

Responses cannot be edited

Kevin Cox

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 mission is to ensure all students of APS are getting the highest quality education we can provide, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background or documentation status. I come from humble beginnings, so I understand the struggles of children in vulnerable positions. I want to protect their futures by making sure they have great public schools to attend and great teachers to help them grow.

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

The first thing that is sorely needed is to bring transparency and fully equitable accountability to all schools in the APS district. This includes charters, though this is not a black and white issue. I grew up receiving a wonderful education from public schools and believe they are the best option for our children and, for many, the only option. I do fully support the right of parents to choose where their children go to school because they, after all, know what is best for their child. I also love that charters are trying to address the ever changing needs of their communities. However, there is no need for the best wishes of those parents to come at the detriment of the rest of the children in APS. I can appreciate that charters are the testing grounds for new and innovative ideas for education styles and curricula, but I cannot support them if their gains are mixed at best and they still lack transparency. If we hold all schools to the exact same standards

and keep public money out of private institutions, we will then be comparing apples to apples. The rapidly increasing footprint of charters in our district gives me pause when I think about those factors. The second issue that I find as an emergency is protecting the dreamers. The DACA situation is a tragedy right now and my heart breaks to think about the fear and anxiety some students must face on their way to school, where they are supposed to be comfortable and ready to learn. These children have no control over the situation they were born or brought into, therefore, we should not punish them by treating them like they are "less than" or an "other". That being said, our teachers are not paid enough as it is in our current economy to say they should take on another role, as an extension of ICE, when they already have one of the hardest jobs on Earth. In APS, I want to keep the focus on learning and growth; not immigration status and deportations.

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

We must attract teachers and faculty of color. When there are members of many of these minority communities present as faculty in the school, there is less likelihood that there will be as much racial injustice. With that being said, I do not want to just start hiring people just because they are of a certain color. I want to prioritize the hiring of talented, quality teachers and staff. If they are truly well-rounded and qualified, they will be sensitive to diversity and inclusivity issues. The task will be difficult to hire from the communities of all 100+ ethnicities, but we will be pushing to find qualified candidates and hire them immediately; especially in situations where we need translators and multilingual services. I personally believe that bilingual immersive environments are the best way to teach multiple languages well, so that would be a good place to start the ball rolling.

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?

We need to use the data on hand to find the students most in need of these programs and personally reach out to them. I want to have parents' phones called and doors knocked to tell them about the benefits and how it can change their child's future.

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

APS must reinvigorate their efforts to inform the students of Professional and Technical Education. I want these kids to know that if they feel that they are not headed to college, there are many paths to success. Many find a college education to be cost prohibitive or need to contribute to the household because of the high cost of living today. These are the same struggles I faced as a student and are why I passed up on a higher education. They need to be exposed to Apprenticeship programs and vocational institutes such as Pickens. They can earn while they learn, eventually becoming a very well paid worker without all of the student loan debt. I believe this message will be powerful with our youth, especially those in financially vulnerable situations or single parent households.

How would you determine top budget priorities?

The highest priority is going to be to get APS back into the black. I feel that students being removed from the district by parents is a huge contributor to this crisis. I would focus on improving performance and curricula to attract the students back to APS, thereby increasing incoming funding. The decision making process about how to prioritize other issues pertaining to the budget is a portion of the job that I am excited to learn more about as board member. There is a lot to learn and I am up to that challenge.

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

I would be a bullhorn for APS to each and every representative I can get in contact with. I will work hand in hand with members of our local and state government to address pertinent issues; including City Council, House Representatives and especially members of the Education Committee.

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

Many students spend more time at school than with their parents. The school needs to be an extension of home and vice versa. Parents need to recognize what is and is not allowed at school and teach these lessons at home in order to prepare their child for a positive learning experience. With that said, schools need to have diversity in the faculty to understand differences that may be considered as behavioral issues, but in reality are cultural differences that need to be accounted for.

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

By ending out of school suspension immediately. These children with behavioral issues are exhibiting symptoms of a problem that is very unlikely to be solved by stopping their education. We need to, once again, call a phone and knock a door. There may be gangs on the route to the bus, a lack of nutrition in the home, even a lack of a stable household. In many cases, the school is the main source of stability for the student. If they have working parents, which, in this economy, I'm not sure how the average family can make it without two incomes, suspension would be a gigantic financial burden on the family. One parent would have to stay home to ensure the child does their classwork or is overseen. This is multiplied if we are dealing with a single parent household, so we can easily expect an unsupervised child. Compound this with the fact that most children who are suspended, expelled or incarcerated are children of color. The institutionalizing effect of this process is proven to increase the likelihood that the child in question will be incarcerated. This process is being started in some places as early as Kindergarten. We must stop this at the beginning. No more out of school suspension.

What is your position on charter schools?

Adding to what I provided in the first answer, I think we need to slow or stop the growth of charters in APS for the time being. For the ones standing now, we must implement an oversight plan for them that is fully equivalent to public school standards. Again, I am glad they are trying to provide a better model to serve our kids, but I can't let the cycle as it works now continue to bankrupt APS and run its reputation into the ground while under-serving our special needs children along with minorities and others. Public schools educated me very well and are, in many cases, the only option for children in APS. This means we have an imperative to improve our traditional public schools to a standard above and beyond the national average before we start trying to reinvent the entire system.

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 believe that having people of color on the Board of Education will help this. Being a man of color, I am sensitive to this issue and will work diligently to make the sure the curriculum is not formulated specifically to be applicable to the majority alone.

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

We have to offer competitive wages. If we can attract the best and brightest teachers, teachers of color will be walking through the door much more frequently. Economic difficulties are multiplied upon people of color, so you cannot expect people of color to be walking into poorly paying professions when they are struggling worse than their counterparts. Once again, we can't just pick people of color just because of that fact, but if we are attracting the best talent, we can prefer some of color if they are fully qualified because they are fulfilling multiple needs at the same time.

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

Absolutely. I do not agree with families being ripped apart or scared to send their child to school. All children, regardless of their documentation status MUST be educated if they live in the district. Our schools need to stay away from ICE and keep our schools a safe and inclusive environment.