile of scraps. Our schools were better funded when I was attending

them than they are now. If we could do it then, there is no reason we cannot do it now.

- 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?**

If our teachers strike, you will see me on the picket line, you will see me challenge the superintendent and the school board, and you will see me using my position as a legislator to bring the sides together for a swift resolution. Hiring replacement workers is never acceptable, and not just because it is a union-busting tactic. It is also an ineffectual system that is doomed to fail. Replacement workers are a method for the district to claim they are educating kids, when they're really just putting a body at the front of the classroom to avoid public criticism.

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?**
Culturally competent instruction is a crucial tool for our students, but so is attending a diverse and inclusive school. Brown vs. Board of Education stood for the principle that there is no such thing as separate but equal and that in any governmental system, cultural majorities benefit at the expense of cultural minorities, if left on policy autopilot. So, even when communities self-segregate, extremely careful attention must be paid to educational outcomes, and distribution of resources, because it is an open invitation to political redistribution of funding and opportunity toward majority cultures.
 - 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?**
Tiered licensure cannot deliver as diverse and qualified pool of educators as could adequate funding for teacher training funding, as well as adequate salary and benefits packages for teachers of color. I understand the need to look outside the profession for teachers of color to reflect the student body, as the lack of teachers of color is a dire situation, but there is no need to water-down instruction or qualifications when we have a ready solution by properly funding public education and teacher training, including financial aid for higher education and loan forgiveness for teachers of color.
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 am the chief author of HF 11 – Minnesota’s Earned sick and Safe Leave bill. When we can deliver a benefit like this for parents of sick kids, and others in other situations as contemplated by my bill, we will deliver a powerful tool for families to weather the ups and downs of work and family life, thereby stabilizing homes of students who need it the most. This measure will benefit our education system by stabilizing homes and families – most importantly, those families at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

- 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 took the House lead on the charter reforms and maintenance oversight legislation of 2007. My efforts were blocked by my own caucus. I was refused a hearing for these reforms at the Education finance committee and the education policy committees, but I took them as amendments to the floor anyway and picked a fight to highlight the fact that some charters that were not delivering the results they had promised. Sometimes, to move the needle, you have to challenge your friends. I have always been willing to do that and I always will. While we did not pass the charter reforms that I drafted in 2007, we did get half a loaf, and various changes were made to the charter school laws for the first time since their passage in 1991. In the words of Frederick Douglas, “Power never conceded anything without a demand. It never has, and it never will.” I make demands because that is the only way we make change.

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

As someone who was elected to office in my 20s, and the circumstances and supporters of my first election, I know what it is like to be a young person challenging the establishment. And so, over my 18 years in office, I have consistently sought opportunities to engage young people, people of color, and new communities in MN politics. As a member of the personnel committee, I prioritized the hiring of members from underrepresented groups, sought opportunities for them to thrive as employees of the house, and sought to mentor them to success. Some of my proudest hires, and success stories, are Jay Xiong, and Fue Lee – both of whom worked for my office. You’re only too old and out of touch if you’ve forgotten where you came from and you stop paving the way for leaders behind you. I never have and I never will.

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?**

There are bookshelves full on analysis on how Devos’ programs don’t work. Of course, any reform policies clearly impact public education. Some have had a

negative impact, some positive. Charter schools had a good intent, but a corollary impact is that they have hurt district schools, some by decreasing enrollment and increasing segregation. Some charters have contributed to re-segregation, while others have offered a clearly inferior education which has harmed students and families. Despite this, charters remain overwhelmingly popular options for many MN parents, and for reasons that are often not hard to understand. This complicates any discussion about charters, but it does not preclude a negotiated policy understanding between charter advocates, and public school districts, on our mutual goals – a equitable education for all students.

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

Charter schools are public schools insofar as they receive public dollars, but they are not subject to the oversight and accountability measures built-in to district schools, or even private schools for that matter. There are no public votes if a charter makes a big mistake. Further, Special Education cross subsidies are automatic for a charter, whereas district schools must provide for special education resources out of their own budgets. The business model of charter schools, as delineated by statute, means that, in most cases, charters continually must expand enrollment in order to stay in business. This creates an effect that results in a market bubble – an outcome no one could have intended.

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 will author the moratorium bill, and will attempt to engage the stakeholders in dialogue which maximizes results. I am partnering primarily with SPFE members and EdMinn people in crafting the legislation. Stakeholders should include proponents and opponents: SPFE, EdMinn, union teachers from other districts, School district officials, school board members, charter school advocates, charter school officials, district school parents, and charter school parents, among others.

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?

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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. The state of Minnesota should not support any bank which engages in predatory lending practices, either through doing business with those banks as a state entity, or as investment options through the state board of investment. I will support all legislative measures toward this goal.

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?

MN Schools must be funded in a manner which provides equity not equality. Students come to school from a vastly different set of circumstances. This is made clearly evident when one enters an inner-city school versus an exurban school. It is visible in the uniforms and travel gear of student athletes, in the curriculum opportunities and the after school opportunities, and in the guests, employers, and higher educational recruiters who are brought to campus. Equal educational opportunity means that a kid of color in Saint Paul has the same opportunities as a white kid in Wayzata. A Saint Paul kid's parents should not have to resort to dropping her off every morning in Minnetonka in order to avail themselves of the education opportunities out there. The opportunities should be available for all kids in the community where they live, and our funding structure should reflect that.

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, we must be willing to lead on revenue. This means a progressive income tax modification to mirror the rates we had in the 1990s – when I graduated from high school. Without an infusion of progressive revenue, public education opponents will continue to take advantage of public services fighting each other for a dwindling pool of funds. We should not be plussing-up our shortfall with operating levies. This simply buys in to the regressive model which property wealthy districts exploit to increase disparities. As a 16 year member of the House tax committee, I have led on progressive revenue solutions, and will continue to fight for them.

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?

See my answer above (a). Additionally, we should start with the statewide business property tax, the corporate franchise tax, and the personal income tax, adding a top tier for wealthier individuals. We should stay away from regressive revenue sources like sales or property taxes.

- 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?**

As long as I have been in the legislature, Republicans have made no bones about their desire to undo the Minnesota Miracle of 1971, but undoing that system only benefits the truly property-wealthy districts. There are far more legislators representing rural and urban school districts than there are representing the exurbs, but rural republicans exploit divides with complaints about special education funding, ELL, and compensatory funding. The debunking of their myths on these issues, and its attendant xenophobia, is the surest path to cooperative votes on shared goals.

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 have been elected since 2002 and these are principles I ran on. It means to that you have relationships with the people you represent, both individually, and as a whole. It means you count on leaders of constituencies to be accountable to their memberships, and to accurately represent their views without ego, but also to give advice and recommendation without strings attached to it. Only with those reliable relationships can the dynamic and often high-speed nature of policy work be effective.

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

I look to my fellow legislators, knowledgeable constituents, to experts in their fields, to house research staff, to scientists, and activists, to lobbyists who know their issues, and to agency personnel. But my chief advisor is my wife, who usually has the best advice.

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

Representative democracy, as designed by our system, depends on the representatives' decisions reflecting that of the peoples'. It means soliciting feedback that does not necessarily come from the testifier's table in committee. It means bouncing ideas off of your constituents, and it means following up with constituents and groups, sometimes years later, on policies that were passed with certain promises, and seeing if the results were delivered as promised.

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

A legislator does not generally have the luxury of personal feelings. We certainly have personal values, and it is incumbent on us not to violate those values, but feelings are not a part of the decision process. Our feelings should be guided by the reasons, the numbers, and the stories brought forth by the people who want change.

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?

I unequivocally support workers' rights to collectively bargain, and I will actively oppose any and all efforts to pass so-called "right to work" legislation. One of the most important things we can do to support unionization and solidarity is to allow for adequate resources to union employment. Most people think this means just public employees, but it doesn't stop there. It also means a robust bonding bill so that ironworkers and carpenters can bring apprentices into the job pipeline. It means prevailing wage and PLA supports, and it means opposing any and all efforts to enable scabs, be they private sector, public sector, or even national guard personnel, in the face of a strike. The withholding of one's labor is the oldest and primary tool a union has to bargain with. We cannot afford to water it down. That means you will see me protect it at every turn as long as I am in the political position to do so. Until then, you will see me standing, arm and arm with you, on the picket line.