

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.

Denver is an amazing city undergoing enormous amounts of change. As we look forward, we want all families and students - whether they've lived here for generations or just moved here - to have a fair shot at success. A strong education is that opportunity. It sets everyone up to live the life they want and succeed in our rapidly changing economy and world. To create a Denver where every kid gets a fair shot, we must put aside politics and focus on our communities. District 4 is made up of many diverse communities. Each has their own wealth of community resources and also their unique challenges in the education system. What does that mean? There's no one size fits all answer for education across Denver. So we must be willing to bring parents and communities to the table and respect them as the experts they are. Parents and families are experts in what they need, in their children, in their experiences, and in their culture. We must allow them to bring that to bear in district processes. I'm not a politician; I'm a former teacher, school administrator, and community organizer. As your school board member, I pledge to bridge the political divides and work with everyone to find practical solutions to our challenges. This is all to ensure Denver Public Schools sets all our kids up to live the life they want to live.

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

Colorado ranks 50th in the country in terms of teacher salary competitiveness. We face an urgent, statewide crisis in school funding and as a school board member, I plan to use my position to continue advocating at the state capitol for additional funding for education. However, I'm running for Denver School Board because of the urgent issues facing our local schools. District 4 has been the epicenter of so much change in Denver and education over the past decade: the challenges of schools facing increasing and declining enrollment, the opening and closing of schools, and the implementation of the school performance framework. In order for our schools and our students to realize their full potential, the District needs to work to provide a stable foundation - in its expectations of schools, in the resources it provides, and in its forward looking vision for schools.

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

As a former teacher, the persistent gaps in outcomes for our students of color in DPS are heartbreaking. Despite overall rises in graduation rates, the gaps between students of color and their white peers remain the same. These students are not abstractions; I have taught and worked in schools with our students of color and am convinced of their incredible potential. That's why on the board I will utilize an equity impact assessment for all decision, determining how different student groups would be impacted differently by any decision. DPS needs to evaluate its curriculum to ensure all students see themselves and their culture reflected, its discipline policies and outcomes so all students are treated with the restorative practices, and focus on professional development of teachers to support all students.

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?

As a student, I was one of the few African American students in my school's IB program. The majority of other African American students in my school were tracked into regular or remedial classes. I know there were other students who had just as much

potential as I did, but for some structural reasons, were not given the same opportunities as I was. The injustice of that experience was part of what motivated me to become a teacher. As a District we can deliberately set goals and thus create strategies to not only increase the number of students in honors, AP, IB, and concurrent enrollment classes as well as in the gifted and talented category. Real inclusivity strategies take intentional work – we have to be direct in eliminating barriers and invest in tactics to bring students into honors classes. One policy that has seen success in other districts is to remove all pre-requisites (i.e. minimum grades or test scores) for being in these classes. All a student needs to have is the desire, and the class is open to them.

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

Readiness for college and careers starts with a great foundation of early childhood learning and early literacy. Together with other providers of early childhood education, DPS must ensure we have enough space in every neighborhood so all kids start kindergarten with a solid foundation. Right now, only one of the 25 elementary schools in District 4 meets the goal of 80% of third graders reading on grade level: there is a lot of urgent work to do. In the older grades, we should invest and expand programs we know work to prepare and excite our students about college and careers: concurrent enrollment courses, Career Connect programs, and vocational and apprenticeship partnerships. Denver should uplift and invest in college enrollment and completion programs like Denver Urban Scholars, College Track, and Denver Scholarship Foundation as well as partnerships with trade and vocational programs.

How would you determine top budget priorities?

While DPS' budget is complex, as a lawyer, board chair of the financially sound non-profit Padres y Jovenes Unidos, and a member of Denver Public School's Accountability Committee, I know I am prepared to effectively evaluate the budget. I plan to evaluate the budget with two lenses: values alignment and efficiency. Budgets are reflections of the values and goals of the organization. Denver Public Schools has set strategic goals through its 2020 plan and the values within that plan are clear: equity, early interventions, and high quality school options for families to chose from. These are noble values, but there are clear places where how we spend our resources is not in

alignment. When I evaluate budgets, I first break it down to individual areas (i.e. transportation, building maintenance). Then, I think through how organizational values should be playing out in that sphere. For example, if DPS says that as an organization it values choice and equity, the transportation budget should reflect a plan that allows families, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, to access good and diverse school options through public transportation. Finally, I look for inefficiencies or areas where the size of the investment does not match its strategic importance. This stage is when an equity-framed cost benefit analysis tool is helpful. The budget process is also best done after strategically engaging with the community who we are elected to represent. I plan on holding community meetings throughout the district, reaching out to those most impacted by budget decisions, and having open lines of communication to hear the needs and values of the community to ensure those are reflected in our budget. Finally, with a billion dollar budget, it is critical that DPS acts in ways that are transparent. Our budget should be publicly audited, and the findings should be shared publicly in ways that are accessible to professional accountants as well as parents who want to know how their tax dollars are spent.

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

Colorado ranks 39th in the nation in terms of education spending (adjusted for regional cost) and dead last in teacher wage competitiveness. We will not be able to do right by our students without increased funding. Given the significant structural barriers to P-20 funding at the state level (TABOR, Gallagher Amendment, Amendment 23, Negative Factor), it is clear it will take a state level initiative to untie our government's hands and increase state funding. I would plan on using my position as an elected board member to advocate for state ballot initiatives that would address this crisis. This might be testifying, lobbying, writing op-eds, or engaging folks in the community to collectively take action to influence state legislators.

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

I've launched my campaign with a series of house meetings, where I've been intentionally listening to the stories of teachers, families, and students. Two themes that have already emerged are a frustration with a one size fits all approach to education in

Denver and the idea that first, decisions are made at the district, and then teachers and community members are consulted. As a community organizer, one of my key principles as a leader is to listen first to the voices of those most affected by a decision. As a public school district, the public deserves to be a part of the decision making process from the beginning, especially in critical decisions like school closure. Currently, this is not happening, and that's part of my motivation to run for school board. Some of the concrete examples of ways to improve include: Increasing investments in the home visit program Redirecting of and transparency of ESSA Title 1 community engagement dollars Increasing training opportunities for families to increase their knowledge of how the district works, how advocacy and organizing works, and how to engage with schools and the district Meeting families where they are at – DPS can travel and knock on doors, or host meetings at hours that meet family availability Going pro-actively to seek the input of parents and family members, instead of after a critical decision about their school or student's education has already been made

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

As a black woman and former school administrator, I care deeply about examining our disciplinary policies and ensuring schools do not reinforce a school-to-prison pipeline. Education is a life or death endeavor, and policies that enter too many students into the criminal justice system is another institutionalized way to limit people's potential and freedom. I have been working on addressing this issue in Denver for the past seven years. As a community organizer, I worked to build a coalition, that included NAACP and the Urban League, to create state law to limit the use of police arrests in schools, and suspensions and expulsions as a means of school pushout. I have also been leading know your rights workshops for parents and students so that they can protect themselves from law enforcement as well as advocate for themselves in schools. The same organization and coalition presented the measure DPS recently approved to eliminate suspensions and expulsions for our youngest students, where I was also present to testify. Public schools can eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline by continuing to reflect on and change policies that directly limit the ability to push black children out of school and into the criminal justice system; as well as policies that drive the elimination of implicit and overt bias in the treatment of our children. In looking at discipline data, we know that students of color are suspended and expelled at a disproportionate rate, and suspensions in early grades have long-term consequences

for a student's educational trajectory. I support the position to eliminate the use of suspension for our youngest, most vulnerable learners; but also equip and support our teachers and administrators to effectively implement restorative approaches to discipline. I also support the position of DPS to implement policies identified in the African American Task Force that focus on teacher of color and retention; culturally responsive school based pedagogy and practices training; and policies that focus on our communities as assets. Policies such as this help us eliminate the consequences of bias and support the practice of prioritizing learning for our students who need it the most.

What is your position on charter schools?

In my career in education, I've supported charters that meet the needs of students and the community. I've also been vocal in my criticism in places where I've seen them fall short- from high teacher turnover, especially with educators of color, to disciplinary policies that disproportionately impact young men of color. When I speak with parents and families in Denver, they want to be able to find schools that meets their students' multifaceted needs, and they welcome the ability to choose magnets or charters with specialized programming (e.g., dual-language program, a school that specializes in special education push in models, the performing arts, wrap around services for homeless youth, etc.). That said, for too many families in district 4, the only choice is between an academically struggling neighborhood school or driving across town. Every student deserves to have a safe and successful school in their neighborhood, a high-quality education no matter what. DPS policies approved by the Board currently do not do enough to help traditional district-run schools turn around their academic performance, instead favoring the opening of new schools, often charter-run. For example, Stedman Elementary is facing an increasing number of families opting out of their school, in part due to several years of low academic performance. At the policy level, Stedman, a school with ~200 students, is charged the same amount for its mandatory reading program as a school with 500 students. In order to pay for that program, while receiving a smaller budget due to its enrollment declines, Stedman has been forced to cut the librarian position and close the library. This action is in opposition to the goal of increasing academic performance. Instead of providing the additional resources and flexibility to the school and it's teachers to improve the performance of the school, district policies are allowing the school to continue on a path towards closure. High-quality charters are an important strategy towards helping all kids in

Denver succeed, but they are not the only answer. We need to build a healthy educational ecosystem that prioritizes the needs of the people in which we serve, which includes equity, public accountability, and transparency. We need to do better for our traditional district schools to ensure a healthy school ecosystem and to ensure true opportunity and equity for our students.

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?

Denver Public Schools has said that it believes all teachers and school staff should be culturally responsive and culturally competent. However, we know that does not happen just because we say we value it. There are persistent disparities in discipline rates among students of color compared with their white peers, gaps in retention rates between staff of color and their white peers, and curriculum that still may not fully reflect or value the culture and experiences of our diverse students and families. Given that, it is clear to me that DPS needs to continue investing in professional development of school staff, curriculum options that are culturally responsive, and anti-bias training across the organization.

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

I have personally and professionally been working on this issue for the last 4 years. I plan on using my role as a School Board member to directly address this. I personally support the recruitment and retention of educators of color with Community Organizations of Aligned Together (COAT), and it was my role to directly do this at Teach For America Colorado. While at TFA, we went from 12% to 41% of our corps being people of color and 40% from a low income community. We were also the first in the country to recruit and hire DACAmented teachers. This work proved that DPS does not have a simple recruitment problem. People of color want to educate children of color. Part of the solution is highlighting that DPS is a district of children of color. Prospective talent also needs to know that they can be themselves and thrive here. That is where we as a district can improve. There is a very deep and wide gap here in Denver. Roughly 70% of our students are children of color but 80% of educators are white. There are even fewer people of color as school systems leaders (in DPS and CMOs) or in chief level leadership, and in the policy landscape that is approving and

informing schools. There are tangible steps and policies the district can undertake to bridge this gap. Staff of color need networks made up of fellow educators, administrators, and external stakeholders to learn from and to support them as they step into their identities in this work. They also need to see themselves reflected in leadership positions, and their leadership styles evaluated and rewarded in equitable ways. And finally we need to prioritize training and implementing culturally responsive instruction and school culture so that teachers of color do not feel torn when they teach or implement school culture plans that may not reflect their own identities. District wide, we can prioritize policies and accountability for management to retain talent by checking for cultural bias at the foundation of addressing an issue. Until we can see a shift in our mindset and an increase in representation of talent of color we should have an independent hiring/promotion policies that are protected with a cultural bias rubric or ombudsperson.

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

Yes. Schools cannot do their job of ensuring all students can learn if students and their families do not feel safe. I am currently the Board Chair of an organization that has been leading an advocacy effort for this here in Denver, Padres y Jóvenes Unidos. On the school board, I would want to expand our advocacy efforts to keep schools as ICE free zones, and to better connect our students and families with rapid response and legal supports when facing potential deportation.