

Responses cannot be edited

Miguel In Suk Lovato

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.

I am Miguel In Suk Lovato and I believe that all students, regardless of where they live, have the right to attend a high-quality school that prepares them for success in college, careers, and life. Regardless of socio-economic status, cultural background, disability, immigration status, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, tribal affiliation, or ethnic heritage, I believe that all students can learn and excel academically. I have witnessed this firsthand as a classroom teacher and remain committed to helping every student in the district succeed. This includes making sure that the district views resources through the lens of equity. Resources should be distributed equitably to support the needs of traditionally underserved students. For example, interpretation and translation services should be concentrated and prioritized in schools with high-need for these services. Teachers with large numbers of historically underserved students – whether students of color, emerging multilingual students, or students with disabilities – need to be adequately supported to create inclusive learning environments for all students. And opportunities to earn post-secondary certificates and degrees are presented to students and families that don't typically earn these credentials.

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

At the state level, I think the biggest thing I would like to see changed is simply an increase in available funds. Primarily due to the restrictions of TABOR, our school districts are funded at much lower levels than adequate. While there are those who say, "Throwing more money at the problem won't solve anything," we still need to fund public education at comparable levels with the rest of the country. Adequate funding will allow school districts to attract highly skilled teachers by offering competitive wages.

Currently, Colorado ranks dead last in the nation as far as offering competitive wages for teachers. On a local level, one of my primary goals will be to push the district for urgent change by looking at examples of success in surrounding districts and nation. Aurora Public Schools is in great need of support and leadership. Recently released CMAS scores (including PARCC scores in English and math) point to growth in English language arts above the state average, but overall proficiency continues to lag far behind other school districts. This is particularly true in northwest Aurora. For me, student achievement is the single most pressing issue in Aurora Public Schools. I believe that it our obligation as educators, parents, families, and students, to push our district to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education. It is the promise that we've made with the families of these students. We owe it to them to deliver.

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

One way to move towards a district that is more equitable for students of color is to ensure that our students are able to see themselves reflected in their educators and mentors. As the son of an immigrant, I value having a teaching and administration staff that looks like the students, comes from the same cultural backgrounds, and shares the same set of experiences. This means having strong African American and Latino teachers, but also great teachers with roots from Ethiopia, Somalia, Nigeria, Mexico, El Salvador, Nepal, Korea, etc. Certainly, it will be challenging to have every cultural background represented, but in the most diverse city in the state, we need to make it a priority.

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?

Colorado is in the great position of offering concurrent enrollment where students can earn college credits while in high school. Additionally, the ASCENT program gives students the opportunity to earn an associate's degree, tuition free, by remaining in high school for an extra year. This is helpful to all students, but in particular, to low-income and undocumented students. Access to these programs can certainly be improved, but more importantly, students already taking advantage of these programs need to be given enough support to successfully earn degrees and certificates. Unfortunately, despite some schools in APS boasting notable percentages of students taking advantage of concurrent enrollment, the percentage of students actually earning degrees and certificates remains low. For example, at Hinkley High School, 60% of students are concurrently enrolled in high school and college courses. This compares to the 22.8% of students in the state who are concurrently enrolled. However, only 22% of Hinkley students are earning degrees or certificates compared with 28% of concurrently enrolled students statewide who are earning credentials. The Aurora Post-Secondary Pipeline is a collective effort with APS, the Community College of Aurora, Goodwill Industries, and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, that is attempting to address these issues. Their work is wisely focused on tactics that have demonstrated increased degree/certificate attainment like FAFSA completion, pre-collegiate programming, and enrollment in college supportive services. We should learn from the Aurora Post-Secondary Pipeline what can be successfully scaled across our district.

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

I believe that the bar for all students graduating from high school should be college readiness. In the days of rampant tracking of students years ago, students of color and low-income students were counseled away from college as an option. We need to ensure that we never return to those days of trying to predetermine the future of a young person. For students who choose not to go to a four-year college, or who might find a better fit with other post-secondary options, we need to provide great options and pathways to dignified and well-paying careers. I have had wonderful conversations with two-year certificate programs, trade unions, and community colleges that offer other

alternative paths to successful careers. It would be my responsibility as a school board member to push for strong connections with college, careers, and work.

How would you determine top budget priorities?

Ultimately, the school board has the important role of fiscal oversight of the district. This includes regular monitoring of income and expenses to ensure that spending is in line with established budgets. This also includes monitoring existing assets and liabilities. Finally, this also includes the development and approval of future year budgets, and fighting for Bond and Mill Levy dollars. In order to be an effective school board member, I believe that it is vital to be as informed as possible, by engaging with various constituents, before the approval of any future year budget. This is especially important in the case of projected budget shortfalls. Constituents include students, teachers, school leaders, families, and community members.

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

On a state level, I believe that it is important that our local school board regularly engage with our Colorado legislators. While board members can certainly advocate for increased funding at the local level, there are limited moves that our elected officials can actually do. Barring the unlikelihood of a repeal of TABOR, perhaps a new funding formula needs to be developed. I would welcome the opportunity to engage in these discussions. Locally, we need to take a hint from the playbook of the innovation schools in APS that used their autonomy to keep vital interpretation and translation services. In a district with over 150 different languages, we need to prioritize this service and make smart and equitable decisions that will place these important services with the communities that need them the most.

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

I recently attended the school board candidate forum sponsored by the families of RISE Colorado. What was made abundantly clear is that families want to be involved and supportive of their children even when there are linguistic and cultural differences. Aurora Public Schools is fortunate to have a community of families that is willing to be engaged and active. At the beginning of the current school year, members of the Resident Leadership Council of the Community-Campus Partnership addressed the school board and stated that they were willing to help with the implementation of the innovation schools in northwest Aurora – had they been informed. Council members stated that they would be willing to support the district's efforts by reinforcing expectations at home. Unfortunately, they did not feel like they were included and welcomed. We must do a better job of actively including our parents and families.

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

The school to prison pipeline must be broken. A disproportionate number of Black and Brown children are directly affected. 85% of the young people in the juvenile justice system have special education qualifying disabilities, which makes this an issue that goes beyond race and ethnicity. "Zero tolerance" disciplinary practices in schools, including over usage of suspensions and expulsions, often drive students into the juvenile justice pipeline. Teachers should be provided with support and ongoing training to work with challenging behaviors in the classroom. We have seen huge successes at the state level in implementing restorative practices to keep our students in school and learning, rather than removing them from their classrooms. And regarding funding, we know that keeping kids in school and addressing the root causes of discipline problems actually saves us tremendous amounts of money. Truancy, drop-outs, incarceration — these are massively more expensive than ensuring that all of our students stay in school and graduate college- and career-ready. We can't be pound-wise and penny-foolish by believing that our efforts to dismantle systemic disenfranchisement, often of Black and Brown students, are "too expensive." Aurora Public Schools has benefited from past support from philanthropy to help decrease suspensions and expulsions in particular schools. If needed, the district could reach out to private foundations for possible future support. Finally, I support the efforts state-wide and more locally by our neighbors in

DPS to eliminate exclusionary discipline practices for our youngest learners. Our kids can't learn if they're at home being punished.

What is your position on charter schools?

I care a lot less about the governance model than I do about outcomes for students. Aurora Public Schools is clearly not serving all students as well as they need to be, and our children and families deserve urgent improvement. If any model of public school wants to come forward and provide a great education for kids, and is transparent and accountable to parents and the community, then that's something I can get behind. Aurora has generally seen less school choice than in other cities like Denver. Even without a variety of school options available, families are making educational decisions for their children by sending them to schools outside of their neighborhood -- or even out of district. For example, I have met numerous northwest Aurora families who are choosing not to send their child to Aurora Central High School, one of the neediest schools in the state, but rather to higher performing public schools like Rangeview in APS, Smoky Hill in Cherry Creek, Arapahoe High School in Littleton, or Denver School of Science and Technology in DPS. I believe in empowering parents to make decisions for the education of their children. Having a variety of school options available appears to have been successful in Denver with enrollment up, graduation rates up, and a dropout rate that is lowest it's ever been.

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?

As stated in the Colorado Revised Statutes, one of the roles of the local board of education is, “To determine the educational programs to be carried on in the schools of the district and to prescribe the textbooks for any course of instruction or study in such programs” (CRS 22-32-109 (1)(t)). As such, it is not just appropriate that the school board be involved in curricular matters – it is required by law. In this day and age of revisionist history, we must stand our ground against any attempts to whitewash the history of the oppression, colonization, and civil disobedience. While these may not be the easiest topics to discuss, I believe that it is important to not shy away from that which is difficult. All students can learn from the positives and negatives of our past. I believe that the curriculum used in our schools must be: 1. Factually correct; 2. Respectful of the diversity of thought and experience of our students; and 3. In compliance with state law and local policy. Further, where there is academic disagreement, the disagreements must be presented factually and without bias.

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

APS struggles, as do districts nationwide, with recruiting and retaining teachers of color. I am excited to explore options to ensure that we have a strong pipeline of incredible teachers of color in our district — whether it means a district-specific recruitment program, enabling paras to become full-time educators, teacher residencies, and partnering with our institutions of higher education to grow-our-own. APS should be a model for the nation in our teaching staff by making specific concerted efforts to have a teacher force that reflects our students and community. We need to incentivize the best teachers to come to Aurora and stay.

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

I do. I thank the school board for approving the Resolution to Keep APS a Safe and Inclusive School Community – the community-led resolution to support students regardless of immigration status which passed in the spring. I feel that it is an important reaffirmation of the role that schools play in our community. It is also an important declaration of what role the schools will not play – that of assisting immigration and customs officials with the enforcement of immigration laws. Going a step further, I would support the declaration of our schools as safe havens for all children.