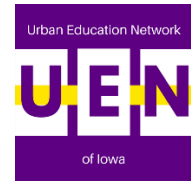


SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATE AND LEGISLATOR CONVERSATIONS



GENERAL TIPS

- If you can, share the issue areas, list of priorities and even questions ahead of any group forum or discussion. Don't try to put someone on the spot.
- Keep questions balanced and nonpartisan.
- Add an element of local impact – what does your data or students' experience suggest?
- These questions are suggestions (not scripts), so feel free to edit or rewrite to include your concerns, local issues and priorities.
- Listen to the answers with an open mind and determine what follow-up is required; provide more information, schedule another meeting, or invite others to the next conversation.
- Circle back with your UEN staff to debrief and plan next steps or get help with your next response or outreach.
- Remember to always start and end with a thank you.

QUESTIONS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

(aka, learn more about your legislators, whether they are new or just new to you)

1. What is the best way to reach you during the legislative session? Do you prefer email, text, cell phone or phone message to the Statehouse switchboard? What about when you are at home or the legislature is not in session?
2. What is your vision for education?
3. What experiences from your own education, and those of your family's involvement in school, frame your educational priorities today?
4. How important is public education to the success of families, business and our community?
5. Why did you agree to run for office and what drives you to keep representing the people in our school district?

QUESTIONS ON ISSUES

See the Legislative Successes from the most recent Session at: www.uen-ia.org/legislatedigest. For returning legislators, thank them for policy progress in several of these areas throughout the conversation.

For new legislators and candidates, balance educating them with learning their position to determine whether they need more background and information on the issue.

The following questions are suggestions to both provide information and engage with candidates on where they stand. Feel free to change the questions and/or add some local information based on your school district's experiences and student needs.

1. As the Iowa economy and competitive hiring market continue to be strong, schools are struggling to fill and retain positions (teachers, paraeducators, bus drivers, coaches, and others). As the legislature has continued to mandate costly local district actions, public schools have had to sacrifice programs and activities that students, parents and employers would prefer, because there is not enough revenue to maintain those and meet mandated salary minimums.

Will you commit to setting the SSA rate within the first 30 days of the session and for an amount that keeps up with the basic cost of the business of education, exceeding the inflation rate? (You can share the adequate funding issue brief or education funding PPT which shows Iowa's lagging investment in public schools and the history of per pupil increases.)

2. Just like you, local school board members are elected to represent the interests of constituents, taxpayers and students in our district. Iowa Code 274.3 was amended in the 2017 Session to require a liberal interpretation of the Iowa Code to effectuate the purposes of local control, trusting school board members to make the best decisions on behalf of their students, parents, staff and communities.

Do you agree with this philosophy of local control, and will you work to consider the importance of local control in your decisions at the statehouse?

3. Over the last several years, big state policy changes have been legislated (chronic absenteeism, reading and math initiatives, student removal from classrooms for nonviolent or violent behavior, cell phone restrictions, talented and gifted plans and student acceleration, graduation requirement to include passage of the INS Civics Test and addition of social studies student achievement measures to the state accountability plan). Executive branch policy changes, such as special education expenditure reviews and changes to accountability desk audits, have also been required of public school districts. School leaders have advocated for and appreciate the few instances of delayed implementation when state policy and rules must be developed, then local board policy, often followed by training for staff to follow. These thoughtful implementation deadlines are too few and far between, which means that new state demands interrupt the cadence of the normal education delivery process and interfere with state or local rules and policy development and planning for adequate training and support for school district leaders, board members, staff and families.

Will you promise to advocate for reasonable implementation deadlines for any legislated state mandate (and expect reasonable timelines from the executive branch, too)?

4. Solid research demonstrates the positive impact of a quality preschool experience for students. (See the Position Paper on PK for examples). For many of our 4-year-olds, however, their parents cannot get them to half-day programs or childcare is not available

for the other half of the day. There have been recent proposals to provide a 1.0 weighting for all-day preschool or for preschool with wrap-around services for the full day, so parents can engage in the workforce and students most in need of closing the achievement gap (such as low-income and non-English speaking students) can get the great start they need in school.

Do you support investment in quality preschool for needy students, including the 1.0 weighting, so schools can overcome barriers to access by providing a continuum of quality preschool, including wrap-around services?

5. Iowa has a worker shortage. It's been evident in the education field for years, although the pandemic created additional stress. Iowa DE compiles a list of [shortage area positions](#), which for 2026-27 includes nearly every teaching position, with special education shortages as the most significant, but others include music, math, science, social studies, world languages, English-as-a-second language, counselors, talented and gifted, librarians, early childhood, art and CTE teachers, and others. Almost all districts in Iowa, including urban schools, are struggling to find bus drivers, paraprofessionals, office staff, and food service workers. Nearly all districts face a substitute shortage. See this [DE map](#) of the percentage of teacher vacancies by district for 2025-26.

What do you think are the causes of the education workforce shortage?

Will you support state or other sources of funding to encourage grow-your-own teacher recruitment programs or expand alternative certification programs to grow the pool of potential teachers?

Recent investments in teacher minimum pay came with increased mandated minimums (\$50,000 for new teachers up to 11 years of experience and \$62,000 for teachers with 12 or more years), funded through the teacher salary supplement per pupil categorical fund (known as TSS). Many districts, especially those with declining enrollment, need additional resources to address salary compaction and meet the minimums. The range of increases in TSS for this school year provided a much larger increase in per pupil TSS for smaller school districts but much less per pupil for urban schools, which were already paying higher salaries to teachers who were, in many cases, teaching larger class sizes and more students with very diverse needs. We can all do better to reduce the negative rhetoric about teachers and public schools that discourages young people from going into teaching and encourages experienced teachers to leave the field.

What will you do to help districts have adequate resources to pay staff, recruit more people into education and restore the respect that the profession deserves?

6. The percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch is a measure of poverty used in school policy-making. In 2001, 27% of Iowa students were eligible for FRPL. Today, that percentage has grown to over 42%, which means at least 197,491 students in the 2025-26 school year were living and learning in low-income environments. For many students in low-income families, schools must provide them with the resources and

supports they need. Iowa does not have a poverty factor in our funding formula. Our dropout prevention local funding is based on enrollment rather than the percentage of students at-risk or from low-income households. The cap on Dropout Prevention is based on an old formula, somewhere between 2.5% and 5% of regular program district cost, but all districts should have access to the 5%. Districts with concentrated poverty need more to close achievement gaps and support students to success. Lastly, during the Branstad administration, the education reform package included a \$10 million standing appropriation to the DE to provide support for high-needs school districts. This appropriation has been delayed every year since 2014, despite increased levels of at-risk, low-income and non-English-speaking students nearly every year since.

Do you support keeping the \$10 million high-needs schools appropriation in the FY 2028 budget, which Iowa Code currently authorizes, and will you resist efforts to delay it next year?

Will you work with us to update Iowa's formula to include what many other states do, providing resources for the neediest students?

Would you support a poverty factor and English-learner weighting for preschool students, to get these students off to the right start?

7. The Legislature and Governor worked for a period of five years to make progress on the inequity in the district cost per pupil and state cost per pupil. We appreciate the commitment to close that gap by \$5, last done in the 2025 Session. There is still a gap of \$135 per student remaining in the formula.

Will you support continuing the formula equity effort at an increased per pupil amount, so that we can eliminate this gap entirely over the next 8-10 years?

8. The Legislature has required the state to assume more of the education funding formula costs over time, bearing more of the cost of educating students as compared to the national average. Meanwhile, national comparisons show the contribution of Iowa local funding well below the national average. Most recently, FY2025 Iowa per pupil spending ranks our state 9th out of 12 in the Midwest region, at \$3,250 below the national average per [US Census](#) data. The NEA Rankings and Estimates [annual report](#) confirm that number, as well as estimating a growing gap, placing Iowa about \$4,200 per pupil below the national average for FY 2026. Historic income tax cuts over the last four years are estimated to reduce state General Fund revenue by over \$1.8 billion annually (likely impacting budgets when the surplus and taxpayer relief funds are spent down). Action in the 2026 Session cut funding for non-salaried staff supplemental pay by \$7 million (in half), diverted additional SAVE dollars for property tax relief (removed over \$132 million annually from schools for equipment and construction by 2032), and used \$42 million state appropriation to pay for the budget guarantee (providing even more property tax relief rather than using the \$42 million of funding for school district staff and programs for students).

What tax policy decisions will be considered this year to ensure stable and adequate state funding for education over the long haul? How will you work to keep a reasonable mix of state and local funding for education so Iowa can approach the national average in investing in our students?

9. Iowa has fully implemented education savings accounts to pay for private school tuition, but some technical corrections to existing law and possible realignment of resources could support public and private students.

Would you support eliminating the public-school role of reimbursing private school parents for transportation and instead, appropriate the \$8.2 million to private school parents in their ESAs for transportation?

Now that private school students receive the same level of regular program funding as public school students, should private and public schools be held to the same standards of enrollment, transparency, and accountability for public tax dollars?

Now that Iowa has ESAs, would you support redirecting some of the \$20 million School Tuition Organization Tax Credits and additional Tuition and Textbook Tax Credits to public school needs, such as poverty, English-learner supports or teacher recruitment and retention programs?

10. Iowa school choice includes many options for parents; 1) attendance in the resident neighborhood school or open enrollment within the resident school district, 2) open enrollment to a neighboring public school district (deadline of March 1 application), 3) home school with assistance from the resident school district or open enrollment into a neighboring district home school program (also March 1 deadline) or home school without district support (both qualify parents for tuition and text book tax credits), 4) Private school tuition paid with education savings accounts (application deadline of June 30 for first semester or December 1 for second semester) plus millions for STOs and Tuition and Textbook tax credits for parents, 5) 17 charter schools (12 chartered via the State Board of Education and 5 chartered by local school boards, all funded by the public school district of residence, and 6) open enrollment to an online academy at any time with no deadline. This last option provides an escape valve for parents of students who are chronically absent and face consequences mandated by Iowa Code when those parents choose not to comply with the district's attendance requirements.

Would you support an open enrollment deadline of March 1 for student application to an online academy? (Note: there are many exceptions to the March 1 deadline that would also apply for students in some circumstances, such as health circumstances, a victim of founded bullying or harassment, changed households to a different parent, for any reason if allowed by the district of residence, and others.)