

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR 2017 CANDIDATES FOR THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Candidate: Barbara O'Brien

Position: DPS District 1 At Large

Please answer in the space provided, explaining your answer as required. If you feel you need more space, you may attach a supplementary sheet.

QUESTION	CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE
Do you support the right of every child to attend the school nearest their home (or most accessible by available transportation)? If not, under what circumstances do you not?	All children should be able to attend the school that best meets their personal and academic needs, whether that is the school across the street or across the city. The work of the DPS board is to ensure that all schools are of the highest quality and prepare students for college or a career.
Under what circumstances, if any, would you support the use of public funds (vouchers) for private schools?	I would not support vouchers for private schools.
Do you believe that financial decisions by DPS are sufficiently transparent? If not, how could/should they be made more transparent?	DPS can improve, but it does an ok job of being transparent through its website. I support the legislation for transparency that CDE is implementing. The DPS budget is a large, complex document. I have made sure that increases or decreases in budget areas are explained in terms of how the changes relate to the goals of Denver Plan 2020. Those short documents are public and available online. My colleague Mike Johnson has broken out the costs of services so that schools receive more of the funds for support services, allowing principals to pay for a combination of services that best meets the needs of their students. These school-based budgets help principals with planning, meetings with teachers, and are available online. Nevertheless, DPS needs to get to the point where any citizen can understand the complex ways that revenue comes into the district and how it is spent.
What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of public charter schools; and do you think the proportion of charter schools within the DPS is too high, too low, or about right?	I remember the 1980s and 1990s when low-income and minority students were falling behind and the blame was put on families and students. I worked to create charter school legislation so that new types of public schools could prove that all children can achieve at high levels. Charter schools helped push districts to change, and traditional schools have taught charters about the importance of the social-emotional health of students. Today, many Denver schools – district and charter -- are excelling at serving our students. The proportion of each is less important to me than ensuring that all schools are safe and welcoming and that they are preparing kids for the future.
How would you rank order (1 = highest) the importance of the following factors in student success: (a) teacher quality, (b) quality of principal, (c) class size, (d) racial/ethnic integration, (e) economic means of family, (f) parental involvement? (Add any other factors	These factors are not completely in the control of the DPS Board of Education. I don't want to downplay the impact that housing, family income, transportation and parents working multiple jobs can have on students. But a good school will find ways to help students focus on learning. Many schools in Denver are proving that this is possible. I would rank the factors in terms of importance as:

that you consider important.)	<p>1 Quality of school leadership</p> <p>2 Teacher quality</p> <p>3 Racial/ethnic Integration</p> <p>4 Class size</p> <p>I would add support services for students and school culture to the list of important factors.</p>
Recognizing that some schools may offer a specialized curriculum, in general do you favor broad-based curricula with extracurricular options, or curricula focused on basic English and STEM subjects?	A great education system should have both. Both approaches should prepare students for whatever opportunities they want to follow: broad-based curricula should allow kids to go deep in some areas; focused curricula should expose kids to arts and community. That's why I supported mill levy funding for arts and PE and why there are state standards for arts education for all schools. The state arts standards aren't as high as I would like, but they require all schools to address them.
Do you favor foreign language courses for all students; and if so, at what grades should they begin?	I stated in 2013 that I wanted to make DPS a bilingual district, and the bilingual certificate for students is a step in that direction. Students who learn second languages at a young age are more likely to have strong language skills in all languages and be successful in school; I favor making these courses available as early as possible. I also agree with the Congress of Hispanic Educators that students should be helped to keep their home language strong while mastering English. Foreign language is often a requirement for students seeking college and therefore should be offered to all students so that multiple post-secondary options are available to them.
Do you support the funding of nutritious school meal programs for children in need of them, or do you not see this as a responsibility of the public school system?	I absolutely support funding nutritious school meal programs. That is one of many reasons why the DPS board introduced and passed a resolution condemning the Trump/DeVos budget that would harm this vital funding for our kids. Nutritious school meals during the school year and vacations are things I promoted all over the state when I was LG.
Under what circumstances, if any, would you make exception to the mandate for equal access to appropriate quality education for all challenged and special needs students?	I would not make an exception to this mandate under any circumstances. All children deserve a great education.
Most politicians (and parents) say they are opposed to excessive testing; but what is excessive, and can standards be raised to make our students nationally competitive without the use of standardized national tests?	I believe that most tests should be diagnostic so that they help the teacher and student understand how to maximize learning. We should reduce the amount of required state testing as much as possible, as DPS has tried to do. I also think it is important that we have a standardized measure of achievement to assure that all students are getting the education they deserve, and not go back to the days when low student achievement in some groups was swept under the rug. We shouldn't return to that. I believe we can raise standards without using standardized tests, but it would be meaningless to raise standards without some way of measuring how well students are meeting those standards. I think the most important challenge is to give teachers better professional development for moving all students forward, and especially for helping students who are behind to catch up.

Do you support “military style” management of student behavior?	Again, one size never fits all. I personally don’t like this style of managing student behavior, but for some students this may be an appropriate way to ensure their success. I would trust parents to make that decision. I strongly support the move of schools toward restorative justice practices. I was proud to introduce a resolution to virtually eliminate expulsions for young students, and greatly minimize suspensions. At the same time, DPS is working to ensure that restorative justice practices are implemented in a high-quality way.
Under what circumstances, if any, do you support waiver of Colorado’s licensure requirements for teachers?	When we have schools with high quality leaders, I believe it is appropriate for them to make decisions around staffing. In many cases, particularly at the high school level, there are people who are highly qualified in subjects who may not otherwise have a teaching license, and pending rigorous background checks, we should allow our students to have the opportunity to learn from them. Additionally, not all teachers come through the university system and we should respect alternative licensure pathways. Finally, the teacher shortage in Colorado, particularly in rural Colorado, requires creative thinking in filling positions. Once an educator is hired they should be required to participate in all mandated professional development and held to the same standards as licensed educators.
Do you support initiatives to increase the proportion of people of color as administrators, teachers, and staff? If so, give examples of such initiatives.	Yes. I have supported initiatives including Make Your Mark, the Denver Teacher Residency program, and grow-your-own programs (for paraprofessionals). I look forward to creating policies that are aligned with the African American Equity Taskforce recommendations to help increase the proportion of people of color as DPS staff.
What would be your approach for dealing with schools deemed to be failing, starting with a statement of what your criteria for failure would be?	A failing school is a school that consistently fails to place students on a path to college or career readiness, as determined by proficiency or growth toward proficiency in the Colorado Academic Standards. My approach for persistently low performing schools is spelled out in the School Performance Compact. DPS has a series of intensive interventions it uses to improve a school and that includes extra funding for support services. However, students don’t get another shot at a K-12 education, and if these interventions are not showing evidence of school improvement, I believe we owe it to the students to act and change the direction of the school.
Do you believe that all educational professionals have a right to organize?	Yes.
Given limited resources, would you choose lower class sizes or higher teacher salaries?	I would choose higher teacher salaries. A good teacher can manage a larger class size. There is evidence that small class size makes a difference in K-3, but it is more important for students to have good, experienced teachers.
Do you support limits on campaign contributions and full disclosure of donors for school board candidates?	Yes.

<p>The ratio of administrators to teachers is much higher in the DPS than in all its surrounding school districts. Are you satisfied with the Administration's justification for more administrators because DPS receives and administers many more grants?</p>	<p>This is incorrect. According to the Colorado Department of Education there are 2.17 teachers for every one administrator (administrators + administrative support + other support + professional – other) in Denver public schools. By way of comparison Jefferson county has 2.16 teachers for every one administrator, Douglas County has 2.68, and Aurora has 2.78. Even comparing all staff to teachers DPS has a staff to teacher ratio of 1.47 to 1. Jeffco has 1.34 to 1, Douglas has 1.31 to 1, and Aurora has 1.25 to 1. While DPS does hire a greater number of administrators than other districts I am proud of policy we have implemented to devolve funding decision-making to school leaders.</p>
<p>Do you favor allowing school staff members including teachers to be designated as security officers and to carry concealed firearms?</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p>How do you think mandatory attendance should be enforced?</p>	<p>There are different root causes for chronic absenteeism for young students and older students. For young students, parents often need support with their understanding of the importance of regular attendance or help accessing medical treatment for chronic conditions such as asthma or parental depression. For older students, chronic absenteeism is often a reaction to a lack of cultural understanding in the classroom. The groundbreaking report released last year by the Chief Education Office studying chronic absenteeism in Oregon suggests that many of the reasons that students miss school have to do with a lack of culturally responsive curriculum or systemic barriers. This should come as little surprise – no one, and certainly not students, likes to go places where they feel unwelcome or out of place. For me, it isn't a matter of enforcing mandatory attendance, it's a matter of creating spaces where students feel welcome, respected, and where their needs (academic, physical, social, and emotional) are well met.</p>
<p>Though Denver voters approved a mill levy increase to broaden offerings in fine arts and physical education, some schools do not yet offer this broader curriculum. What should be done to implement the will of the voters?</p>	<p>The board fully supports a comprehensive and well-rounded curriculum that includes art, music, and physical education. Expanding the teacher applicant pool will help schools provide these classes, as DPS is doing.</p>