



School Board Reflection Questions for Legislators

School Funding:

Explanation:

Public schools received a six percent increase in state aid for the 2022-23 school year, which all are grateful for. A similar or higher increase will be necessary for next school year as schools face rising costs with inflation being above 8 percent and having reached as high as 9 percent this calendar year. In addition, schools continue to need increased funding to recruit and retain teachers as openings continue to climb and exceed previous years' openings.

Dollars for such an increase are available as the state closed Fiscal Year 2022 with a \$115 million surplus that brought the total amount in the state's reserves to \$422.6 million and through the first two months of Fiscal Year 2023 revenue collections have exceeded adopted projections by nearly \$35 million.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Will you utilize a portion of the more than \$400 million in the state budget reserve to increase state aid and meet state budgetary requirements?
- Do you think our state's teacher pay is at an adequate level to retain current or recruit new teachers to the profession?
- Are you willing to provide an increase in state aid at level similar to or higher than what was provided this legislative session?

Juvenile Justice Reform:

Explanation:

The legislative interim study committee on juvenile justice continues its work on the topic following the defeat of Senate Bill 198, which sought to overhaul the juvenile justice system, during this year's session. The committee has discussed a variety of topics that have included truancy, compulsory age, mental health and school resource officers, among a few other areas to assist with handling juveniles within the school, judicial and correctional systems.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Where do you stand on lowering the compulsory age to attend school?
- Are you in favor of providing more funding or resources to the Department of Education, state's attorney's offices or schools to enforce truancy law?
- Would you support funding school resource officers for school districts to combat disruptive juvenile offenders who are returned to school buildings?
- Would you support funding for additional mental health resources for students and families, whether in schools or outside of them?

Content Standards:*Explanation:*

The South Dakota Department of Education hired consultants from Hillsdale College in Michigan to dictate new social studies standards for the Social Studies Standards Review Committee. These standards are now in the public hearings process by the State Board of Education Standards and have received a great deal of opposition from educators and the public. Teachers and administrators have testified the standards are poorly written and the abnormal process is politically motivated, as a similar study was completed and standards presented last year, but were rejected by Gov. Noem and the study committee reconvened. The state only adopts standards and does not dictate curriculum.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Do you support the current process, or should the State Board of Education send the standards process back to the original standards review committee to redo the standards?
- Do you support allowing local school boards and districts to continue to determine the curriculum best suited for their students?
- Do you support the current system of DOE and the State Board utilizing stakeholders to review and amend current or new content standards before being adopted?

School Board Elections:*Explanation:*

Following the debate on and defeat of a bill requiring specific dates for local government elections during the 2022 legislative session, schools are seeking to address the concerns about voter turnout by supporting legislation setting school board and municipal elections on the second Tuesday in either April or June, which would aim to establish a consistent date for these elections and increase voter turnout.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Would you support legislation establishing either the first Tuesday in April or June as local government election day?

Homeschool Activities Participation:*Explanation:*

Following the overhaul of the homeschool education statutes in 2021, questions have arisen as to whether or not a homeschool student may open enroll in a public school district solely to participate in an activity.

The option for a homeschool student do so and whether a public school board can deny the application has been disputed, but this option is not available for public school students as they must enroll and attend the public school in order to participate in an activity.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Do you believe home school students should have to follow the same open enrollment rules as public school students? If so, why?

Public funding for non-public education/Vouchers:

Explanation:

In August, a press release from Gov. Noem state, “As we kick off a new school year, we are committed to ensuring our students experience no disruption to their education and parents have the choice for any option they believe is best for their child. To that end, we believe money for education should be student-centered and are committed to making that more of a reality in our states.”

A bill was introduced – and ultimately withdrawn – during this year’s session proposing the creation of an education savings account utilizing public funds for private or homeschool education. In addition, there is already currently a private school scholarship fund that utilizes up to \$3.5 million in public dollars for private education.

As seen in other states, stripping public schools of public dollars erodes the public education system, which is “the duty of the Legislature to establish and maintain” in the state’s Constitution.

Questions to ask your legislators:

- Do you support utilizing public dollars to fund any form of education beyond public schools? If so, why?
- Do you believe the state’s public education system can thrive if significant funding is diverted to other forms of education? If so, why?
- Will you support legislation implementing a voucher program for education? If so, why?