

NASB State Board Candidate Questionnaire 2026



Patrick Leahy – LD 6

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?

We all share the responsibility of ensuring our kids receive a quality education. The state has a role in providing funding, as mandated by our constitution. The state board of education should help set select statewide policies impacting every school district. Nearly all other decisions, including on tax authority, hiring/firing, budget, etc., should be set by local school boards. When issues come before the Legislature, I will consult with local school board members within and outside of LD6 to ensure we are taking their considerations into account.

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 key word I like to focus on is predictability. How can local districts be confident in executing their strategic plans, hiring decisions, capital budgets, etc. if they do not know what to expect from the state year to year. We must do better. Poor planning leads to poor results and, ultimately, it's the kids who pay the price. I support ensuring the state has funded schools at an adequate level to deliver necessary services we ask school's to provide. I welcome your feedback on changes as I want to make sure I do not handicap local districts' ability to meet the needs of their teachers and students.

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 is vital. This is when our kids learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, STEM, the arts and humanities, teamwork and physical education, and build other foundational skills for the rest of their lives. What our education system is top notch, it is an investment that our communities will be too for generations. I want school districts in Nebraska to be models for the rest of the country. I believe some of our school districts are already hitting this mark, but we must continue to support their important work and bring everyone to these levels.

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 is dealing with workforce shortages across many industries. In order to fulfill these positions, we must attract and retain more families to live in Nebraska. Whether that is making childcare more affordable, building housing at all price points so more families can afford to plant roots in our state, or making quality of life investments in our communities - there is a lot that can be done to make Nebraska a more attractive place to live, work, and play. With all this said, for the unique challenges faced by the educational sector, we must start by offering competitive pay and benefits compared to nearby states. We must work to address burnout in these roles by ensuring we offer services like mental health resources in schools, appropriate disciplinary policies to promote safe and productive classrooms, and ensure we are giving our staff enough time to handle their workload by protecting things like planning periods. Many of these decisions must be made at the school board level in coordination with the state board of education, but I welcome a conversation about actions you think the Unicameral should be taking as we all have a role in educating our kids.

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?

For me, if there is a state mandate being placed on school districts, the state should fund it. Otherwise, these decisions should be made by local school districts. Many of these mandates seek to improve our classrooms, but we should put the money behind them or remove them.

Final Thoughts

I hope to be a partner with your association to get real results on our shared goal and responsibility: to educate our next generation. If elected, I hope to regularly visit with the school board members in Omaha and surrounding areas as well as other districts across the state so we can stay in communication and work effectively together. I welcome your feedback on all matters before the Legislature as I want to ensure my votes are setting up our schools for success.

How can voters contact you?

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