

Responses cannot be edited

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Community Led School Board

Questionnaire

This questionnaire was put together by a coalition of non-partisan, non-profit organizations seeking to provide the community with an opportunity to meet, engage and learn from all school board candidates. All candidates running for Denver Public School Board and Aurora Public School Board are being sent the questionnaire on the same date with two weeks to submit their responses.

The questionnaire was put together by Inspire Colorado, YAASPA, and Padres y Jóvenes Unidos.

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In a few sentences, describe your vision for the students and families you desire to serve.

My vision for the students and families that I desire to serve is simple, serve as an advocate and voice for those who feel like their voice doesn't matter. I want to see Aurora Public Schools as a beacon of change in terms of dramatically increasing the graduation/completion rates and decreasing the dropout rates. I want to serve as a supporter, mentor, and partner to our educators, students, and our families. Our schools, our students, our educators, and our community matter. Education is the first priority. Regardless of zip code, students should have access to the same resources and quality of education.

In your opinion, what top two changes should be made on a state and local level regarding public education?

Better school funding is a necessary condition for making meaningful improvements in our education system. Less funding/budget shortfalls, mean larger class sizes, less staff, and fewer resources. Under the current school funding formula, school districts that appear to be similar in size, pupil funding, at-risk funding, on-line funding, and budget stabilization factors experience different outcomes. As I mentioned before, I would like to see equitable resources distributed across the district from schools in North Aurora to schools in South Aurora.

If you are elected to the school board, how will you ensure there is progress toward racial equity for students of color?

I think one of the critical components of ensuring progress toward racial equity is recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching/administration staff to serve as role models for all students. When I am elected, I will take an active role in monitoring the demographics of our teachers and administrators and consistently work with the superintendent to gather data on the representation of teachers of color not only within the total teaching population but also relative to the representation of students of color in our schools. I will also serve as a mentor, partner, and advocate to all district staff, students, and families. They, in turn, need to hold all school board directors accountable to issues of equity. In 2017, the city of Aurora was ranked at number 77 of the most diverse cities in America, outranking a neighboring large district (Colorado Springs). We need to constantly talk about racial equity, because it does impact the way our students learn and family engagement. In times, where many people feel divided, it should not be that way in school or when it comes down to education. We have a responsibility to our students, teachers, families, and community; they deserve board members who are culturally responsive and not afraid of discussing issues that are important to them.

What do you think needs to be done to increase access to programs like ASCENT and concurrent enrollment for students of color and lower income students?

It is very important to provide pathways to technical education. The traditional route of college is not for everyone; we need to provide more information and education to our students as to the various options that exist. There are various options for non-college bound students and public education should not just serve students who are college bound. That is the beauty of public education; that all students are represented and provided access to the same educational opportunities. Aurora Public School District has programs like Options, GED Testing, and the Rebound Ombudsman Programs. There is also a partnership with the program Colorado Youth for A Change that works with students in both APS and DPS around a variety of options for non-college bound students. Pickens Technical College is also a part of Aurora Public Schools, which offers nearly 50 certificate programs to high school students for career and technical education skills. The district should also offer more opportunities to partner with community resources and SBE's and Minority-Owned Business Enterprises. Through

those partnerships there should be opportunities specifically for our students and families for employment and internships. ASCENT is also an option for students that helps increase the number of educational pathways available to students and helps them save a considerable amount of money on college.

How does your school district need to improve in its process of ensuring all students graduate ready for college/career?

We can embrace an environment of collective responsibility for academic success. We also need to be data driven. We also need to ensure that we provide technical pathways and encourage an array of options for post-high school success. Aurora has significant work to do in terms of raising the graduation/completion rates. As I mentioned previously, partnerships with community agencies is also important for opportunities for internships and employment.

How would you determine top budget priorities?

Addressing any questions about budget shortfalls and establishing transparency are top priorities. It is the responsibility of the board to evaluate every program that APS has and its efficacy. This includes any private contracts that the district has and how they are held accountable. It is important to have transparency and an improvement of communication about how budget decisions impact the entire district. Education needs to be the primary focus of the board and decisions should not impact overall service delivery and/or access to education for ALL students. We need to be very strategic in how make our decisions and involve key stakeholders in the decision-making process. It is Board of Education's role to do the following: Put plans, procedures, programs, and systems in place to achieve a clearly defined, desired Result; Monitor those plans, procedures, programs, and systems against appropriate benchmarks or measures of effectiveness; Change the plans, procedures, etc., if they are not proving successful in achieving the desired result. As a board member, it will be my duty to go beyond the prescribed role and really invest in our students and teachers and find out exactly what is working and what needs to be changed, especially in terms of the budget.

How would you advocate for adequate and equitable funding for your district on a state and local level?

I would advocate for adequate and equitable funding for our district by asking the right questions and doing an in-depth examination of the data as to what is working and what is not in our district. We are one of the largest districts in the state; for our graduation/completion and drop-out rates to be where they are, it is obvious that there need to be some changes. I think that the current board has made some positive changes; however, I think it will be important for the new board members to ask questions and really examine the data as to the efficacy of all programs and plans in place to really propel us forward. We need to provide the state with data showing how we need more support and resources for all of our schools, not just the ones in the neighborhoods where property values are higher.

What role do you believe families and students should play in implementing district and school policies?

I believe that families play an integral role in implementing district and school policies. How does the Board know if something is working, without the feedback from those impacted by the policies? Without engaging the families and students and having their buy-in, there will be no progress. There is no one size fits all approach, so it is important that we actively engage the families and students to assist us in identifying issues and problem-solving. It is important that their voice be heard and we include their suggestions and take their feedback as to what is and what is not working. We can also build a mentor/partnership to establish teams to create shared goals, coordinated intervention plans, and strategic plans to support the family system. School Board Directors are elected by their community and should be held accountable by their community. They deserve to be engaged and that should not stop once the election is over.

How would you work with schools to address the school-to-prison pipeline?

The school to prison pipeline is disturbing to say the least. Working in the juvenile justice field, I see cases where students are impacted daily. Schools with zero-tolerance policies criminalize minor behaviors and students with behavioral issues, trauma, learning disabilities only make them vulnerable to picking up charges and being involved in the justice system. Students with the aforementioned issues get pushed out and isolated. Teachers get easily frustrated with certain behaviors from students and the most important question is what resources do the teachers have at their disposal to help them deal with difficult behaviors? Are the teachers and administration adequately trained on responses to trauma and difficult behaviors in the classroom? Are there zero-tolerance policies at the school? Are there SRO's and what is their role in the school? I would first ask those questions to gain a better understanding and ensure that we are more responsive to the sensitive needs of our students, families, teachers, and administration. I would propose additional educational and counseling services for students, families, and teachers. I would also encourage a proactive approach to partnerships in the community and building an external infrastructure to assist with the complexities that our families and students encounter on a day to day basis. There must be resources to build upon the systemic barriers that create concepts like the school to prison pipeline.

What is your position on charter schools?

Although, I do believe that parents should have the choice as to where they send their children, I am a strong supporter of Public Schools. I believe that we need to invest in our public schools and offer more resources to the public school system. Charter schools not part of the State Charter School Institute have different standards for funding and recruitment for teachers and pupils. The difference between charter schools and public schools is that public education is inclusive of all students; not just a certain demographic, social class, etc. Charter schools have specific criteria that does not make education accessible to all students. Furthermore, most charter schools do not have the same criteria for educators and administrators. Some charter schools do not require a bachelor's degree for teachers. Furthermore, resources for public education are reduced because of charter schools. There are also increasingly large waiting lists for students. School choice was intended to offer alternatives to traditional public education and create new methods that improve education. The veracity of its intent has been widely questioned since there are not the same standards of education, targeted outcomes, and consistency among hiring practices.

What steps would you take to ensure that the district curriculum be culturally responsive to the needs of students of color at all grade levels?

I think it is important to focus on the performance of the student as an individual rather than the school. We should have surveys at the end of each school year/semester much like the way colleges do to evaluate the course content. We should empower our students to tell us whether the content was effective and what they would like to see improved upon. Furthermore, the board should be more involved in curriculum matters in partnership with the administration and the teachers. If the curriculum is not effective, we need to be more responsive to our students and our teachers. There should be open lines of communication to encourage and foster support and growth. It would also be valuable to incorporate the student and family perspective as well.

What would you do to hire and retain more teachers of color?

Hiring practices should be inclusive of all demographics and backgrounds. I would ensure that we utilize a variety recruitment boards and strategies to hire a diverse group of educators. It is important for students to see people that look like them and that they can relate to. It is also important that the employees are dedicated and have appropriate credentials. Teachers in general are underpaid, so addressing that issue specifically and recruiting quality candidates into these positions is important to look at when looking at the diversity of staff. Teacher retention is a serious problem in our District. Issues of low achievement and poor learning climates affect teacher retention. Other issues such as, job dissatisfaction, inadequate administrative support, isolation, poor student discipline, lower salaries, and teacher's feeling powerless and having an inability to influence school decisions also impact retention and recruitment. Family buy-in is also difficult when we have many families struggling with housing and homelessness; often school is not a top priority for them. In order to recruit teachers of color, we need to strongly evaluate current starting salaries and benefits. We should also continue partnering with colleges and universities, but specifically HBCU's. My opinions for improving teacher retention are simple: Provide Support, empower them to succeed, and create better work environments. Give them more opportunities to express their concerns and opinions. The School Board should not be so disconnected and isolated and we need to empower the teachers to tell us directly about their concerns. Perhaps, board members may be able to serve as mentors. We need to provide and offer more opportunities for trainings and conferences. We are all responsible for creating an environment for students and teachers to thrive.

Do you support the establishment of Haven Schools in accordance with the Safe and Welcoming School District Resolution adopted by the School Board?

Public schools serve ALL students. Students should not fear coming to school and school should be a safe place that is absent of any political rhetoric that is not inclusive of all people. I wholeheartedly agree that education plays a critical role in empowering our society and paves a way for equity and opportunity. I want all students and families to know that they are supported by Aurora Public Schools regardless of their birthplace/residency status. We have a responsibility to foster growth and empower our students and families; their voices will not be silenced.