

2015 CANDIDATE SURVEYS

AT-LARGE

HAPPY HAYNES
ROBERT SPETH

Part I: Denver Public Schools Strategies and Goals

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4= strongly agree.

	Happy Haynes	Robert Speth
The district's current strategic plan (the Denver Plan 2020) is the right focus for DPS to better meet the needs of most students.	4	2
I am confident that the district's current leadership can meet the goals of the Denver Plan by 2020.	4	1
I believe that Goal 2 of the Denver Plan-- that 80% of DPS third graders will be at or above grade-level in reading and writing by 2020-- will be reached.	4	1
I am certain that efforts taken by DPS will be able to double the number of students who graduate college and career-ready by 2020.	4	1

What might you change in the Denver Plan 2020? How will you hold the district accountable to meeting the goals of the Denver Plan?

Happy Haynes: Implementation is the key to the success of the Denver Plan and it is the responsibility of the board to ensure that the right benchmarks are being monitored on a regular basis, that we are digging deeply into the underlying reasons for the progress that being made or the roadblocks to success and that we don't hesitate to make changes where they are needed. ALL of our kids should have access to a high quality education. In some parts of the city that is already a reality. In other parts of the District, schools have lots of ground to make up. I haven't given up on kids in those areas, and I will continue to make hard decisions that ensure those kids don't miss their opportunity for success just because of their zip code, the color of their skin, or the income of their parents.

Robert Speth: I give the district some credit for recognizing the importance of having a long term vision for student achievement. However, the plan lacks specific strategies for how we will achieve these goals. Specifically, there are two major pieces missing from the Denver Plan: supporting our teachers and working with our communities. There is nothing in the Denver Plan that addresses how we will reduce teacher turnover, and how we will increase the number of certified, professional teachers in our schools. There is nothing in the Denver Plan that addresses how we work will work with communities, instead of forcing changes on them that they aren't asking for.

Part 2: Teaching, Leadership, and Learning

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4= strongly agree.

	Happy Haynes	Robert Speth
I support the district's recent decision to allow all schools to opt-in to, or opt-out of district provided curriculum and professional development.	4	3
DPS is doing a good job of recruiting, compensating, and supporting great teachers.	3	1
DPS is doing a good job of recruiting, compensating, and supporting great school leaders.	3	2
Teachers should be evaluated and held accountable to student outcomes.	4	2
School leaders should be evaluated and held accountable to student outcomes.	4	2
The current teacher compensation system and ProComp ensure that effective teachers work with the hardest-to-serve schools and students.	3	2
The district should mandate a common literacy and math program for all red/orange rated schools.	2	2
The district's Federal court-ordered English Language Acquisition program is improving outcomes for English language learners.	3	3
DPS should contract objective third-party evaluators to regularly review and report out on the district's performance, programs, and strategies.	3	2

What do you believe is DPS' greatest challenge to having great teachers in every classroom? How do you suggest the district enhance or change its approach to this challenge?

Haynes: We need to strike the right balance between accountability and more strategic and targeted supports and professional development that is tailored to the specific needs of our educators. We need to have mentorship and training programs for teachers in universities, such as the partnership between DPS and Metro so that graduates come into classrooms with experience and preparation. Expand alternative licensing programs for individuals with degrees in fields besides education can share their passion and expertise with our kids. Finally we need to offer them opportunities for career advancement and leadership positions within our schools, not only to reward our best teachers, but to support and mentor new and struggling teachers.

Speth: The district is its own worst enemy when it comes to having great teachers. We have great teachers. The district needs to focus on supporting and retaining our teachers. School closure, privatization, and the culture of high stakes testing are all demoralizing to teachers. As I mentioned in my bio, these are the issues that need to be addressed.

Additional comments on teaching, leadership, and learning?

Haynes: I voted for and support the DPS policy that puts school resource decisions in the hands of principals and schools that best understand the needs of their students.

Part 3: School Management and Support

Rate the following statements on a scale of 1-4, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, and 4= strongly agree.

	Happy Haynes	Robert Speth
All schools, whether charter, innovation, or district, should be held to the same performance standards.	4	3
The School Performance Framework (SPF) appropriately balances student growth and proficiency.	2	1
Schools that are rated orange or red on the SPF that have not made significant progress (more than 4% improvement/year) over two years should be replaced by other high performing schools.	3	1
DPS adequately engages families and community members throughout the school turnaround process.	3	2
I support Tom Boasberg as DPS superintendent.	4	1
I think the current financial transparency of the district is sufficient, and it is easy to understand the amount of funding schools have direct control over.	3	1
I believe DPS should do more to promote socio-economic integration in schools, and to reverse the growing trend of school segregation in Denver.	4	4
I support the strategy of creating enrollment zones as a way to ensure more underrepresented students have greater access to quality schools.	4	2
It should be a school's responsibility to provide information and assist families' decision-making during the school choice process at transition grades (i.e. 5th and 8th grade).	3	3
Co-location of schools is a good strategy for utilizing facilities as long as resources are shared equitably.	4	2

Are resources and staff in the district allocated correctly? Specifically, does the district have the right balance of teachers to other employees (5,245 out of 14,792)? If yes, why? If not, how should this be changed?

Haynes: We know that teachers are the most important factor in a quality education for our children and that great teachers make a huge difference in a child's life. However, there are many people that work to support our kids' education from custodial staff to paraprofessionals and good administrators to after school providers. Schools should have the flexibility to decide what the right balance is for their communities. It is not a game of numbers, but rather what resources are needed to ensure that each component of the system functions effectively.

Speth: No. DPS has administration costs that are two to three times higher than comparable districts. More resources need to be put toward increasing the number of certified teachers in the classroom, and fewer administrators in the skyscraper downtown.

Additional comments on school management and support?

Haynes: I somewhat agree that both the sending and the potential receiving schools have an obligation to assist families with some aspects of the choice process, but it is the primary role of the choice office to help families navigate the process across the district.

Part 4: Free Response

What is the role of a DPS Board Member?

Haynes: The board should be focused on providing leadership and guidance on the district's vision and policies and work with the superintendent and his key staff to establish the goals and metrics for achieving those goals. The board should maintain close communication with the superintendent and key staff on benchmarks and progress towards achieving the goals, identifying barriers and strategizing together to find solutions as problems arise and taking the necessary action to hold all parties accountable for their commitments. The board should maintain constant communication, formally and informally with the community, including parents, students and teachers and be a conduit for communication between those constituents and the district and vice versa. Finally, as a board member, I want to be focused in every decision on what's best for kids and how to work collaboratively with the adults that influence their lives to achieve that result.

Speth: Quite simply, to represent the views of their constituents as it pertains to the advancement of a robust public education system in the city of Denver.

What will be your two primary goals as a Board member, and how will we know you are working towards these goals?

Haynes: I want to focus greater attention on improving and changing the systems for recruiting, supporting and evaluating school leaders and expanding the leadership roles of teachers; investing more in the early grades to ensure grade level literacy by 3rd grade, which data shows will substantially increase chances for successful graduation; dramatically increasing focus on strategies and investments to close the opportunity gap; providing a stronger emphasis on whole child development with a commitment to equity and inclusiveness, culturally responsive practices and social emotional learning that is imbedded in instruction; creating greater flexibility for schools to meet the unique needs of their students and families while maintaining accountability for progress and success.

Speth: My two primary goals are to increase community collaboration and stem the tide of privatization in the district. I will hold meetings in each district two times per year with open agendas. I will be a voice for the citizens of Denver. I will not vote to outsource additional schools to privately run charter networks.

What were the one or two best decisions the DPS Board has made in the last four years? How would you work to support these policies?

Haynes: There are no "best" decision. Each one must advance the cause of reaching the district's goals in an important or strategic way. That said, I would highlight a few recent actions: The Denver Plan 2020, the teacher leadership project, raising the minimum wage for para-professionals, innovation schools policy and the 2012 bond and mill levy.

Speth: The 2012 Mill levy 3A supporting increasing the number of certified teachers in classrooms, and the advancement of Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs throughout the district.

What were the one or two worst decisions that the DPS Board made in the last four years? How would you work to change these policies?

Haynes: I am most troubled by the legal requirement to approve a new school that meets a minimum state quality standard while not meeting the district's higher standards, however, changing the state law may be beyond our reach as board members. Another troubling decision was approving most teacher dismissals with a blanket do not rehire provision. I led the effort to change this practice and new criteria which now results in this provision being applied in very few instances.

Speth: The DPS Board has failed to hold the district accountable for developing real community collaboration. Time and time again, the board has been a rubber stamp for district policies that tear apart communities. For example, colocation at North High School, colocation at Lincoln High School, the Hentzell Park land swap deal with Denver Parks and Rec resulting in an ongoing lawsuit, the Place solar project, and school closures in northwest and northeast Denver. These are the actions of a board that is aware of public opinion, but does not take it into consideration when moving its agenda forward.

Final thoughts?

Haynes: Having nearly completed a four year term on the DPS Board with two of those years as Board President, I am seeking re-election to a second term to accelerate the progress that has been made to boost student achievement and school quality and to drive additional innovation and change where current strategies and practices are not working effectively. I am proud of the work I helped to lead that produced the Denver Plan 2020 with clear and ambitious 5 year goals for the District, expanded the groundbreaking teacher leadership program, expanded the work on equity and inclusion and student leadership, and increased the minimum wage for our paraprofessional educators, to name a few accomplishments.

ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

Happy Haynes



A native Denverite, Allegra attended Denver Public Schools and received a BA degree with honors from Barnard College at Columbia University in New York City. Her nickname, Happy, is derived from the Spanish translation of her first name, Allegra.

She was elected to the Board of Education in November 2011 and before that, served as the Chief Community Engagement Officer for five and a half years for two superintendents. In her role at DPS, she was responsible for leading the district's parent and community engagement efforts, creating collaborative partnerships and managing legislative and governmental affairs. She is currently the Director of Civic and Community Engagement at CRL Associates, a business and public affairs firm.

She was the first African American woman elected to the Denver City Council in 1990 where she served for 13 years including two years as President of the Council from 1998 – 2000. Happy's experience in state and local government also includes 17 years in the executive branches of government. She served as an administrative aide for two Denver mayors, a former councilman and a former Lt. Governor. Happy worked for several years as a facilitator with the National Civic League serving various communities in Colorado and throughout the United States.

Her civic involvement includes serving on the boards of the Colorado Children's Campaign, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, City Park Jazz and the Stapleton Development Corporation. She was a founding board member of the Mile High Youth Corps and the Foundation for Educational Excellence and has served on numerous other non-profit boards. Happy completed two years of law school at the University of Denver and received a master's degree in Public Affairs from the University of Colorado at Denver. She is also a graduate of Leadership Denver, the Denver Community Leadership Forum, the Rocky Mountain Program and the State and Local Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

Visit her website: <http://www.happyhaynesfordenverskids.com/>

I'm a parent, not a politician.

My wife, Kristen and I have two children, ages 8 and 10. Both currently attend Escuela Valdez. We anticipate they will attend strong neighborhood schools through high school in Denver.

I became increasingly involved with Denver Public Schools when I was nominated by the Valdez leadership team to spearhead the effort to secure funds to renovate our school and bring it up to modern standards. This led to a partnership with several DPS board members to find a way to resolve serious safety issues within many other "open design" schools in the Denver system beyond just Valdez. As a result of our collaborative efforts, the following schools across the district had their open classroom needs addressed at a cost of \$22 million: Valdez, Swansea, Southmoor, Samuels, Cheltenham, Centennial, Kaiser, Eagleton and Bromwell.

Through my involvement in various DPS projects, I've had the chance to meet many parents, teachers, and community members from all areas of the city. I've seen a repeated pattern of DPS implementing changes that communities do not want. The school board has simply been a rubber stamp, approving every single DPS recommendation since 2013, often with no serious debate. This has left many communities frustrated and distrustful, and has led me to the conclusion that I must step forward to try and bring the often ignored community voice and perspective to the board.

Robert Speth



ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

If I am elected to the school board, I will advocate for the following:

Strong Neighborhood Schools – Every student should have the option to attend a strong neighborhood school with a well rounded curriculum. Currently, DPS is on a trajectory to outsource 100% of Denver's public schools to private corporations within a few short years. This will force students into specialized schools and this is already happening in some neighborhoods, specifically neighborhoods with some of Denver's highest need students.

Support for Teachers – The recent trend of privatization means that many of our students are being taught by non-certified teachers. This trend flies in the face of what I have witnessed firsthand: vast improvements in educational outcomes can be made by hiring top notch professional teachers and administrators who then work in a tight partnership with the parent community.

Reduction of standardized testing – I've been living through the testing debacle that has begun to dominate activities in our classrooms. I know that DPS and the school board could do more to rein in the testing load that is taking over our educational system. If elected, I would spend time at the Mayor's office, the state capital and even Washington DC to get this under control.

Community collaboration – Time and time again, the DPS community engagement process leaves communities frustrated and distrustful. The process starts with an already pre-determined set of outcomes, and the District pigeon-holes communities into choosing one of these, often pitting various groups against each other. If elected, I will listen to what our communities really need, and I will work with and listen to parents, school leaders, and community members to arrive at the best possible outcome for our students and communities.

There is no silver bullet. It takes hard work and a passion for transformative results. I know we can work together to do better for our students

Visit his website: www.spethforstudents.org