

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR 2017 CANDIDATES FOR THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Candidate: Jennifer Bacon

Position: DPS District 4

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?	As a district, we should ensure that students have a great school option they can attend in their neighborhood. One of my greatest concerns about schools in District 4 is that frequently, the neighborhood school is not the best option and parents are forced to send their child to a school across town. I think we can do better to ensure that all schools are strong schools and parents are provided an honest choice in their neighborhood when deciding where to send their child to school.
Under what circumstances, if any, would you support the use of public funds (vouchers) for private schools?	Public funds should stay in public schools. Our resources should stay focused on strengthening our public schools so that all schools are good options for families, not go towards private school vouchers.
Do you believe that financial decisions by DPS are sufficiently transparent? If not, how could/should they be made more transparent?	<p>No. Increasing transparency in decision making and including more community in processes is one of the key reasons why I'm running. We can and should have more authentic engagement when the Board and the District are making decisions - by doing so, we will make more decisions that are reflective of our community.</p> <p>Community forums should be a regular occurrence. Forums can be used to gather input on key ideas and policies the district is proposing before implementation.</p> <p>We must also invest in digital transparency and accountability systems and share them with parents and communities. Denver citizens deserve to always know how well district promises are being kept and how our tax dollars are being spent.</p>
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?	<p>One of the greatest strengths of our system is that parents can seek out schools that meet their student's needs. When I speak with parents and families in Denver, they want to be able to find schools that meets their students' multifaceted needs, and they welcome the ability to choose magnets or charters with specialized programming (e.g., dual-language program, a school that specializes in special education push in models, the performing arts, wrap around services for homeless youth, etc.)</p> <p>However, I've been concerned that the district has not done enough to proactively invest in neighborhood schools to ensure that we have strong district-run options. When we fail to do so, we are forced to open new (and increasingly, charter) schools that may not always meet the needs of the local neighborhood.</p>
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	It's important to acknowledge that how a student comes to school, whether it be hungry, traumatized, sick, all significantly impact that student's ability to succeed in the classroom. However, those indicators should never be used as an excuse for why a student isn't thriving. It is our imperative, as a district, to provide all students with

means of family, (f) parental involvement? (Add any other factors that you consider important.)	<p>the supports and resources they need to learn, regardless of how they come to us.</p> <p>That's why investing in professionals who surround our students, especially those facing the additional challenges of poverty, is paramount. As a former public school teacher and high school dean, I believe that teacher quality and quality of administrators go hand in hand as the most important factors in the success of our students.</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?	<p>I believe all schools, regardless of model, should prepare our students broadly, with strong and culturally-responsive curriculum in english, math, science, social studies, arts and PE. All students should graduate not just prepared academically, but also as self-aware global citizens.</p> <p>Parents and students should also continue to have access to innovation or magnet programs that have specializations, like Denver School of the Arts or expeditionary learning models that meet the needs and interests of their students.</p>
Do you favor foreign language courses for all students; and if so, at what grades should they begin?	Research shows that there are immense benefits of learning a second language. While I'm not advancing a hard and fast rule, those benefits are exponential when students have access early on in their school career and I would love to see those elementary school language options expand for DPS students.
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?	As a former teacher, I understand how hunger can impact a student's ability to learn. Public schools absolutely have a responsibility to ensure nutritious school meals are available for all students, so that they can focus on learning. This includes rethinking our policy as a district of how we deal with students who are behind on payments for school lunches.
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?	Much of my career has been spent as a lawyer helping parents navigate this country's special education laws. Given that we have decades of federal special education laws that districts are required to uphold, I firmly believe that students should always have access to the least restrictive environment.
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?	<p>I've dedicated my career to working with teachers and as a DPS board member, will hear teachers, parents, and students when they say we're testing our students too much. No one wants our classrooms to be taken over by a test-prep, high-stakes culture.</p> <p>That said, testing is a means to understanding how well our students and schools are doing. From an equity perspective, we only knew there were significant gaps between students of color and their white peers because of common testing. Without accountability through common assessments, it would be far too easy to ignore gaps and inequities. That's why the NAACP, Urban League, La Raza, and National Disability Rights Network and other civil rights groups</p>

	<p>have come out against complete anti-testing efforts, saying “There are some legitimate concerns about testing in schools that must be addressed. But instead of stimulating worthy discussions about over-testing, cultural bias in tests, and the misuse of test data, these activists would rather claim a false mantle of civil rights activism. At the heart of that debate is whether or not we will have the courage to make the necessary investments in each and every child, no matter their race, ethnicity, class, disability status, or first language. But we cannot fix what we cannot measure. And abolishing the tests or sabotaging the validity of their results only makes it harder to identify and fix the deep-seated problems in our schools.”</p> <p>I believe common assessments should be used for these purposes annually, and we should work to change our culture around excessive test prep.</p>
Do you agree with zero-tolerance disciplinary policies in public schools?	<p>No. I have spent much of my life dedicated to fighting for students who are unfairly subjected to zero-tolerance policies and will actively work as a board member to end the school to prison pipeline. As the chair of Padres y Jovenes Unidos, we built a coalition that pushed a bill, the Smart Schools Discipline Act, that would have limited the use of police-arrests and eliminated zero tolerance school discipline policies across the state.</p> <p>I believe our schools and students are most successful when they reorient from criminalizing student behavior to using restorative practices where students can learn how to regulate and correct their own behavior.</p>
Do you support “military style” management of student behavior?	<p>Behavior management techniques can and should vary from school to school. Students and families may desire different types of environments based on the needs of their students.</p> <p>That said, I believe that today’s graduates will need to have much more advanced “soft-skills” to succeed in today’s world: conflict management, cooperation with people who are different than themselves, communicating their emotions with others. Those skills are difficult to cultivate in a compliance and control based “military style” models.</p>
Under what circumstances, if any, do you support waiver of Colorado’s licensure requirements for teachers?	<p>To meet the increasing demands of a high-quality teacher workforce, I believe in teacher licensure. I also believe that our landscape can and should allow for alternative licensure for individuals who seek to become teachers.</p> <p>In my own experience, I’ve seen these alternative certification pathways work in ways that benefit students. Paraprofessionals, who have worked in schools for years and deeply understand the school-community, can use these to move to the front of the classroom. I’ve worked with folks who have earned multiple degrees in math and science and make a transition in the middle of their career to teaching.</p>
Do you support initiatives to increase the proportion of people of color as	For the past four years, I personally have supported the recruitment and retention of educators of color with Community Organizations of

<p>administrators, teachers, and staff? If so, give examples of such initiatives.</p>	<p>Aligned Together (COAT). Additionally, one of my jobs was to diversify the teachers we recruited; while in that role, we went from 12% to 41% of our teachers being people of color and 40% from low income communities. We were also the first in the country to recruit and hire DACamented teachers.</p> <p>This work proved that DPS does not have a simple recruitment problem - they have a retention problem. People of color want to educate children of color. Part of the solution is highlighting that DPS is a district of children of color. Our talent also needs to know that they can be themselves and thrive here. That is where we as a district can improve.</p> <p>As a member of the District's African American Round Table and Executive Committee member of its African American Task Force, I've worked to provide clear recommendations to the district, including those outlined in the Bailey Report, to make the district a more inclusive and supportive space for teachers of color.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Schools should be safe spaces for children, and for that reason, safety is the number one reason that I would deem a school unfit for students. As a district, we can do a better job of being transparent with the community about the indicators that suggest a school is not healthy. Indicators such as achievement gaps, low test scores, declining enrollment, and school climate can all tell the district and the public that a school needs intervention.</p> <p>I am careful about the use of the word "failure" to describe schools, because I sat across from children who have attended multiple schools labeled "failing", and heard how they had internalized that <i>they</i> were failures because of the school they attended or neighborhood they lived in. Children are not failures. Our policies are failing them.</p> <p>Currently, district policy doesn't do enough to support a school when we know that a school is in trouble. I commit to not only pushing for more transparency about school status, but to bringing community to the table to ensure we provide struggling schools with the support they need to succeed.</p>
<p>Do you believe that all educational professionals have a right to organize?</p>	<p>I know the impact of a strong union because I have lived it. As a teacher in New Orleans, my classroom was infected by mold and fungus, presenting a health risk not only to me, but also to my students. The message I got from administrators was "this is just the way it is." It was my union rep who helped me stand up for my and my students' rights and safety.</p> <p>After Hurricane Katrina, I taught remedial math in Miami and started the school year with 40 plus students in all five of my sections. Again, the message I got from administrators was that not having enough desks was "just the way it is." Again, it was partnering with my union rep that brought down class sizes and helped my students and I have a successful year.</p>

	<p>Beyond the impact I've seen in my own life and the lives of my students, I deeply believe that a healthy union is key to a healthy school system. Collective bargaining and union advocacy for appropriate school supports are key tenets to professionalize and strengthen the roles of teachers and school employees, and I support their right to organize.</p>
<p>Given limited resources, would you choose lower class sizes or higher teacher salaries?</p>	<p>Colorado ranks last in the country terms of wage competitiveness for teachers. Our low pay to our teachers, combined with the rising cost of living in Colorado, contributes to a host of other challenges facing the district, including teacher turnover. That's why I would prioritize higher base teacher salaries, so teachers can afford to live here and make teaching a long-term career.</p>
<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>Generally, I believe we should be sending the majority of our resources into the classroom level. However, in order to better answer this question we need more transparency about where and how the district is spending its money. particularly as teachers, students, and parents are feeling the financial pinch of insufficient money in classrooms. We deserve more transparency so that the community can engage and determine where to best spend our limited financial resources.</p>
<p>Do you support limits on campaign contributions and full disclosure of donors for school board candidates?</p>	<p>As a community organizer and a lawyer, I believe deeply in removing barriers for individuals to engage in the civic process. I believe instituting campaign contribution limits and disclosure rules similar to what we see at the state level could be a way to allow school board candidates who do not come from traditionally well resourced networks to compete, and for all candidates to have to build a wide base of financial support.</p> <p>That said, one of the reasons we see school board elections raising so much money is related to additional systemic issues. First, school board districts in Denver are just as large as state house districts, meaning communicating with voters is difficult to do cheaply. Additionally, school board positions are unpaid, putting up barriers for folks who cannot afford to give that much time to unpaid service.</p>
<p>Do you favor allowing school staff members including teachers to be designated as security officers and to carry concealed firearms?</p>	<p>All adults in a school have a responsibility for creating the community and maintaining the safety of a school, but safety should be established through building relationships with students, never through force or firearms.</p>
<p>How do you think mandatory attendance should be enforced?</p>	<p>When I was a Dean of Students at a school in the Far Northeast, it was my responsibility to monitor attendance. Every morning I would make calls to encourage students to come to school, and I would get in my car and go to homes to check on students who were absent. There were a myriad of complex reasons students would miss or be late to school: they needed to translate an appointment for their families, had to ensure younger siblings got off to school first, or missed the one bus that could get them to school.</p> <p>That experience taught me that we should be seeking to understand why a student is not attending school and get them the targeted supports they need. A student who misses school to translate a lawyer appointment for their non-english speaking parent does not</p>

	<p>need a detention, they need connection with a social service agency that can help find another translating service. We should avoid criminalizing and punishing as our first response to absenteeism, and start from a place of seeking to understand our students.</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>Denver voters approved 3 mill levies to provide a number of school-based supports for students and teachers, including fine arts and physical education. As part of the implementation, DPS established oversight committees to ensure that funds are spent as intended and to ensure that communities are engaged in the process.</p> <p>Transparency is a central to how I will serve as a board member, and I commit to ensuring that the public receives more input into the decisionmaking process and is better informed about how decisions are made.</p>