



**NORTH DAKOTA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

**2010 ELECTION  
CANDIDATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

**INVESTING IN PUBLIC EDUCATION  
TO ENSURE  
GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
FOR EVERY CHILD**

*Notes to Candidates:*

**Part A - PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Please be prepared to respond to these questions during your personal interview.

**Part B - PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY**

Please fill this out prior to your interview. Bring it with you to the interview and give it to the interview team.

**PART A**  
**PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. NDEA has always supported a strong defined benefit retirement program for school employees through either the Teachers' Fund For Retirement (TFFR) for teachers and the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) for school support personnel. Defined benefit plans provide members of the plan with a guaranteed benefit that ensure retirees maintain an adequate standard of living.

Recently, the economic downturn has had an impact on the funding levels of both TFFR and PERS. The stock market crash has created approximately a \$600 million shortfall in TFFR and approximately a \$400 million shortfall in NDPERS. Because of this funding concern, some have suggested that it may be time to get rid of the defined benefit plan. However, defined contribution plans have fared even worse during this downtown. Further, defined benefit plans have proven to be less costly to maintain and manage than defined contribution plans. Also, defined benefit plans generally obtain higher earnings and lowers overall risk for plan participants. Finally, defined benefit plans are good economic development. Defined benefit plans sustain state and local economies by ensuring that retirees maintain an adequate standard of living.

In March 2010, the TFFR and NDPERS Boards put forth their respective recommendation on how to shore up the fund and how to solve the funding concerns. The NDEA believes that in consideration of each of these proposals four basic principles should be adhered. 1) A defined benefit **MUST** be protected, 2) Drastic benefit changes should be avoided, 3) Member contribution increases should be minimized, and 4) The current multipliers for PERS and TFFR should be maintained.

**TFFR Specific**

The TFFR Board proposal includes six changes to the current plan. First, it protects members within ten (10) years of retirement as of July 1, 2013. These individuals will not be affected by the unreduced and reduced retirement benefit eligibility changes outlined below. Second, it increases all member and employer contributions by two (2) percent each starting July 1, 2012 and then another two (2) percent each starting July 1, 2014. This constitutes a total increase of eight (8) percent in increased contributions.

-A visual representation of the increases looks like this:

	7/1/2010	7/1/2012	7/1/2014
Employer	8.75%	10.75%	12.75%
Member	7.75%	9.75%	11.75%

Third, it changes all members from the Rule of 85 (Tier 1) or the Rule of 90 (Tier 2) to a new calculation. The new calculation requires all members (except those protected due to being within ten (10) years of retirement) to reach age 60 and obtain the rule of 90, or age 65 to retire without an unreduced benefit. Fourth, it amends the disability provisions of the TFFR statute. The new proposal requires members to be vested and can only draw the number of years they have worked in an approved employment position to calculate disabilities benefit. Fifth, it requires all retirees who go back to work to pay the required TFFR contributions. Finally, it adjusts the early retirement reduction. Current reduction is at six (6) percent for every year an

individual retires early. The new proposal reduces benefit payments by eight (8) percent for every year an individual retires early.

Additionally, TFFR has suggested a second bill. The second bill makes all of the same changes listed above, but it also asks for a one time contribution of \$75 million from the general fund. The NDEA supports all of the TFFR proposals as a reasonable approach to sharing the burden among stakeholders to fix this shortfall.

- a) **Do you support maintaining the defined benefit plan promise of TFFR?**
- b) **Would you oppose efforts to eliminate the TFFR defined benefit plan?**
- c) **Do you support the bill draft TFFR has put forward?**
  - a. **Do you support the bill providing \$75 million from the general fund for pension relief for school districts?**

#### **NDPERS Specific**

The NDPERS Board has forwarded three bill drafts to the Interim Legislative Employee Benefits Committee. Each of these bills only changes contribution levels, none make any changes to benefits or the structure. The drafts are:

- a. An 8% increase in employer contributions phased in over 4 years beginning in January of 2012.
- b. An 8% increase in employee contributions phased in over 4 years beginning in January of 2012. The bill provides that the employee contribution increase would be pre-taxed pursuant to section 404(h).
- c. A 4% increase in employee contributions and a 4% increase in employer contributions phased in equally over 4 years beginning in January of 2012. Similar to #2, the state employee contribution increase would be pre-taxed pursuant to section 404(h)

The PERS Board proposed no benefit changes or structure changes. The NDEA strongly opposes option b. to fix the PERS shortfall because it places the entire burden on only the employees.

- d) **Do you support maintaining the defined benefit plan for NDPERS?**
  - e) **Would you oppose efforts to eliminate PERS defined benefit plans?**
  - f) **Which of the three proposals do you support?**
    - a. **Why?**
2. NDEA believes a strong democratic and economic future for our state and nation depends on the capacity of our public schools to provide all students with a fair chance to succeed.

Adequate funding for public schools is too important to be left to chance. It is good for education, good for children, good for parents and grandparents, and good for the economy of the state and nation. NDEA believes the state of North Dakota should provide adequate funding for public schools to offer a diverse and challenging curriculum and the services that will prepare students for global opportunities. All students deserve a quality public education.

In the 2009 session the ND Legislative Assembly passed SB2199 and HB1400. Combined these two bills raised the state support for public education to the long sought after goal of 70%. The NDEA believes that this is an important step forward; the state's responsibility of the total operating costs should equal 70%. We believe that ensuring the state provides this share ensures that our local school districts can operate at high levels without stressing local property tax bases.

**Would you support legislation maintaining the states responsibility of the total operating cost to equal 70%?**

**a. If no, why not?**

3. The North Dakota Education Association works to ensure great public schools for every child, and research shows the single most important factor affecting student achievement is a quality teacher. Teacher and support staff quality is at risk due to poor working conditions and low salaries, and many new employees leave within their first five years causing serious damage to schools' capacity to deliver excellence. Legislation that supports recruitment and retention of quality education employees will continue to be a priority issue for NDEA during the 2011 Legislative Assembly.

With the passage of the teacher compensation reimbursement program, minimum salary, and the requirement for schools to spend 70% of new money on compensation, teacher compensation has increased, but North Dakota continues to rank 50th in the nation, including all the states and the District of Columbia. North Dakota teachers continue to leave their profession because of compensation and a feeling of not being valued and appreciated.

During the 2009 session, the NDEA put forth research showing that investing an additional \$37 million in school funding above the Governor's 2009 Budget, run through the 70% new money stipulations could have moved North Dakota Salaries Halfway to Average or 35<sup>th</sup> in the nation. NDEA believes that salaries for teachers and all employees need to be increased to ensure that ND schools can recruit and retain the best and brightest teachers. North Dakota's students deserve the best.

**a) Would you support legislation to continue to dedicate 70% of new funding for teacher compensation?**

**b) Would you support legislation to increase the rank of teacher salaries to "Halfway to Average?"**

**c) Would you support legislation dedicating funding to improving support staff salaries?**

4. NDEA believes investing in public education is good economic policy which creates jobs, grows incomes, and lifts people out of poverty. An excellent education reduces costs associated with crime and poverty, saving the taxpayer money.

Taxes support the public structures that ensure prosperous and civilized society. Fair taxes are the best way to preserve such a society. Bottom income earners in North Dakota pay a higher portion of their income in taxes than top income earners, and state and local taxes paid by corporations as a percent of their profits has declined. NDEA believes subsidies and incentives for big corporations shift the burden unfairly onto other taxpayers, cause small businesses to suffer, and work against a fair system of taxes to support infrastructure and education.

Taxes fairly collected and then invested in public education have a positive impact on our economy. NDEA believes North Dakota needs to ensure equal education and economic opportunity for all.

**Would you support legislation to make taxes fair by closing loopholes and level the playing field for business and economic development so all hardworking entrepreneurs can succeed?**

5. Research shows that unless teachers receive appropriate guidance and support, they are likely to leave the profession due to frustration and disillusionment. Fifty percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Ingersoll, 2001). With the current teacher recruitment/retention crisis, North Dakota cannot afford to allow this situation to exist. NDEA believes investing in a statewide mentoring/instructional coaching program for beginning teachers would heighten their expertise and confidence, giving them a solid, positive experience with the profession. NDEA also believes this would result in retaining career teachers who will promote the profession and recruit others to become teachers in North Dakota.

During the 2009 session the Legislative Assembly appropriated \$2.3 million for teacher mentoring programs. The state of North Dakota has a significant investment in higher education teacher-preparation programs. When teachers trained in North Dakota leave the profession or move to another state to teach, that investment is lost. NDEA believes investing in a mentoring/instructional coaching program saves money for our state. The funding should be continued and/or enhanced.

- a) **Would you support continued dedicated state funding to provide mentoring/instructional coaching programs for teachers?**
  - b) **Would you support increasing dedicated state funding to provide mentoring/instructional coaching programs for teachers?**
6. The North Dakota Education Association believes in quality professional development for all educators. Under current North Dakota law there are days specified for professional development for teachers. However, the law does not address the needs of our Education Support Professionals (custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, aides, etc...). ESPs are vital resources in our schools; they deserve training to advance their knowledge base and skills sets.

NDEA also believes that professional development should be driven by teachers and ESPs. Teachers and ESPs know what training they need to provide an effective educational environment for all students.

- a) **Would you support legislation that provides dedicated funding for ESP professional development?**
- b) **Do you support the idea of teacher or ESP driven professional development?**

7. In previous legislatures, tuition-tax-credit bills have been introduced that would have provided a credit against state income tax obligations for those parents who choose to send their children to non-public schools. These proposals would have had a significant negative impact on the revenue available to the state general fund, which could result in even more difficulty for the state of North Dakota to meet its constitutional obligation to provide support for public education.

Non-public schools are not required to comply with all state and federal statutes. Non-public schools are also not required to accept all students. NDEA vigorously opposes any effort to provide public funding for non-public schools.

**Would you support the effort to keep public dollars for public schools and oppose tuition tax credits, vouchers, or other similar proposals that erode public school funding?**

8. NDEA supports statutory provision of meaningful collective bargaining rights for all education employees, including teachers, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, aides, etc... NDEA believes that when employers and employees bargain the terms and conditions of employment, the result is increased salaries, improved working conditions for employees, a better overall work environment and quality professional development. Better employment conditions support a better learning environment for students. NDEA supports strengthening the bargaining rights for all public school employees in North Dakota.

**a) Would you support collective bargaining rights for K-12 Educational Support Professionals?**

**b) Would you support efforts to strengthen the current teacher collective bargaining law?**

9. It is the opinion of some that testing students for mastery of standards is the only effective way to measure student achievement. While this is one snapshot of a child's educational progress, a test does not take into account the socio-economic background, language ability, and other determining factors in a student's ability to progress educationally. Adding formative assessments (observations, questioning, and student products) as an additional measure of student achievement, provides a truer and more realistic picture. NDEA recognizes the importance of formal testing, but also believes informal assessments MUST be incorporated in the assessment plan.

**Do you support the use of formative assessments as a measure of student growth and achievement?**

10. The North Dakota Education Association works to ensure great public schools for every child, and research shows the single most important factor affecting student achievement is a quality teacher. Recently, a lot of discussion has been focused on how to best compensate workers who go the extra mile while ensuring all employees are treated fairly. There is growing agreement among educators that the traditional salary schedule may not be able to provide the type of compensation required in a modern society. As a result, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National School Boards Association, and the American Association of School Administrators recently released a collaborative position paper regarding teacher compensation. This collaborative position paper clearly states that there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to this complex and important issue. It also clearly states that paying teachers based on test scores may be a component of a continuous improvement system, but that it should not stand alone as the basis for paying employees. Further, in order to fully support a school improvement process any compensation system must be aligned with the organizational mission and with other organizational operations such as the evaluation process, professional development, and induction, through a school wide planning

process that involves those affected by the pay system. The NDEA believes this is best achieved through the local bargaining process but that the state may play a role in providing models.

a) **Do you support a comprehensive approach to school improvement that engages all stakeholders in the process?**

b) **Do you oppose paying school employees strictly based on test scores?**

11. NDEA recognizes that the population in North Dakota is declining and moving from a rural base to a more urban base. As a result small schools in rural areas are being stressed because of declining enrollment. Some have suggested that Regional Education Associations (REAs) are an effective way to meet the needs of students who live in the increasingly sparse areas. In fact in the last legislative session, the REAs were appropriated money to begin meeting some needs of school districts. If this model is used to provide a public education in North Dakota, NDEA supports REAs that:

- professional development is driven by teachers and ESPs,
- there are centers, under the direction of a majority of teachers, that incorporate best practices for mentoring, coaching, and professional development,
- provide meaningful long-distance education that allows students face-to-face interaction with a certified teacher at least twice a week, and
- do not create an additional layer of unnecessary bureaucracy.

**Would you support legislation requiring REAs to meet the standards stated above?**

a. **If no, why not?**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PART B</b> <b>PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY</b></p>
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Please provide a short biographical sketch. Include your educational background, occupation, organizations or service clubs to which you belong, offices you have held, family, and any other information you feel makes you a good candidate.