

## NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2026



Chris Anderson – LD 20

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?

I believe decisions should generally be made at the level closest to the people they affect — and in education, that means the local school board should hold primary authority over curriculum and instructional materials, personnel decisions, budget priorities, and discipline policy. Local boards are elected by and directly accountable to the families in our community, and we're best positioned to reflect their values, not a one-size-fits-all mandate from the state. Sex education is a clear example. I believe curriculum decisions in this area belong with the local board, working directly with parents, and I do not support transgender-related content being part of that curriculum. This is exactly the kind of values-based decision that should stay local and responsive to our community, not be dictated from above. At the same time, I want our academic standards to be strong — not just locally, but nationally. The U.S. continues to lag top-performing countries in math and science on international assessments, and I think critical thinking and analytical skills need to be a bigger priority in our classrooms so our students can compete globally, not just meet a state minimum. I'd support the State setting a high floor for rigor and critical-thinking standards, while leaving the local board free to determine how we get there. On funding, I'd like to see the State set a ceiling, not just a floor. Nebraska has the fourth-highest property tax burden in the country, and much of that pressure flows through local school levies. Local boards should retain control over budget priorities within that ceiling, but the State has a role in capping how much can be extracted from property owners in the first place.

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?

Predictability is one of the biggest problems local boards face. When the Legislature changes the funding formula, adjusts equalization aid, or shifts property tax credits year to year, school boards can't reliably plan budgets, staffing, or long-term facility needs. I'd like to see the Legislature commit to multi-year funding stability — whether

through a fixed formula reviewed on a set cycle (rather than ad hoc changes every session) or a statutory floor on state funding that districts can count on from year to year. I also think the state needs to take on more of the funding responsibility directly, rather than relying so heavily on local property taxes. Nebraska has the fourth-highest property tax burden in the country, and a large share of that pressure comes through school levies. If the Legislature wants to keep property taxes in check — and I believe it should — it needs to pair any levy caps or ceilings with real, sustained state investment in the funding formula, not just short-term credits that can be pulled back later. Credits and one-time buydowns create the same unpredictability I mentioned above; a durable shift in how much the state contributes is what actually solves it. Finally, I'd support simplifying the formula itself. A funding system that's easy to understand and forecast helps school boards budget responsibly and helps taxpayers see clearly where their money is going.

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 is the foundation for everything else — our economy, our workforce, and the strength of our community. The students sitting in classrooms today are the workers, business owners, and civic leaders who will determine whether Nebraska thrives or falls behind in the coming decades. If we don't get this right, nothing else we do at the state or local level will matter as much as it should. I think about this in terms of global competitiveness. Our students aren't just competing with kids in the next district or the next state — they're competing with students in countries that are outpacing the U.S. in math, science, and rigor--that also is a national security concern, which is close to my heart with my military background at the tactical, operational and strategic levels where I have worked as a joint qualified officer. If we want Nebraska's economy to attract employers, grow good jobs, and keep our young people here, we need graduates who can think critically, solve problems, and adapt — not just pass a test. That has to start in PK-12. At the community level, strong schools are also what keep families here and attract new ones. Parents choose where to live based on the quality of local schools, and businesses look at the education system when deciding where to invest. A well-run, high-performing school district — one that's responsive to parents and accountable to the community it serves — is one of the most powerful economic development tools a town has. That's why I believe the decisions closest to our students — curriculum, standards of rigor, budget priorities — should stay with the local board, with the State providing a stable, adequate, and predictable funding foundation so we can actually deliver on that promise.

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?

Workforce shortages look different depending on the position, and I think the response should too. On the teaching side, Nebraska has actually made real progress — statewide unfilled positions have dropped significantly over the past year — but special education and a handful of other hard-to-staff areas remain a persistent challenge. I'd support continuing and strengthening the tools that are already working: alternative certification pathways, loan forgiveness and retention grants for new teachers, and stronger partnerships between school districts and our teacher-prep programs at the state's colleges and universities, so we're growing our own pipeline rather than competing for the same shrinking pool of candidates. Bus drivers are a bigger and more stubborn problem, and it's fundamentally a pay and competition issue — districts are trying to recruit CDL-licensed drivers against warehouse, delivery, and trucking jobs that often pay as well or better without the licensing hurdle. I'd support the State making it easier and cheaper for districts to fund competitive wages, and looking at ways to reduce the barriers and cost of CDL training and certification, since that's proven to be one of the biggest points where potential drivers fall out of the process. I'd also want local districts to retain flexibility to solve this with tools that fit their community — signing bonuses, route consolidation, or partnering with neighboring districts — rather than a one-size-fits-all state mandate. LD 20 proximity to Iowa makes this a uniquely interesting (and out-of-the-box) potential solution--leverage a partnership with Council Bluffs to achieve economies of scale. Ultimately, I see this as another example of local boards needing the flexibility and resources to compete for their workforce, paired with state support that's substantial and predictable enough for districts to plan around rather than react to year to year. Either way, in any legislative decision-making when I am elected I will consult the NASB for some meaningful dialogue so I can incorporate its equities and research into my decision tree.

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?

There is concrete example of this in 2025 when Rita Sanders introduced LR18CA. She said "every mandate the state places on counties and cities, even when in the service of valuable public policy, comes at a cost to those entities. The Legislature has studied the problem of unfunded mandates several times in recent years, but has failed to take meaningful action". One highlight of her perspective was this key nugget, which is close to my heart: "Studying the problem has not solved the problem." As a military member of 31 years and senior director in various roles in the private sector, taking action resonates with me--and is precisely what I hear having talked to thousands of LD 20 residents--they are tired of inaction and want more progress and results. Unfunded

mandates are one of the clearest examples of decisions being made without the people who have to pay for them at the table. When the State or Federal government requires a new program, training, reporting requirement, or staffing standard without providing the funding to go with it, that cost doesn't disappear — it lands directly on the local budget and, ultimately, on property taxpayers. Given that Nebraska already has the fourth-highest property tax burden in the country, I think this is an especially urgent issue here. My view is simple: if the State or Federal government believes a mandate is important enough to require, it should be important enough to fund. I support efforts — like the constitutional amendment proposals the Legislature has debated — that would require full state reimbursement for any new mandate or expansion of an existing one placed on school districts. I recognize these proposals have stalled before, but I think that's exactly why this needs to stay a priority: repeated studies and stalled bills haven't solved the underlying problem, and districts keep absorbing the cost in the meantime. Short of a constitutional requirement, I'd also support the Legislature adopting a standard practice of including a funding mechanism, or at minimum a fiscal note review with real teeth, in any bill that imposes new requirements on schools — so the cost of a mandate is visible and debated at the same time as the mandate itself, not left for local boards to sort out after the fact.

### **Final Thoughts**

We are at a crossroads as a state and nation in terms of our competitiveness across the globe for PK-12 pedigree. The rankings are worrisome nationally and, to be sure, since 2019 in Nebraska. Since 2019, Nebraska's PK-12 performance has moved in the wrong direction. State assessment data shows Nebraska students are still nearly a full grade level behind 2019 achievement in reading and about half a grade level behind in math, and the Nebraska Department of Education itself has acknowledged that NAEP scores have been on a downward trend since 2017, with recent declines described by the state's own Education Commissioner as "concerning" and "a call to action." Districts like Lincoln, Columbus, Hastings, and Grand Island remain more than a full grade level behind where they were pre-2019, and chronic absenteeism statewide is still running well above pre-pandemic levels. This isn't a story of a single bad year — it's a multi-year slide that predates the pandemic and has not fully recovered since. This is exactly why I believe the changes I've outlined throughout this questionnaire matter together, not separately. Local boards need the authority to set curriculum and rigor standards that reflect their community's priorities, the State needs to provide predictable and adequate funding rather than shifting formulas and unfunded mandates that force boards to react instead of plan, and all of us need to treat academic recovery and critical-thinking rigor as urgent, not routine. Nebraska has the tools and the local leadership to reverse this trend — but it will take sustained attention and the right

balance of local control and state support to actually do it. I am the right candidate with a proven track record of producing results whether in the cockpit or board room to achieve demanding metrics for national leadership or shareholders/leadership, respectively. Moreover, I will always consult with the NASB underscored by a relationship I will continuously cultivate, to seek their counsel in order to deliver to my constituents as well as the personal equity I have as a father of two teenagers.

**How can voters contact you?**

andersonfornebraska@gmail.com