

Responses cannot be edited

# Angela Cobián

## 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.

Email address \*

angela@angelaforsouthwestdenver.com

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

The students and families I desire to serve are reflective of my own experience in southwest Denver. I grew up as in southwest Denver as a student who received free and reduced lunch, learned English as a second language, and am the daughter of immigrants from Mexico. I vividly remember taking the 14 bus down Federal to go to school with my younger sister, Nicole and my mother who was a paraprofessional at my school. I later taught similar students as a 2nd and 3rd grade maestra at Cole Arts and Sciences Academy in DPS. Therefore; the vision I have for students and families in southwest Denver is directly connected to three distinct vantage points: student, teacher, and parent organizer. I know that when our students, families, and schools thrive, so does Denver. As the city continues its growth, we must equip our students to grow with it while also honoring the diversity of the city. This starts with ensuring all students, including those in District 2, have access to a high-quality education. Outlined below are the components of the ecosystem that will ensure students possess the academic and social foundations to be the next generation of artists, leaders, engineers, and entrepreneurs: --College and Career Readiness From Start to Finish: Invest in early literacy, apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities, and college aligned coursework --Improving the Quality of Our Local Schools: Inside the classroom we must ensure teachers are able to create responsive classrooms that reflect the cultural, social, and academic needs of students. Outside the classroom we must ensure our buildings are accessible for students with learning and physical disabilities --Expanding

Early Childhood Education: Expand access to high quality preschool programs for every child in southwest Denver as there are too many children on waiting lists --Giving Flexibility and Support to Principals, Teachers, and Parents: Principals and teachers should have increased autonomy at the school-level, and parents should be treated as partners in school-governance and educational practices When I am elected I will not only synthesize my experience to inform the decisions I make on the school board; but also develop a community-centered approach where those who are directly impacted are at the table as partners towards a Denver Public Schools in which “every child succeeds.”

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

The top two changes that should be made are changing the way we fund schools in Colorado at the state level so as to be able to offer preschool and full day kindergarten locally. Our public school system as it exists in modern times is a relic of the industrial era, where schools reproduced class structures. Only the few and white were encouraged to pursue higher education, schools in middle class neighborhoods produced middle-managers, and schools in low income and black and brown neighborhoods were either forgotten or set up to prepare students to do factory-labor. This is further exacerbated by a history of legal racial segregation. A New York Times article from 1995 describes how the schools in Denver did not desegregate until 1975, and the bussing that followed in Denver caused record-levels of white flight of students to the suburbs. This historical legacy continues today, further complicated by the fact that today’s kindergarten students need to be academically and socially ready for jobs that don’t exist yet! In other words, our students need a 21st century world-class education in a state that continues to be in the bottom percentile for per-pupil funding. The Taxpayers’ Bill of Rights (TABOR) also prohibits our state from raising revenue for public education statewide. For all of these reasons, I plan on participating in local and state efforts to dismantle TABOR and changing the outdated school funding formula. Colorado does not have the financial resources to ensure adequate, sustainable funding for a quality 21st century public education system, PreK-12 through higher education/career. It is embarrassing that we exist in a legislative setting where an expanded ECE bill competes with an expansion of free and full day kindergarten. As a point of comparison, both early childhood education and kindergarten are provided in full by the Mexican public education system. If we changed the way we funded schools in Colorado in a more equitable fashion, we would not only be able to provide high

quality preschool and full day kindergarten; but also ensure that the state raises its' contribution to higher education as well!

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

I would ensure there is progress toward racial equity for students of color in the same way I supported students in my own classroom: identify gaps, differentiate and target supports, and engage parents as partners. The new equity indicator in the SPF is a way to identify achievement and opportunity gaps within schools across the district and meet them with relevant supports. In District 2, 46% of students are emerging multilingual students, so investing early and often with early literacy programs and second language acquisition supports is especially important. We must engage parents as partners across all schools so learning can continue at home. Expansion of the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program and partnerships with parent-leadership organizations like STAND for Children, Together Colorado, and Padres y Jovenes Unidos are two ways to not only boost student achievement through parent partnership; but also enable parents to be advocates for their child's diverse needs. I would ensure that there is racial equity for students in the district by ensuring Denver Public School Board policies keep kids in school. Currently, there are many policies and practices at the school level which push kids out of school. This is not only correlated to academic achievement; but also the development of a strong sense of self-worth as communities of color. Many schools prioritize compliance and control through rigid discipline structures that are absent cultural competence. In addition to grow and read on grade level, students must have the identity and socio-emotional development that will enable them to thrive in spite of white-dominant society. In other words, we do students a disservice when we teach them to just "work hard," and assimilate. Creando conciencia and a profound sense of self-awareness is what will sustain youth of color writ-large. I will know that this identity and socio-emotional development is successful when students are organized and at the table making decisions alongside the Denver Public School Board.

**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?**

When I was in high school, I was one of two students of color in the entirety of our Honors and AP classroom. Given the racial and ethnic makeup of our school, I knew that sort of racialized tracking was wrong then, and I consider it both a personal and

professional mission to increase access to AP and Honors Courses for students of color across the district. This is actually a specific platform point in my three campaign priorities. Furthermore, community organizing has taught me that, “those who are farthest away from the pain can afford to philosophize.” In other words, as a school board member I will look directly to the experience and expertise of the African American Equity Task force recommendations on this topic. Specifically, I would work to implement the first recommendation under III. Targeted Supports for Students: “Recommendation 1: We recommend that DPS develop and implement an African-American Equitable Access Plan that increases African-American students’ access to high value learning opportunities such as: Advanced Placement (AP), Gifted, Talented (GT/Honors), Concurrent Enrollment, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math (STEM/STEAM), CareerConnect, International Baccalaureate (IB), Middle Year Programming (MYP), student leadership and magnet programs. The Equitable Access Plan should prioritize providing academically rigorous and culturally responsive learning opportunities in closer proximity to African-American communities. The highest priority regions should be the Far Northeast (FNE) and Near Northeast (NNE), which lack high values learning opportunities that meet the needs and interests of African-American students. Specific Actions: 1. Evaluate current state of program offerings by school 2. Conduct a stakeholder survey to understand specific needs of African-American males 3. Provide teachers with additional support to accelerate the learning of low performing students 4. Provide additional push-in support, where needed.” Finally, I think the Latinx/@, Native, Asian, and MINA communities can learn from the African American Task Force by identifying what is the current state of their student populations disaggregated in programs like ASCENT and concurrent enrollment across the school district. In that way, we can subsequently make and fund recommendations to increase the participation of students of color in these programs.

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

I was the first person in my family to go to college. In high school, I took all honors classes, and was able to take advantage of important college-preparatory programs. By 2025 75% of all jobs will require some college, and we need our students to be ready for those exciting jobs. Money and circumstance should not stop students from doing what they want in their future. Every student should be prepared to go to college or make the decision to pursue a career pathway. My cousin Ivan will take his journeyman exam with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 68 (IBEW) in October,

and my other cousin Ulises just started his first year at CSU Fort Collins on scholarship. How do we ensure that all students are confident and ready to pursue their dreams after high school like Ivan and Ulises? Denver Public Schools needs to improve its process of ensuring all students graduate ready for college and career by ensuring we have a pipeline with supports from start to finish. --Strong Foundations: This starts with access to pre-K, investments in early literacy, additional counseling at transition grades (6th and 8th) College aligned expectations and coursework: Access to concurrent and dual enrollment, AP, and IB in secondary school --Career access: job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships through programs such as CareerConnect and partnerships with local labor unions College and career staff and partnerships: staff actively counseling students to help them navigate post-secondary options with organizations such as College Track and Denver Scholarship Foundation --To and Through: DPS should establish a community-counseling program whose role is to prevent "summer melt" by ensuring DPS graduates enroll and register for classes through their first semester, connect them to career opportunities with the City and County of Denver, and/or after their first round of apprenticeship with local labor unions

### How would you determine top budget priorities?

I would determine top budget priorities as a community organizer develops a long-term campaign plan. That is, my frame of reference will always be to always center students in any decisions that are made--including budget priorities. When I am elected, I plan on conducting a listening tour with all 46 schools in my district where I will identify the greatest needs at the school level as well as compare them to my own campaign priorities. I will leverage my relationships with community organizations like Padres y Jovenes Unidos, Together Colorado, STAND for Children, the DCTA and AFT, Great Education Colorado, the Student Board of Education, and Westwood Unidos to solicit input and engage constituents in determining whether or not a budget is sufficiently transparent, improving outcomes for kids, supporting teachers and families, and whether or not school leaders have autonomy of their funds. I have experience managing funds amongst community groups as a member of the Grant making Committee with the Chinook Fund as well the fiduciary responsibility as a Trustee for Colorado College. I am not afraid to ask questions, seek out counsel from stakeholders, and direct staff until I have the information I need to make decisions regarding budget priorities.

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

To be clear, equality means everyone gets the same amount of funding. Equity means that schools get what they need! In District 2, our geographic and socioeconomic position requires additional resources to truly move towards an adequate and equitable school funding. As I mentioned previously, I plan on participating in local and state efforts to dismantle TABOR. The Taxpayers Bill of Rights is intimately connected to a long term source of adequate and equitable funding at the state. In an effort to dismantle the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, I would engage the Denver Public Schools lobbying team. I would highly encourage the lobbying team to join an existing coalition that Together Colorado is a part of with some of the labor unions on this matter. I would ask this lobbying team for regular updates on this matter and provide input on strategy for getting additional funding on the state level as appropriate with this team. In this manner, we can at the very least establish sustainable and additional funding for schools. More locally, I was on the Community Planning and Advisory Committee (CPAC) for the 2016 Bond and Mill Levy. I learned how public funds are spent and shaped by citizens committees. I know which voices are missing from these tables and worked to add additional funds for free and public transportation for students who come from low-income backgrounds on behalf of the parents who shaped the campaign. Students need to be able to get around our city for their jobs and recreation. I would ensure that funding is equitable locally by ensuring that students, parents, and community groups are meaningfully engaged in both the CPAC and subsequent oversight committees.

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

Families and students should be co-creators of district and school policies. When I was a community organizer, I learned that there was often a disconnect between a policy and its' implementation. If those who are directly impacted are at the table shaping and creating the policy in the first place, then not only is there long-term investment; but also a mitigation of unintended consequences. As a school board member, I will center the best interests of students in any decision I make and leverage partnerships with parents, teachers, and communities. This is the approach I took in my classroom and live-out as an organizer. Community involvement in schools and at the school board is at the heart of my schools as community hubs plank. At the school level, I will promote community involvement by facilitating intentional relationships with community

organizations and schools in our neighborhoods so that they can support it each other with wrap-around services, programming, and even governance. One of the most powerful experiences I had as a teacher was serving as the elected faculty representative of my school's School Collaborative Council (CSC). We had parents and neighbors serving on the committee in a meaningful way, as we were able to help shape the school's budget year-to-year. These committees can be a powerful tool to ensuring our schools are supported to succeed. I know from my time organizing parents that they need to be treated as critical partners in their child's success and governance in our district. The Cole Parent Organizing Committee were integral in transforming our school community by creating the Success Express (circular bus routes), moving the district towards student-based budgeting, instituting the creation of parent-teacher workshops, and now leading city-wide work to increase student transportation options. This type of work should be encouraged and promoted, and I can't wait to promote such organizing as a school board member.

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

My oldest brother (now deceased) is a casualty of the school to prison pipeline. In recent years, the school to prison pipeline has also become the school to deportation pipeline due to the privatization of immigrant detention centers, now run by the same companies that "manage" private prisons. Our African American and Latinx students deserve to enter the city of Denver upon graduation equipped to choose college or a career with a local labor union. Instead, they are often pushed out of public schools to be incarcerated by Civic Core (formerly Corporate Corrections of America) and the Geo Group. It is a gross stain on our democracy and further separates families in Denver. The school to prison pipeline is an example of institutional racism that begins inside our classrooms and reinforced by the external judicial systems. Public schools can eliminate the school to prison pipeline by focusing on our classrooms twofold. First, our teachers need to have on-going implicit bias trainings as well as ensure their curriculum is relevant to the students they serve. For example, when I was a teacher I taught students in the Cole and Five Points neighborhood, which served both African American and Latinx (predominantly) students. I wanted my students to know each other's' rich histories, feel a sense of pride, and understand our neighborhood. As a literacy teacher, that meant we first read literature on Madame C.J. Walker, the first self-made millionaire who perfected her door to door salesman technique in the Five Points neighborhood. When we read about Harriet Tubman, I had some of my students share their

immigration experiences as they fled north, crossing the Rio Grande in secret, with the help of coyotes. This is how my Latinx Students came to understand the Underground Railroad, and how my African American students came to understand the struggle of their Latino peers. I also took my students on a field trip to see my good friend Jordan Casteel's art downtown in an elective I taught called Art of Social Change, as she paints both self portraits and black men in daily life. Culturally competent schools keep students in school as a place that honors their identities. Secondly, schools need to have restorative justice systems that are consistently applied. This requires investment in both training of teachers/administrators as well as while child supports that can meet the needs of the toxic stress many of ours students bring with them to school.

### What is your position on charter schools?

The most recent "Start with the Facts" report by A+ Colorado demonstrates examples of strong schools across school governance types; whether they be district-run, innovation, or charter. This has also been my personal experience as well--my neighbors across the street have two daughters. Their younger daughter goes to Munroe and their older daughter will be starting at CEC Early College. Meanwhile, a few of my former catechism students from St. Cajetan Catholic Parish attend the southwest KIPP schools. All have shared positive experiences with their schools, which span governance types. Considering both the aforementioned study and the scenarios above, my position on charter schools is nuanced; some charter schools serve teachers and students well and others have significant room for improvement. This is also true of district-run and innovation schools as well. I believe charter schools should be held accountable to the same standards and accountability systems as district-run and innovation schools. The passage of House Bill 1375 at the Colorado State Legislature added two new accountability measures regarding the financing of charter schools: charter schools will now be required to post their tax documents (990's) on their websites and will no longer be granted two automatic waivers regarding their finances. In addition, all schools who receive waivers are required to post their replacement plans on their website. The Colorado Education Association (CEA) worked with a coalition of community partners including AFT-Colorado, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, NAACP CO-WY-MT state and local chapters, Colorado AFL-CIO, 9to5, Common Cause, and FRESC in shaping this legislation. All students should have access to a high-quality education that meets their needs. Sometimes this is a charter school, innovation school, or district-run school. It is important to make sure that all act as community hubs, reflect the schools they serve, and are superior stewards of public dollars. All schools should

reflect the will of families and the local community. In turn the school should be responsive to the community's' expressed needs, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

**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 a Mexican woman from southwest Denver, I didn't learn about the Chicano movement until I went to college and sought out those electives. Octavio Paz and Gloria Anzaldua were a huge influence on the formation of my socio-political identity. However, I was starved for ethnic studies in my public school career. Fortunately, my parents taught me about Mexican history, language, art, politics, and religious traditions at home. When I was a teacher, I made it a point to center my student's identities and experiences when I taught literacy. I already mentioned the unit around Harriet Tubman as the First Coyote. Another example was my classroom theme of "education and resistance." My students learned about our history with thematic literacy units that explored the accomplishments of teacher-organizer Dolores Huerta and civil rights leader Rosa Parks. The expectation was that they practice resistance by asking questions and putting forth their own ideas about the way our classroom was managed. I taught topics like white privilege, oppression, and even manifest destiny. I didn't always use these terms with my 7, 8, and 9 year olds but by the end of my first year teaching my students knew to say they were "Latin@" (not Hispanic) with pride. The steps I would take to ensure that the district curriculum be culturally responsive to the needs of students of color at all grade level, is train all teachers with implicit bias trainings and establish professional development units (PDUs) around culturally proficient teaching. In this way, teachers could use PDUs to better educate themselves and also be compensated for their development. At the same time, our teachers could also learn about how bias affects their teaching and nurturing of students every day!

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

My sister Nicole Cobian is a kindergarten teacher who will be going onto her third year teaching this school year in Denver Public Schools. She will also be leading her K-1 department. When I asked Nicole about her choice to go into teaching, she said two things that inspired my perspective around hiring and retaining more teachers of color. First, Nicole said; "I realized that I never had a teacher who looked like me growing up. I missed out on role models who shared my background and could speak to our parents in their native language of Spanish. I chose to teach kindergarten because I wanted to

be my students' first experience in school--someone who looked like them, understands their families so that my students don't have to translate for their parents." Nicole also noted the positive impact of having a school leader of color, Lindsey Lorehn. When I wanted to gift my sister some of the books from my social justice library, she already had them because her school leader included them in the design of her school's literacy curriculum. My sister's' experience should be the norm in Denver Public Schools--not the exception. As a Denver Public School Board member, I would actively support the recruitment, retention, and promotion of teachers and school leaders of color. Programs like Make Your Mark can be strengthened to achieve a more diverse teacher population that will lead to increased educational outcomes. Westword recently reported on the program's potential impact on student achievement; 1) "The theory — backed by research — is that diverse teachers can better serve diverse students, and the goal of the program is to start closing the achievement gap by addressing a district wide diversity hiring gap. Three quarters of DPS's 92,000 students are students of color. The majority — about 55 percent — are Hispanic, and another 13.4 percent are African-American." 2) "Having at least one black teacher in the third through fifth grades reduced a black student's probability of dropping out of school by 29 percent, according to a new study from researchers at American University, Johns Hopkins University and the University of California, Davis. For very low-income black boys, the results are even more pronounced, as their chance of dropping out plummeted by 39 percent. " (direct quotes from Westword) Another program worth investment is a pilot program within Denver Public Schools that creates a pipeline for paraprofessionals to become teachers. The paraprofessional workforce mirrors our students makeup more closely than the current teacher workforce. My own mother was a paraprofessional at my elementary school, and already had Mexican teaching credentials. Generation Teach is another program the district can seek to promote and expand as they follow a grow-your-own model starting at the high school level. Retention and promotion is the most challenging part of maintaining our diverse workforce, which is why I look forward to supporting the implementation of the recommendations from Dr. Bailey's report in my current organizing work. When I am not campaigning, I am an organizer for Leadership for Educational Equity. I am currently coaching one of our community organizing teams through two-campaigns: oppressive educational practices and lack of diversity in leadership. The policies and practices I learn through the course of my organizing work professionally will also help me learn and scale what other districts around the country are doing to retain and promote our teachers of color.

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

The morning after the 2016 elections, I felt a terrible pain I had never felt before. I sat in that pain through most of the day. However, I could sit in that pain because of my citizen privilege. In sharp contrast, that same morning, my tio, tia, and prim@s were at work and at school by 7:30 am. As members of the undocumented community, they could not afford to sit still--they had to keep moving forward without rest; despite the fact that their futures are uncertain. I support the establishment of Haven Schools in accordance with the Safe and Welcoming School District Resolution, and look forward to identifying how the district can push farther. While the Denver 2020 plan includes a focus around the whole child, it is also important to update whole-child supports for the Trump Era. For example, all front-staff personnel should be practically trained in rapid-response practices if ICE is on/near schools to go into immediate lock-down, and the district should connect impacted families to pro-bono lawyers and psychologists. I will look to the Sanctuary Schools Coalition for further guidance on this topic.