

NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2024



Robert "Bob" Hallstrom – LD 1

1. **Local Control** - With so many decisions from the legislature impacting local boards, NASB is interested in your view of local control. Regarding education, what decisions do you feel are best made at the school board level vs. the State level?

By way of analogy, I am a supporter of the free market enterprise system and believe that government should generally stay out of the way of businesses and allow them to be innovators. I have the same basic philosophy when it comes to state government interference with local school boards. I believe that local school board representatives should generally be allowed to do what the public elected them to do and that the people closest to the issues should be making decisions relative to the operation of a school district.

In the context of schools, local control means school boards and administrators making decisions that best reflect the culture, values and heritage of a school district.

2. **School Funding** - Every year the legislature makes decisions about the way schools are funded, making predictability of funding a challenge. What changes and/or adjustments, if any, do you think the Legislature should address?

Recent actions taken by the Legislature have enhanced educational funding through the establishment of the Education Futures Fund and by the state assuming responsibility for a greater percentage of special education costs. These actions should serve to enhance the certainty and reliability of sufficient funding for quality education and have moved Nebraska from the bottom five states in terms of state funding for education into the top 15. We must continue to prioritize our commitment to educational funding.

3. **Role of Education in the State** - What role do you think PK-12 Education plays in the future success of the State and your community?

I believe that educators are the primary drivers of student success. This is particularly true with declining church attendance, less community/civic involvement, single parent families, and two-wage earner families. Continuing to provide a quality education is essential to the economic success of our state and local communities in shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

4. **Educational Workforce** - Educational workforce continues to be a challenge across the State from teachers to bus drivers. What would be your plan to address this challenge?

Given the shortage of teachers and other education support professionals, we must promote enhancement of teachers' salaries in order to retain those currently in the system and to attract new teachers to the profession. More can also be done in terms of scholarships, loan forgiveness and other types of incentives to encourage more individuals to pursue a career in the teaching profession. We must also not overlook the significance of para-educators and other education support professionals who contribute significantly to the learning experience. We must do more to lift up these individuals with respect to salaries and benefits, including the provision of health benefits for those who do not currently receive these benefits as a part of their compensation package. Dealing with the consequences of mental health issues in the classroom is certainly stressful for our educators, and there is a need to commit greater resources to address mental health issues with our youth in the school system.

5. **Mandates** - School districts continue to be challenged by the increasing unfunded mandates put upon them by the State and Federal government. What is your response to mandates and the State's role in them?

In general, I believe that imposing curriculum requirements upon school districts by the state Legislature should be the exception, rather than the rule. I am aware of recent mandates, including third-grade reading proficiency requirements, testing for learning disabilities and financial literacy requirements. Since it is often difficult to challenge the benefits which students can derive from these programs, efforts should be made to eliminate other programs or responsibilities of school districts which may have outlived their usefulness or no longer provide the benefits initially envisioned. In this manner, if a new program or responsibility is to be added, this action could be matched by the elimination of an existing program or responsibility. I would encourage school boards and school districts to identify areas in which their responsibilities can be reduced.

Final Thoughts

I understand and appreciate the need to prioritize overall educational funding. Coming from an extended family with multiple educators, there is no lack of encouragement for me to continue to understand and appreciate this fact. The level and quality of education provided by our schools to students serves as the backbone for the future of our state and local communities.

How can voters contact you?

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