

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.

All students, regardless of where they live, deserve the same educational opportunities, the same high expectations, and the same access to high quality instruction with multiple pathways to success, including choices to attend college or launch a career. To move forward, we must strengthen student achievement, ensure equity for all, and empower the community by bringing all voices to the table.

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

The two changes I would make immediately would be 1), school funding formulas, and 2, teacher evaluation practices. School funding in Colorado is in crisis, and the formulas used to direct money to local districts must change. (Please see my answer to the school funding question below.) While the laws regarding teacher evaluation are meant to keep the most highly qualified teachers in service, the unintended consequences are that teachers are leaving the profession within the first few years of starting their careers. This creates an ongoing “teacher churn” that results in a continuous cadre of inexperienced teachers. The complicated skill set needed to produce a proficient, effective teacher can take longer to master than three years. Twenty-five percent of APS teachers are in their first two years of teaching; fifty percent have only been with the district for five years. To move APS forward, it is critical that we support teachers,

especially those new to the profession, with professional learning opportunities such as job-embedded coaching; coaching that helps teachers do just what is needed to accelerate student achievement, as well as helps them feel more confident in their ability to effect change.

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

The solution to this begins with teachers and administrators in early childhood education. From the very start, we must ensure that all students, regardless of race, are given the same opportunities to learn and succeed. We must always set the bar high and truly believe that all students can achieve. We must encourage students to believe in themselves, to take risks, and to persevere. And we must provide exactly what is needed to each student so that they become proficient learners and successful adults.

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?

Sadly, teachers too often make false assumptions about what students would or would not be interested in or be capable of doing. Research tells us that students of color are routinely passed over for honors or advanced placement classes. The same may hold true for participating in concurrent enrollment or taking advantage of ASCENT. As stated previously, we must always set the bar high and truly believe that all students can achieve. We must engage parents as our partners and educate them as to the benefits of concurrent enrollment and ASCENT, so they, too, can become encouragers of their children. We must intentionally recruit students who might otherwise not consider taking these classes. And we must actively combat the systemic racism that exists in our daily decision making and contributes greatly to these false assumptions.

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

Student achievement is accelerated when teachers focus their instruction precisely on what students need to know in order to learn. They do this by determining what their students already know, carefully evaluating their students' strengths and next steps, and differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs. They must match students with appropriate resources, approaches, and strategies, set high expectations for learning, monitor student growth over time, and work hard to meet the diverse needs of everyone, including second language learners, high performing students, and students with special needs. To move APS forward it is critical that we:

- support teachers, especially those new to the profession, with professional learning opportunities such as job-embedded coaching; coaching that helps teachers do just what is needed to accelerate student achievement.
- recruit and retain a diverse, highly qualified team of teachers
- ensure all students receive equitable learning opportunities and high expectations
- work tirelessly with parents to ensure that students are in class and ready to learn every day

Aside from college preparation, APS must increase its ability to prepare students for career choices that don't require a college degree. Not all students want to, need to, or choose to pursue a degree. Different vocational classes are offered at high schools across the District, as well as at Pickens Technical College, to which students are bussed for vocational classes throughout the day. Additionally, concurrent enrollment classes are encouraged for students in partnership with the Community College of Aurora, so that students may complete an associates degree or certificate program at the same time that they graduate from high school, making moving into either college or career options that much faster. Aurora is also exploring the development of apprenticeship programs with local trades and businesses, an option in which I see great potential and highly encourage!

How would you determine top budget priorities?

It is always important to make smart, financial decisions, but it is imperative to do so during lean economic times. A primary responsibility of the Board of Education is to be the steward of taxpayer dollars. A challenging budget requires setting critical priorities that keep teachers, instruction, and teacher resources needed to accelerate student achievement at the top of the list. For instance, we cannot cut the budget by reducing a school's teaching and support staff and increasing class size; this harms kids. We cannot cut the budget by decreasing early childhood education and eliminating full day kindergarten; this harms kids. We cannot cut the budget by decreasing access to high quality curriculum and adequate classroom resources; this harms kids. Instead, we must look for ways to be more efficient in other areas. Clearly, budget cuts are painful; they require difficult choices, which can only be made through thoughtful reflection, strategic planning, and a commitment to putting children first.

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

Colorado school funding is incredibly complicated! Local funding is drawn from property taxes; state funding is drawn from income taxes; and both of these sources have caps on them. Even an amendment meant to add funds to school districts is actually now being used to subtract funds. Federal dollars are added for Title I schools, but all of this is not enough. While it's true that simply throwing money at a problem doesn't fix it, we know that more money, spent wisely and consistently over time, has a positive impact on students – and not just on their test scores – but on their life chances. Districts like APS need greater per pupil funding for at-risk students and students learning English; we need to repeal HB 17-1375 or greatly reduce the amount of funds required to go to charter schools (APS funded its charter schools with over \$38 million this year;) and we need to repeal TABOR, which greatly limits revenues that are collected by the State.

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

One of the legs of my platform is community, and specifically, strengthening community groups by bringing all voices to the table. Clearly, we will be a better school district by working together in community with parents and local business leaders. Strong neighborhood schools start with strong leaders from the neighborhood. As a Board member, I will reach out to parents by instituting “Town Hall” type meetings in schools. Even though there is always an “opportunity for audience” at each Board meeting, those opportunities can be very intimidating; and furthermore, those opportunities do not provide a time for dialogue. I much prefer conversation, which can only happen in a setting outside of regular meeting protocols. There is no doubt that many good ideas will emerge from such conversations, leading to policies that will come directly from students, parents, and the community.

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

The school-to-prison pipeline is rooted in racism at the core and is particularly visible in discipline policies that are often referred to as “no excuses” or “zero-tolerance;” policies that outline strict consequences for behavior, especially out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. There is a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby children who are labeled “bad” begin to see themselves as “bad.” As the police get involved, this process moves even faster. Children need to see themselves as good, capable of success, and connected to their teacher and classmates in positive ways. Hiring a diverse team of teachers is essential to helping both students and parents make this connection. To eliminate the pipeline, we must train administrators, teachers, staff members, and police officers to understand how the pipeline functions, and then, to learn new ways of responding to children. With children from so many different countries in Aurora Public Schools, teachers must come to a deeper understanding of the various cultures represented in their classrooms and work to develop classroom communities that are culturally responsive. Programs such as “Peaceful Classrooms” and “Restorative Justice” work well in some settings, but can be challenging to implement in others. We must dig deeper into the research on these and similar programs, while building stronger relationships with parents and community members by offering them more opportunities to have a voice.

What is your position on charter schools?

The original role of charter schools was to serve as an opportunity to “try on” non-traditional, innovative ways of being school, as well as to provide an option for students for whom more traditional school settings weren’t working. The role of today’s charter schools is less clear to me. While charter schools still offer parents a school choice, they do not offer a clear advantage to students. In general, less than one-fourth of charter schools perform better than traditional public schools, and about one-fourth perform worse; the rest are a wash. The National Education Association, Black Lives, and the NAACP have all called for a moratorium on for-profit charter schools. Without a doubt, APS must take a very cautious approach when considering any new charter school within the District, whether it’s for-profit or not. The unintended consequences of charter schools include pulling money away from traditional schools, a lack of transparency and accountability, and the very real possibility of re-segregating classrooms. A better approach might be to design educational models such as magnet schools, teacher-led schools, lab schools, and schools of innovation; models that increase student achievement and build stronger communities within the existing public school 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?

A culturally responsive curriculum starts with a culturally responsive classroom. It goes much deeper than celebrating holidays, eating certain foods, or learning about key figures in history such as Harriot Tubman or Ceasar Chavez. It means honoring and valuing cultural differences among all students in the classroom. It means being aware of my own position of power and privelege as a white woman and how that effects my thinking. It means teachers must get to know their students as individuals and not make assumptions about who they are based on preconceived notions. It means developing partnerships with students and families to understand better the differences in cultures so that teaching can be more responsive. These concepts and expectations must be intentionally brought to bear through professional learning and coaching, so that teachers, principals, and support personnel are made aware and will continually reflect upon them. At the same time, we must broaden the variety of books on our reading lists to include as many cultural perspectives as possible, always provide multiple

perspectives in our history and civics lessons, and ensure that children can relate to the characters and ideas being expressed in the literature they read. To do this, we'll need the help of parents and community members, as well as experts in the field.

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

The first thing to do is to write job descriptions that uplift the value of diversity and of a diverse teaching staff. From there, instead of waiting for applicants to come to the District, Human Resources should actively recruit in colleges and universities that have high populations of students of color. I would invest in a "Grow Your Own" program whereby current District employees can receive tuition help for becoming a teacher. I would think outside the box of the District website and advertise for jobs using social media. I might even figure out how to give a signing bonus to a teacher who makes a referral. And to lay the groundwork for the future, I would talk to high school and college students about the need for a diverse teaching staff and do my best to encourage and inspire the next generation of leaders to pursue education as their career path.

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

I wholeheartedly support this policy; in fact, I spoke in favor of it before the Board. Here is an excerpt from my address: "Of course, parents want us to teach their children, but the number one thing that parents want us to do is to keep their children safe. While this resolution doesn't have the power to guarantee a child's safety from all possible calamities, it does have the power to send a critical message. It intentionally names the baseline of school culture for all our students – whether immigrant or native-born – that Aurora Public Schools is a welcoming community, that we embrace our strength of diversity, that we protect families' rights, that we care about students' emotional wellbeing – not just their test scores – and that we stand beside all of them as they work to shape a successful future."