

NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2026



Patty Pansing Brooks – LD 28

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?

Our strongest education system is one that combines clear statewide expectations with meaningful local authority. School boards should have the flexibility to make decisions in the best interests of their students and communities, while the state focuses on setting broad goals and ensuring transparency, accountability, and opportunity for every Nebraska student. In general, local school boards should have primary responsibility for decisions involving district policies, budgeting priorities, school operations, facility planning, resource priorities, academic achievement, and long-term strategic direction. Communities across Nebraska are diverse, and a one-size-fits-all approach from Lincoln often fails to account for the unique circumstances of rural, suburban, and urban districts. At the same time, effective local control recognizes that school board members are not educational experts and should not be making day-to-day classroom decisions. Their role is to listen to and learn from superintendents, teachers, and staff who understand the needs of students, and then use that expertise to make informed governance and policy decisions that strengthen the district's long-term success. The state's role is important in establishing high academic standards, ensuring accountability, protecting student rights, supporting teachers, maintaining fiscal oversight, and providing equitable funding opportunities. The Legislature has a responsibility to support public education and serve the public interest, but it should be cautious about unnecessarily restricting local decision-making or imposing mandates that reduce flexibility at the local level.

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?

For too long, the Nebraska Legislature has failed to meet its responsibility to adequately fund public education, shifting an outsized share of the cost onto local property taxpayers. Nebraska's Constitution makes clear that education is a responsibility of the state, yet school districts are often left relying on local property taxes to make up for gaps in state support. As a result, homeowners, farmers,

ranchers, and businesses continue to shoulder a burden that should be shared more broadly across the state. If we are serious about both strengthening public schools and providing meaningful property tax relief, the state must play a larger role in funding education. The answer is not to undermine public schools, tie the hands of local communities, or simply shift taxes from one group of Nebraskans to another. The answer is for the Legislature to fulfill its obligation by increasing support for public education and reducing the degree to which local communities are forced to fund a statewide responsibility on their own.

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?

PK-12 education plays a fundamental role in the future success of both our state and our local communities. Public schools prepare the next generation of workers, leaders, and engaged citizens while helping attract families, support economic growth, and strengthen communities. Supporting public education is one of the most important responsibilities of state government, and it is a responsibility clearly established in the Nebraska Constitution. When we invest in public schools, we invest in Nebraska's future. Providing adequate state funding helps schools meet the needs of students while reducing pressure on local property taxpayers. I believe our focus should be on strengthening the public school system that serves nearly every Nebraska family and ensuring it has the resources necessary to help every student succeed. Strong public schools are the foundation of strong communities and a strong 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?

Nebraska's workforce shortage affects schools just as it affects businesses and communities across our state, but we must recognize that recruitment is only part of the challenge. Teacher retention is equally important. Today, many educators are facing chronic and often unaddressed student behavioral issues that require more resources and support than schools can provide. When teachers spend significant time managing behaviors without adequate support staff, mental health resources, or intervention services, it contributes directly to burnout and drives talented educators out of the profession. Addressing these challenges requires investment in the whole educational workforce, including teachers, paraeducators, counselors, behavioral specialists, and support staff. Such investments will not only benefit our teachers, but also our students. My hope is that LR 455 provides positive information that can help the state better understand and support the needs of Nebraska's public school teachers. We also need to give educators the time, flexibility, and support they need to be successful. Teachers understand that many students need individualized instruction

to reach their full potential, yet they are often required to work within systems and curriculum expectations that leave little time or capacity to provide that level of support. At the same time, they have limited opportunities for professional development, planning, collaboration, and the personal time necessary to care for themselves and their families. In the Legislature, I would support investments that strengthen the educational workforce pipeline, expand access to affordable childcare for educators and other school employees, and provide schools with the resources necessary to address student behavioral needs and improve working conditions. If we want to retain great educators and attract the next generation to the profession, we must create an environment where they feel supported, valued, and equipped to succeed.

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?

I believe the State has an important role in setting broad expectations, ensuring accountability, protecting student rights, and providing adequate funding, but it should always be cautious about imposing mandates that limit local flexibility. Too often, state and federal requirements come with significant costs and administrative burdens without providing the resources needed to implement them successfully. Local school boards, working with superintendents, teachers, and staff, are best positioned to understand the needs of their students and communities. Before creating new mandates, the Legislature should carefully consider their financial and operational impact and seek meaningful input from local education leaders. If a new requirement is necessary, the state should be willing to provide the funding and support needed to make it successful. Our goal should be to empower schools to meet local needs, not burden them with unfunded requirements that divert time and resources away from students.

Final Thoughts

My mother served on the Lincoln Public Schools Board of Education when I was in high school and handed me my diploma when I graduated from Southeast High School. That was my initiation into the immense value of public schools. I have consistently opposed charter schools and school vouchers because I believe public dollars should stay in our public schools, which serve every child and every family in Nebraska. During my two terms in the Legislature, I worked extensively to strengthen public education, and that work reinforced my belief that our responsibility is to invest in Nebraska's fabulous public schools that are open to all students. I will always combat efforts to divert taxpayer money away from public schools into voucher schemes and charter systems,

which lack the same accountability as public schools and can undermine support for rural, urban, and neighborhood schools alike. I was proud to work with the successful ballot effort to repeal the private scholarship program, and I would continue to stand firmly against vouchers and against policies that weaken public education. Nebraska students, educators, and working families deserve strong, fully supported, fully funded public schools, not privatization by another name.

How can voters contact you?

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