

NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2026



Brian Hardin – LD 48

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?

Local level is best for virtually all decisions — from curriculum to the educational culture.

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?

It's impossible to discuss school funding in Nebraska without discussing property taxes. 60% or more of property taxes collected across the 93 counties go to some form of local education. In 2023 (and before) NE ranked 49th of the 50 states in terms of state-level help for funding local schools. We've been on a march since that time to improve the state level participation. The property tax issue should be considered in the context of complete tax policy change — property, income, corporate, inheritance and sales taxes — together. Otherwise we get simple tax shifts. And those never work. So funding is tied in part to getting comprehensive tax policy change. That said, all states like NE that do not have vast amounts of oil, shale, coal or other significant natural resources (or large amounts of tourism) struggle with how to fund schools. We're not unique in that endeavor across the country. This, we'll continue to see incremental changes to school funding until comprehensive tax reform takes shape.

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?

It's obviously important — especially the youngest grades. So much of comprehension is built in the foundational years. Given that we're facing an explosion of technological growth with AI and the Information Age, there will be significant strategy needed for how to balance the very human needs of kids with the opportunities and temptations of the world of artificial intelligence (emphasis on ARTIFICIAL). Teachers and parents will have to wrestle with the upside and downside of the technological advances for students of all ages. So future success for western NE is heavily dependent on education, parental involvement and the technological wave we're experiencing.

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?

Grow the economy! Educational needs are growing. So are healthcare needs, law enforcement needs, infrastructure needs... the key is to grow local economies in ag and other business. That means embracing technology like never before. Our farmers do that with modern equipment and at levels unsurpassed in any other industry. Efficiencies need to grow in education. Are we actually helping our kids to perform better at Math and English at the 5th, 8th and 11th grades (where we do standardized testing)? Can technology help that? Or does it hinder that? Does it need to be highly individualized? Our outcomes for such testing are not very strong across America (including NE) right now. Less than 40% of our kids are at proficient levels in Math and English Arts.

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?

A couple ideas: 1) Build a "mandate tally" into the fiscal notes related to education. Let's see not only the total cost if an idea is implemented, but add it to the list of all else already implemented as a current mandate to get a sense of the total burden. And also 2) Do an automatic review of any and all mandates every five years? Eight years? Hold that in comparison to the sum total of what that burden is that's being handed down. As lawmakers, those are number totals we don't easily see. And reviewing older mandates can make some sense. Is a given mandate still necessary? To the same degree? Maybe even require a repeal of an older mandate in order to embrace a new one and prioritize them. Don't overburden districts. But we need to see those numbers during the bill development process.

Final Thoughts

There's a tricky balance to find between the technology which is so promising and the young minds who crave and need adult direction and encouragement from parents and teachers. This is not easy!! Thank you parents for standing with your kids. Thank you teachers for inspiring visions of what could be!

How can voters contact you?

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