

# Federal Candidates Answers on Education Issues

## Kevin Cramer U.S. House Candidate



- 1. What are your thoughts about the practice used by the U.S. Department of Education's use of Race to the Top grants to advance its education policy agenda?**

I am a strong believer in local control. Local school boards, with active participation from teachers and parents, working together with the state government department of education should be the ones determining their priorities in education policy, not the federal government.

- 2. What will you do to enable small or rural school districts to have a realistic opportunity to apply for and be awarded U.S. Department of Education grants?**

I think the points system currently used to decide grant opportunities needs to be re-evaluated, and what classifies as a "rural" school district needs to be more carefully and concisely defined to reflect truly rural and sparsely populated districts. If federal grants are going to continue, the competition must be fair to all schools.

- 3. In what manner would you consult with and gather information, advice, and opinions from local school leaders including school boards in North Dakota prior to supporting or opposing legislation involving k-12 education?**

Gathering input from organizations like the ND School Board Association and other groups who are most affected by the legislation is important. As an energy regulator, I've grown to appreciate community input in every situation and case. North Dakota only gets one Representative in Congress, and that person needs to be actively engaged with constituents on a regular basis. The founders designed the House of Representatives to be "The People's House," which is why they stand for election every two years and are in session only half of the time.

- 4. What are your thoughts on tuition tax credits and vouchers? Do you believe they erode already limited funds available to public schools? How do you believe they impact public school funding?**

I'm not opposed to vouchers, but I believe that it is an issue for state governments – not the federal government – to decide. In Congress, I intend to push for returning more power to the states in determining their educational priorities, programs and structures.

- 5. Of the education issues Congress will deal with during the next session, which are your priorities?**

The issues of common core standards and common core curriculum are almost certain to come up. I am against the federal government imposing any kind of national core curriculum. I am committed to the ideal that education is a state and local issue. I will encourage a limited role

for the federal government in education. What are your thoughts about the practice used by the U.S. Department of Education's use of Race to the Top grants to advance its education policy agenda? I am a strong believer in local control. Local school boards, with active participation from teachers and parents, working together with the state government department of education should be the ones determining their priorities in education policy, not the federal government.

## Pam Gulleson U.S. House Candidate



- 1. What are your thoughts about the practice used by the U.S. Department of Education's use of Race to the Top grants to advance its education policy agenda?**

Government has no business picking winners and losers in education policy. I do not support programs like Race to the Top, because they do exactly this.

- 2. What will you do to enable small or rural school districts to have a realistic opportunity to apply for and be awarded U.S. Department of Education grants?**

In Congress, I will be a champion for North Dakota's small and rural school districts just as I was in the North Dakota legislature where I sat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. Federal grants need to take into account North Dakota's rural issues and demographics. I sponsored and passed similar legislation in the North Dakota House, ensuring that state aid distributed to schools allowed adjustments for school district size and demographic differences.

- 3. In what manner would you consult with and gather information, advice, and opinions from local school leaders including school boards in North Dakota prior to supporting or opposing legislation involving k-12 education?**

As a state legislator and as state director for former U.S. Sen. Byron Dorgan I worked with people involved at all levels of our educational system. On any legislation affecting K-12 education, I will consult school board members, teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

- 4. What are your thoughts on tuition tax credits and vouchers? Do you believe they erode already limited funds available to public schools? How do you believe they impact public school funding?**

I do not support tuition tax credits and vouchers. I believe we must do everything we can to strengthen our public schools; vouchers take away funding necessary to accomplish this.

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**5. Of the education issues Congress will deal with during the next session, which are your priorities?**

Throughout my sixteen-year tenure in the North Dakota legislature, I worked hard to advance the quality of North Dakota's schools. In 2007, I was a bi-partisan sponsor of SB2200, a landmark bill that was the outcome from the Governor's ND Commission on Education Improvement to increase quality and provide additional resources for our schools. In Congress, I will prioritize key education programs that advance academic excellence and global competitiveness and I will fight to close the achievement gap by stopping draconian cuts to public education – like those offered in Rep. Paul Ryan's budget – and by supporting proven programs like Trio, Upward Bound and Headstart.

**Rick Berg  
U.S. Senate Candidate**



**1. What are your thoughts about the practice used by the U.S. Department of Education's use of Race to the Top grants to advance its education policy agenda?**

The \$4.35 billion Race to the Top competition was established in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment ACT (ARRA). The money was set aside to make competitive awards to states willing to implement a series of reforms deemed innovative by the U.S. Department of Education. Competition in education is good for students, but I have two major concerns with this program. First, in establishing Race to the Top, the President circumvented Congress instead of working together to put good education policy into law. Second, Race to the Top requirements seem best suited to densely populated and urban states, and rural schools have experienced mixed results. 72% of North Dakota schools are considered rural, and while Race to the Top may have good intentions, in many ways it only exacerbated rural school funding disparities and North Dakota chose not to pursue a second round of grants from the program. North Dakota schools need more than federal band-aids on a broken policy. I believe that returning greater authority to the states would empower parents, local school leaders, state policymakers, and governors to take responsibility for local schools and implement reforms to strengthen public education.

**2. What will you do to enable small or rural school districts to have a realistic opportunity to apply for and be awarded U.S. Department of Education grants?**

I was raised and went to public school in Hettinger and my wife Tracy attended a single-room schoolhouse in Hensler near Washburn. We know firsthand the importance of our rural school districts, and every American deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education and high standards, accountability for results, local control, transparency, and parental choice are essential to achieve that aim. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has not worked in conjunction with many states' educational programs and I continue to hear these concerns voiced by parents,

teachers, and administrators of North Dakota. North Dakota's schools need greater state and local autonomy, where decisions can be influenced by students, parents, teachers, and principals-not federal bureaucrats in Washington. The federal government must work with state and local school boards to ensure our teachers and students have the resources they need, without forcing our children to pay off an insurmountable mountain of debt.

**3. In what manner would you consult with and gather information, advice, and opinions from local school leaders including school boards in North Dakota prior to supporting or opposing legislation involving k-12 education?**

As the father of a 12-year-old son, I understand education is essential to the advancement of our nation's future. I am extremely proud and grateful to our North Dakota teachers and educators, who offer a first class education to our children. As with any important issue facing our state and nation, I believe we must bring the stakeholders together and work toward agreement on solutions to those issues. I have and will always work to consult with parents, teachers, school boards and school administrators when making important decisions about the future of education policy.

**4. What are your thoughts on tuition tax credits and vouchers? Do you believe they erode already limited funds available to public schools? How do you believe they impact public school funding?**

The long overdue NCLB reauthorization debate offers an opportunity to make commonsense improvements to public education in America. I am a strong supporter of public schools in our state and the quality education they provide to our state's children, including my 12-year old son. I believe that there would be far less demand for charter schools and private schools nationwide if more states worked like North Dakota. In fact, we don't even have charter schools in North Dakota, a testament to our public education institutions.

**5. Of the education issues Congress will deal with during the next session, which are your priorities?**

My priority is ensuring that our education system prepares our children and grandchildren to enter into the workforce of the 21st Century economy. We are living in a world of rapid change and increasing global economic competition, and Congress must provide leadership to ensure our country remains strong and that the next generation of American workers is equipped to compete in an ever-expanding global marketplace. NCLB had several negative unintended consequences. NCLB required more local expenditures to comply with its mandates and left communities with less flexibility to meet the needs of their children. NCLB has not worked in conjunction with many states' educational programs, and I continue to hear these concerns as I travel throughout North Dakota and will work to address them. North Dakota's schools need greater state and local autonomy, where decisions can be influenced by students, parents, teachers, and principals and not federal bureaucrats in Washington. The federal government must work with state and local school boards to ensure our teachers and students have the resources they need.

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# Heidi Heitkamp

## U.S. Senate Candidate



**1. What are your thoughts about the practice used by the U.S. Department of Education's use of Race to the Top grants to advance its education policy agenda?**

While I understand that one goal of Race to the Top was to promote greater involvement between all stakeholders in education, it's also true that one size fits all policies from Washington don't always work in North Dakota. Funding for programs like Special Education is critical, especially for our rural and small school districts. I remain concerned about proposals that take funding away from programs like special education and move it toward those like Race to the Top that don't help North Dakota schools.

**2. What will you do to enable small or rural school districts to have a realistic opportunity to apply for and be awarded U.S. Department of Education grants?**

The first step would be making sure that small and rural schools and school districts are made aware of all of the various federal programs that offer assistance, not just via the Department of Education. I would look to have my staff put together a comprehensive pamphlet or listing all of the various programs available to rural and small schools and school districts. Various programs exist through the Department of Education, including the Investing in Innovation Fund, Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program, and the Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS); in addition the USDA Rural Development Agency has several programs as well ... all of these programs have funds specifically set-aside to assist small and rural school districts. The second step would be to work with the various agencies to ensure that their criteria for applying and securing the various forms of assistance are truly reflective of the real-world conditions and are not excluding schools/districts based on incomplete, inaccurate, or non-germane information. The application process for the various programs should also be streamlined and not burden the small and rural schools/districts with unnecessary paperwork that requires time and manpower that these schools/districts do not possess. In certain cases, the federal government should explore ways to increase flexibility for small and rural school districts to work cooperatively and pool their needs and resources for these grants so they have a better opportunity to compete.

**3. In what manner would you consult with and gather information, advice, and opinions from local school leaders including school boards in North Dakota prior to supporting or opposing legislation involving k-12 education?**

Too often, when it comes to education, Washington

imposes unfunded mandates and one size fits all rules rather than realizing that fundamentally, in the U.S., education is a local decision. That's why I believe that all stakeholders deserve a voice at the table when it comes to public education, including parents, teachers, administrators those who train a new generation of teachers, and state and local officials.

**4. What are your thoughts on tuition tax credits and vouchers? Do you believe they erode already limited funds available to public schools? How do you believe they impact public school funding?**

Our education system should not resemble a lottery or depend on luck and random chance. Every dollar that goes to a charter or school or to tuition tax credits is presumably a dollar taken out of public education, so these programs most certainly erode already limited public school funding. We need to maximize the dollars per student that we already have committed, not further reduce the amount spent, severely impacting school funding. I oppose federal private school voucher programs.

**5. Of the education issues Congress will deal with during the next session, which are your priorities?**

First and foremost, I want to serve as a watchdog to make sure that Washington doesn't impose more onerous unfunded mandates on our local schools. Specifically, my top education priorities would be (1) [Pre-K] Head Start and Similar Early Education programs – because the basis of a good education and the tools for life-long learning and achievement are instilled and/or ingrained at a young age. While it is important to ensure that we provide access to a quality education at all age levels, it is imperative that we instill the necessary tools for learning and achievement as early as possible in order to put students on as equal a footing as possible at a young age. Closing the learning gap at the front end is a crucial means of keeping the education gap from becoming insurmountable at later stages of public education. (2)[K-12] Special Education – students with disabilities and/or who require additional, specialized instruction, are usually shortchanged in most systems, whether due to funding challenges, lack of adequate facilities and teachers, or myriad other issues. We must provide these students with every resource available, within reason and that is due to them under law, in order to ensure that they are afforded the best opportunity possible to reach their greatest potential (3) [Higher Education] Student Loans/Costs – there is a need to maintain a robust and equitable system for providing student loans to those wishing to pursue higher education. I benefitted from these programs when I went to college and law school, and were it not for these programs I am not certain that I would be where I am now. As a parallel issue, it is necessary to look at the costs of higher education and why the costs continue to exponentially outpace inflation and as a result, make attaining a degree increasingly more difficult for low-income and middle class students. And burdening those who do go to school with crushing debt.

**2012 NDSBA ANNUAL CONVENTION**  
**TENTATIVE PROGRAM**  
 Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck

**PRECONVENTION SESSIONS**

**THURSDAY, October 25**

- 8:00-9:00 a.m. Registration and Continental Breakfast - Dakota Ballroom
- 8:55-3:30 NDCSA School Law Seminar - Lamborn/Patterson
- 9:00-4:00 NDSBA New Member Seminar - Grand Pacific
- 3:30-5:00 p.m. Early Registration - Dakota Ballroom Coatrioom
- 5:30 p.m. NDSBA Board of Directors' Meeting - Governor's Room
- Business Managers' Board Meeting - Room 1258
- 6:00-8:00 p.m. Purchasing Card Program - Sheyenne/Cannonball

**NDSBA CONVENTION**

**FRIDAY, October 26**

- 7:30 a.m. Registration - Dakota Ballroom Coatrioom
- Exhibit Visitation - Courtyard (coffee and rolls available)
- 8:30-9:30 **GENERAL SESSION - Six Keys to Success**  
Karl Mecklenburg, former Denver Broncos Captain and All-Pro Linebacker
- 9:45-10:45 **GENERAL SESSION - The New Frontier in Public Education**  
David Quam, Director of the Office of Federal Relations for the National Governors Association
- 11:00-11:45 **CLINIC SESSIONS:**
  - Leadership Track for Experienced Board Members (Karl Mecklenburg and David Quam)
  - Policy Hot Topic: Seclusion and Restraint
  - Law Enforcement in New ND Part 1: Community Awareness
  - Regional Education Associations and Hess Grant Funding Proposals
  - ND Small Organized Schools Annual Meeting
- 11:30-12:15 Business Managers' Lunch Buffet
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch Buffet & Exhibit Visitation

1:15-2:00

**CLINIC SESSIONS:**

- North Dakota's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)
- National Board Certification
- Business Manager Certificate Program
- Law Enforcement in New ND Part II: Public School Safety
- Two Tools for Teaching - Use of Cell Phones and iPads in the Classroom
- ND Small Organized Schools: Addressing Curriculum Needs While Facing Teacher Shortages

2:15-3:30

**First Business Session & Delegate Assembly**

Superintendent of Public Instruction Candidates Q & A  
 Business Managers' Business Meeting

2:15-3:30

**SATURDAY, October 27**

7:00 a.m.

Buffet Breakfast

8:00-8:45

**GENERAL SESSION - Mindsets of Economic Classes and Overcoming Poverty**

Dr. Ruby Payne, educator and author

9:00-9:45

**CLINIC SESSIONS:**

- National Board Certification [repeat]
- AdvanceEd Accreditation
- TFFR: What Lies Ahead?
- Question Box for Business Managers
- Oil Country Issues/Discussion
- Dr. Ruby Payne Q & A

10:00-11:00

**GENERAL SESSION - How Children Learn: Brain Research and Inquiry-based Science**

Dr. Ken Wesson, college professor, author and education consultant

11:15

**Second Business Session & Delegate Assembly**

Adjourn (no lunch provided)