

2025 Official Candidate Statement

City & Borough of Juneau, Alaska

Steve Whitney

Candidate: Board of Education



Name as it appears on the ballot:	Steve Whitney
Office Sought:	Board of Education
Personal Information:	Resident of Juneau for 25 years, originally from Bellevue, Wa. I have also lived and worked throughout Alaska, including Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor.
Education:	B.S. from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wa., with a focus on mussel aquaculture; graduate study at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in biological oceanography.
Professional Experience:	I was part-owner of a mussel farm in Washington and spent three years as a groundfish observer on vessels in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. I later worked as a deckhand on a salmon seiner and a harvest diver for abalone and sea cucumber, both in Southeast Alaska. After having a family, I joined inseason management and the Community Development Program for the National Marine Fisheries Service, where I have been for more than 20 years.

Position Statement: I am the son of two public school teachers and the father of two children who attended Juneau public schools from preschool until high school graduation. Most of my immediate and extended family members are teachers. While I broke with tradition and studied biology, the Juneau School District has been an integral part of my life over these same decades. Through my direct experience as a parent plus years of research and involvement, I have a considerable amount of insight into how schools work and succeed.

Since I left the board in 2019, the district has faced increasingly trying times. The pandemic set the world back, but it was especially hard on schools. Consolidation was also an upheaval for students, our staff, and the community. We now need healing and a period of normalcy. If elected, I do want small modifications, but I am not pushing for large changes in the next few years as we try to bring stability back for our kids.

While that's the goal, our schools remain under intense stress. First and foremost, we do not have the funds to adequately run our schools. In 2016, our Base Student Allocation was \$5,880, without any special funding

outside the formula. This year, the Alaska Legislature increased the current BSA to \$6,960. However, \$5,880 in July 2016 is equivalent to \$7,894 in July 2025 dollars. Inflation is still high, and by next year, we'll need over \$1,000 added to the BSA just to be where we once were. This is unlikely under the current governor. It will be another fight next year in the Legislature to protect public schools.

The governor and the education commissioner are also crafting regulations that would gut local contributions to our schools. The recent budget veto override was worth roughly \$2 million in our budget. The governor's potential regulations would be an estimated \$8 million hit, and if they succeed, our school district will face massive layoffs and enormous class sizes. I do not want class sizes of 50 kids. Our kids deserve far better, and I will do everything I can to fight this, despite our need for healing.

One modification I would like to see is better educating students and families on how college success and financing work. When I left the board, our National Clearinghouse data showed 60 percent of our students going to college and only 30 percent finishing. Among our Alaska Native students, 50 percent attended college and 10 percent graduated. We can and must do better at preparing our graduates for what comes next. We are in a position to make a difference.

According to the [Opportunity Atlas](#), all of this results in a per capita student loan debt of \$9,600 in Juneau, or \$288 million total. That debt is concentrated among young people who should be buying their first homes and starting families. If early debt stops them, it hurts the whole community. Five percent interest on that total debt is effectively a tax on Juneau residents of more than \$14 million a year. Unlike sales and property tax, it's money from residents' pockets going primarily to banks in other states.

Better educating our students and families about their choices and the process will prevent them from getting saddled with this much student loan debt in the first place. We can do this through minor changes in curriculum without disrupting the way our schools function.

Despite my preference to minimize disruptions, we have serious problems that must also be addressed. We have trouble hiring and retaining staff, especially in special education. We must be able to pay people enough to stay in these difficult but critical jobs and prevent burnout. We also have schools that desperately need renovation. A lot of what Mendenhall River needed more than 20 years ago, when my kids started there, still needs to be done. It's remarkable what has been achieved despite long financial starvation, but continued cuts are not sustainable. Quality public schools are a cornerstone to a free and fair society, and these continued cuts are detrimental to our community and society as well as our kids.

I want to thank the teachers and staff from the bottom of my heart. You deserve better pay and conditions than our community has been allowed to give you. Our children, city, state, nation, and world are better because of you.

This is a volunteer position, and it is not always a pleasant job, but it is an important job. I am someone with the knowledge and dedication to make a positive difference in that process and make things better for our community. I would appreciate your vote on October 7.