

NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2026



Dan Winter – LD 24

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?

In education equity and quality are best handled at the state level. These decisions include standards, licensing, and data collection. Standards should be determined at the state level so that every Nebraska student is qualified and ready for life. State level licensing prevents a patchwork of laws inhibiting the hiring of quality teachers. Finally, statewide data collection of Nebraska 245 districts allows for better allocation of state and federal dollars to the under performing. On the local level the decisions that should be handled are tools, staffing, and culture. Local school districts have a better understanding of what tools (i.e. books, computers, programs) can best educate their students. Staffing is much the same, determining the best teachers, counselors, or administrators that gel with the local culture. By better understanding the local culture, the district can determine best what staff provides optimal education opportunities. Lastly, culture, which includes school disciplinary measures, only at the local level can school culture become best suited for the student body.

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?

The state of Nebraska needs to change how public schools are funded. Nebraska school district funding currently relies on local (property taxes) for nearly 60%, the state contributes 30%, and federal agencies make up the last ten percent. In total the cost of Nebraska's 245 school districts is roughly 5.66 billion dollars. The state government has taken measures to increase state funding of schools with TEESO and EFF but these only cover 1.4 billion dollars of funding. I would like to focus private/public partnership investments on childcare/pre-K that could give Nebraska students a better foundation and possibly lessen the burden on k-12 education. To stabilize the Nebraska school budget there are four changes that could be proposed. Firstly, the formula used to calculate students' needs to be altered to better represent the current environment, maybe using another states calculations such as Mississippi which saw a substantial increase in student outcomes. Secondly, there needs to be

adjustments made to better compensate for inflation, perhaps setting the inflation increase to 1.5 time the yearly inflations rate rather than a flat 3%. Thirdly, the state needs to focus more funding on childcare and schools taking on the burden from local property taxes, this could be done by removing some tax incentives or sales tax exemptions. Changes to taxes to increase the state revenue could then be used to improve baseline aid. Finally, when the state finalizes the budget school funding should be included in the two-year plan, making sure that schools have a secure baseline for the future.

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?

"5) In Nebraska, pK-12 education acts as a fundamental economic engine producing skilled works, fostering innovation, and driving local growth. Education is tied directly to the metrics that define a prosperous state such as tax revenue and per capita income. Nebraska's pK-12 education can help to lessen the impact of "brain drain" on the state by providing opportunities for native and new talent to make their homes in the state."

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?

My plan to combat the current educational workforce challenges would be to expand and reinforce the current strategies the state has taken up, while also asking what teachers and support staff need. The current Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act provide grants based on longevity starting at \$2,500, an increase to the base grant while also incentivizing high-need fields such as special education and math. The second program that is working to improve the number of teachers is the Teacher Apprenticeship Program. The program allows current district employees to gain a teaching certificate after completing 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and while also completing two years of education. To better this program I would strengthen compensation for mentors, ensure cost transparency for the apprentice, offer flexibility for schooling, and provide sustainable funding. The final challenge to combat is burnout, to do this we must look at workplace culture. This could be done with clear preparation windows, dedicated student behavior support, and reducing administrative paperwork

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?

The easiest way to fix the unfunded mandates is to fund them. As the state sets the curriculum and determines the licensing for teachers, any mandates that pertain to

these factors should be funded by the state, including teacher training, testing mandates, and student screenings. Now individual districts need for special education should still be handled locally with some support from the state.

Final Thoughts

My final thoughts almost always go to the numbers and how Nebraska compares to others. In New Jersey that is consistently ranked in the top five general pK-12 rankings, they spend \$26000 per student, while in Nebraska though behind in reading we consistently rank in the top 15 while only spending \$16000. We can also see that programs can be adapted to our educational systems, such as the mandates that Mississippi have put in place for 4th grade reading levels. These mandates have given Mississippi an overall ranking of 16 with only an investment of \$12000. This comparison is misleading only because Mississippi receives more federal funding to support schools. The final comparison I would like to make is to the bottom of the list, Oklahoma. Oklahoma spends \$12500 per student and ranks at the bottom when compared to other states. So currently Nebraska has strong outcomes for investment we give to education, with targeted investment and strengthened public/private partnerships we can provide for the future success of Nebraska.

How can voters contact you?

winterd78@yahoo.com

Winter for NE district 24 (Facebook)