

Denver School Board Candidates:

The future of Denver Public Schools

October 4, 2011



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Dear Denver Voters,

Denver's public education challenges are enormous with roughly half of Denver's kids not graduating from high school. Of those that do graduate, few are prepared to succeed at the next level; 59% of Denver's high school graduates require remediation in college. Most of these students will never get a college degree. As education becomes more clearly tied to economic development and a city's overall future, our community requires an effective public education system where most kids are fully supported to reach their potential and contribute to the growth of Denver.

This past month A+ Denver asked the nine candidates for the Denver Public School Board to respond to a 28-question survey on K-12 education in our city. We also asked them to create their "priority list" on 16 key education issues.

Eight of the nine candidates responded. One answered with a paragraph explaining why he did not complete the survey; others offered a number of additional comments along with their ratings; and in a few cases candidates did not answer all of the questions. We share the results of our survey here.

Our goal has been to help Denver citizens have a clear picture of where each candidate stands on the critical issues of public education for our city and our school district. We hope this enables voters to be more informed as they decide who will be elected to the Denver Public School Board.

We have not graded or rated the candidates. We encourage readers to investigate how best to improve public education in Denver, along with what each candidate for the School Board can do to support effective school improvement policy and practice. On the next page you will see the general trends and findings from the survey and then you will find the actual survey. We want to point out that some candidates chose not to answer every survey question and some did not submit any answers at all, which we found disappointing.

We also recognize that some questions are complex and even have multiple parts which makes it difficult to answer fully in this survey format. We allowed any candidate to submit comments (included after the survey) to further explain their choices. We want to thank the candidates for their time and effort in responding to our questions and participating in all the candidate forums.

Additionally, we invite you to attend a candidate forum that A+ Denver is hosting along with partner organizations to hear more from each candidate. We believe it is essential for voters to hear directly from the candidates in these forums so they can expand on their answers and give more detail to their ideas for improving public education in Denver. The forum is open to the public and will be moderated by Fox 31's political reporter, **Eli Stokols**.

DPS School Board Candidate Forum - Districts 1, 5 and At-Large
October 18, 2011 ~ 6pm - 7:30pm
University of Denver - Davis Auditorium, 2000 East Asbury Avenue
Please RSVP [here](#) as space is limited.

A short survey, of course, only scratches the surface of a host of complex and challenging issues. As many have noted, the Denver Public School Board plays a critical role in the future of public education in our city. The election this fall matters.

Thank you,

Van Schoales
Executive Director, A+ Denver

A+ Denver is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to harness the power of Denver's civic leadership to build public will and advocate for reforms necessary to dramatically increase student achievement in public education in Denver.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

This survey is designed to help the public understand where the candidates for the Denver Public School Board stand on improving Denver's public schools. You will see the 28 questions we asked, and then each candidate's response, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We also present the aggregate response to the priorities we asked of the candidates; it is perhaps useful to see the highest priorities among the four candidates who completed this section, in order of importance:

1. Reward and assist schools piloting new forms of teacher evaluation (SB 191).
2. Increase the level of accountability and intervention for low-performing schools.
3. Expand the number of new high-performing district and charter schools.
4. Ensure that graduation rates are not inflated but are clearly tied to academic proficiency and achievement.
5. Provide better support (not accountability) for Denver's teachers.

A FEW POINTS AND COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSES:

A look at the answers indicates a range of views. Many who responded have similar views regarding finances, but differ most on several matters relating to teacher employment, evaluation, and pay; to choice and charters; and to accountability and intervening for failing schools. To see scores on five questions range from 1 to 5, and on eight questions from 1 to 4, or 2 to 5, reveals the significant different viewpoints on a number of these issues.

TEACHING & LEARNING

- We found it encouraging to see three candidates agree that "Teacher employment, evaluations, pay and 'tenure' in Denver should be based primarily upon student results that would include a) adequate 'growth' or improvement on standardized test scores and b) preparation of students for college and work" (Question 7).
- We note that the same three candidates all strongly agree that "DPS should be doing much more to recruit and retain the best and brightest to serve Denver kids through incentives and outreach to the best human capital pipelines in education (for example, Teach for America and The New Teacher Project)" (Question 9).

SCHOOL CHOICE

- Four of the candidates agree or strongly agree that "Denver charter schools should receive facilities, bond and mill levy funding equal to other public schools (including funding for facilities)" (Question 13). We have always believed this to be only fair, but as a number of charters are now among the district's highest performing schools, it seems even more critical to provide such strong educational programs with equal funding.

ACCOUNTABILITY, INTERVENTIONS FOR FAILING SCHOOLS, & TURNAROUNDS

- Few would call the turnaround plans for Lake, the far northeast, or West High perfect, but we find it baffling that some answered Questions 4, 5, and 6 with merely a 3, or below. Where the evidence has been so compelling that dramatic change is needed, will members of the Denver School Board agree to move ahead with turnaround efforts—or will they allow poor results to continue for years to come?
- As A+ Denver played a role in gathering data and engaging the far northeast Denver neighborhood for the turnaround plan there, we were pleased to see three candidates indicate they strongly agree (5) with that effort (Question 5).
- In a similar vein, we were glad to see four candidates answer that they agree (4) or strongly agree (5) with this statement:

"If after two years in a row a school is still rated Accredited on Probation, it should be restarted or phased out ... or replaced by new high performing schools..."

While patience and loyalty are often virtues, our kids just have one chance to be in fourth grade. Allowing chronically low-performing schools to limp along for 4-6 years hardly seems virtuous. We expect a sense of urgency about school improvement from our Board.

FINANCES

- Only one candidate agreed that "DPS is doing the best with resources it has and we should do all we can to support public education" (Question 21). On the other hand, five agreed (4) or strongly agreed (5) that "the more critical funding issue for K-12 education in Denver is ... deciding how to reduce the percentage of per-pupil dollar funds managed by the central office and how to increase the percentage of funds going directly to the schools" (Question 22).

Denver School Board Candidate Survey

Strongly Agree **5**
 Agree **4**
 Neutral **3**
 Disagree **2**
 Strongly Disagree **1**

Questions*	DISTRICT 1		DISTRICT 5		At Large Seat			
	Rowe	Sirota	Carson	Jimenez	Deserino	Haynes	Kilgore	Shumway
1. DPS needs radical reform	3	?	4	?	5	4	4	3
2. DPS moving in right direction	5	2.5	4	?	4	5	3	4
3. DPS reforms too few, too slow	4	4	4	?	5	5	3	2
4. Support for Lake turnaround plan	4	3	5	?	3	5	?	3
5. Support for far northeast turnaround plan	5	3	5	?	1	5	3	3
6. Support for West High turnaround plan	4	3	3	?	4	5	4	3
7. Teacher employment, pay tied to results	4	3	4	?	1	4	?	1
8. Teacher performance available to public	3	2	4	?	?	5	?	2
9. DPS needs to do more to recruit the best/brightest	5	4	5	?	?	5	?	2
10. Teacher pay tied to experience, degrees	2	3	2	?	5	2	?	2
11. Support district managed schools over charters	2	?	2	?	5	2	?	3
12. Charters should have funding equal to other district schools	4	2	5	?	4	4	?	3
13. Assist high quality charters	3	3	5	?	1	4	?	3
14. Actively promote choice	5	4	5	?	5	5	?	3
15. Schools should have rewards or sanctions based on performance	2	4	5	?	1	4	4	4
16. Provide funding and flexibility for low-performing schools for two years	4	4	4	?	4	4	?	5

17. Provide low performing schools funding, flexibility, and time (4-6 years) to improve	1	3	3	?	5	2	?	5
18. Low performers for 2 years should be phased out, restarted, or replaced	4	3	5	?	1	4	?	4
19. DPS should grade schools on performance	4	4	5	?	4	5	?	5
20. Each neighborhood should have high-quality school regardless of charter or district ...	5	5	5	?	3	5	4	5
21. DPS doing best it can with resources	3	2	2	?	3	3	?	4
22. DPS should increase percentage of funds going directly to schools	4	3	4	?	5	4	?	5
23. DPS requires more funding	3	4	3	?	2	4	3	5
24. Redesign DPS school finance system so 70% or more follows students	4	3	5	?	5	4	?	5
25. Funding should have ROI measures	4	4	5	?	5	5	?	5
26. Innovation schools should control their finances and programs...	4	4	5	?	4	5	?	5
27. The Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction	3	3	4	?	2	?	?	3
28. The Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction but it needs to be refined and clarified so that the general public can support and hold the district accountable.	4	3	5	?	5	?	?	5

Note: Candidates were able to provide additional comments, below, in addition or in lieu of filling out the survey. John Daniel is also running for the at-large seat but did not respond to our survey after repeated attempts to contact the campaign; thus we were unable to include him in this response section.

* The full questions as they were presented to candidates can be found at the end of this report.

Candidate Commentary

District 1



Anne Rowe

Anne had no additional comments for our survey.

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	Expand number of new high-performing district and charter schools
	Maintain K-12 funding
	Reduce size, role of 900 Grant Street (or of central office); increase schools' decision-making authority
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	Reduce class size
	Allow innovation schools to choose their principal
	Reform/revise pension system so that it is sustainable into the future



Emily Sirota

Additional comments to each survey question:

1. I choose not to pit schools against each other or put a target over particular communities in this forum
2. 2,3 - this is a series of statements to respond to that don't correspond to one number
4. What I know now, I did not know then. I was not on the board, nor was it my neighborhood, so I was not involved in the details of the discussion.
5. Again, what I know now, I did not know then. I was not on the board, nor was it my neighborhood, so I was not involved in the details of the discussion.
6. Again, what I know now, I did not know then. I was not on the board, nor was

it my neighborhood, so I was not involved in the details of the discussion.

7. Again, there are two statements in #7. Teacher employment, evaluations, and pay should be based on an array of factors, not just one standardized test a year.

9. Yes do more to recruit and retain great teachers, and it should do it by creating working conditions that are attractive, stimulating, collaborative and exciting.
10. We should provide more incentives for those teaching in more challenging environments and for those whose performance is excellent.
11. None of our schools ought to be neglected or pitted against another. We should be creating a system where all of our choices are of high quality.
13. DPS should develop a vision and plan for the needs of the district in the next 5-10 years, one that includes an assessment of overall district capacity and then we can discuss the ways that make sense to meet those needs.
15. Yes set up accountability measures that expect improvement, but there must be accountability from the administrative end to make sure that we are providing the resources and tools necessary for success. But what rewards and sanctions are we talking about in this question? This is very vague.
17. Again, yes there should be a plan that goes along with addressing the low-performing schools that might include funding, flexibility and time. Should be part of a plan that is community-driven.
18. Yes if after two years of being on probation, a new plan must be drafted for the improvement of that plan. The plan should be community-driven.
19. Yes parents should be provided with clearer, more meaningful data about school performance.
20. Again, I'd like to see the options developed in a community-driven process
23. Probably. we should be evaluating the schools that are seeing progress and looking at the dollars it takes to make that progress, ie how much in grant funding. what do schools need right now that they are not getting? We have a serious problem with class sizes. Is it budgets or building capacity that is the solution? There are many strategies on the table to consider.
25. Again, there are two separate statements here. Yes, spending should be transparent. However, I question whether or not "return on investment" measures will be any more meaningful than the number of other stats that are spun by the district.
- Comment: Nearly every one of the 28 questions/statements is in multiple parts, yet your organization asks for one number to respond to each one. I do not find your method useful in demonstrating thoughtfulness on an array of important issues and no number that I can give appropriately describes my thoughts and opinions on these issues.

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	
	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	
	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities

District 5



Jennifer Draper Carson

4. Unlike the others in this race, I have been consistent in my support for Lake.
9. Although I support TFA and TNTP, in addition to these 2 programs, DPS must put a premium on employing excellent teachers and leaders, and we need to make sure we have teachers and leadership that better reflect Denver’s diverse student population.
11. This is not an either/or choice. We can and must invest in both. My son Henry attends a traditional neighborhood school, but not every family is afforded that luxury. DPS can invest in struggling traditional neighborhood schools while investing in other models so parents and students can select the model that best suits them.
16. This model becomes truly feasible on a larger scale if we have a strong principal/ leadership pipeline in place.
29. Remove the word 'new.'

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	Expand number of new high-performing district and charter schools (Comment: Remove word 'new')
	Increase the level of accountability and intervention for low-performing schools
	Ensure that graduation rates are not inflated but are clearly tied to academic proficiency and achievement
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	Redesign teacher evaluation, non-probationary status (“tenure”) and pay
	Allow innovation schools to choose their principal
	Change school finance formula and law



Arturo Jimenez

Due to the nature of your survey, unfortunately I had to leave the questions unanswered. Education policy is not a collection of statements that can be boiled down to simple multiple choice questions. I have answered many other surveys that provided the opportunity for written responses, and I feel that format is much better suited for these types of conversations. I hope you will consider sending a questionnaire that allows for candidates to write answers to the many pressing concerns facing our students today. I would be happy to answer that questionnaire as I have others.



Top 3 Ranked Priorities	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities

At Large Seat

John Daniel

There was no response to the survey after repeated attempts to contact the John Daniel campaign and no picture was found on his website.

Frank Deserino



I believe that the questions here are nuanced in such a way as to make it difficult to provide a definitive answer, given the scale of 1 to 5. The result is that you can either answer to please A+ Denver, and lie to yourself, or you can be honest, but be seen as anti reform, which in my case is simply not true. There are several questions like this, in particular numbers 8 and 9, which I chose not to answer, but instead provide comment.

27. I feel the Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction. Answer (2), as even though the DPS Superintendent has stated several time that he would address the matter of student responsibility as it is currently mentioned in the plan, pages 15 & 17, he has done little to fulfill that promise. However, you would not have known that, as you would have to had read the document before asking such a loaded question.

28. I feel the Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction but it needs to be refined and clarified so that the general public can support and hold the district accountable.

Answer (5), again some reading of the plan on your part would be needed here, no I am not making an assumption as the nature of your question reeks of a lack of knowledge. As so long as the Denver Plan places the majority of the responsibility / accountability in the learning environment on the teacher and none on the student the plan will not carry the weight necessary for success.

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	Reduce class size
	Increase K-12 funding
	Reduce size, role of 900 Grant Street (or of Central Office); increase schools' decision-making authority
	Increase the level of accountability and intervention for low-performing schools

Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	Provide better support (not accountability) for Denver’s teachers
	Redesign teacher evaluation, non-probationary status (“tenure”) and pay



Allegra “Happy” Haynes

I am disappointed that instead of seeking thoughtful open responses, this survey simply measures whether someone agrees or disagrees with one view of the landscape with no opportunity to explain rationales or offer other considerations.

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	Provide better support (not accountability) for Denver’s teachers
	Reward and assist schools piloting new forms of teacher evaluation (SB 191)
	Reward and hold educators responsible for student results
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	Change school finance formula and law
	Reduce class size
	Increase K-12 Funding



Roger Kilgore

I am afraid that I could not respond to very many of your questions because the issues you raise do not lend themselves to multiple choice and ranked answers. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in other forums.

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	
	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities

Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	
	Did not submit ranking for list of priorities

Jacqueline "Jacqui" Shumway



1. It's already happening... and I prefer to call it "radical recreatiing."
3. Ugh - This is very unclear... Certainly we cannot move quickly enough where kids' education is involved, but you cannot force behavior change and this is a societal behavior change,
4. But I think I would have.voted for it
5. I think the concern with process is VERY serious, but I am seeing some excitement starting to build, in spite of the process!
6. But I think I would have voted for it...
7. There could also be a weighting for para help, extracurricular offerings, class size, the principal, Instructional Superintendent, etc... LOTS MORE!
8. Parental statements could also be included...
9. Until the economy gets better, we need to be sure we are recruiting from our underemployed force right here in Colorado.... and be sure that we are not

underserving the kids with inexperienced (although hopefully well-trained) "short-timers"

10. I voted for ProComp, but now we have seen its under-effectiveness - the teachers would much rather have resources and administrative support than a bigger pay check.. New York just abolished their pay for performance system.
11. DPS should support ALL the schools equally.
12. I would say "yes" as long as charter schools are made to be equally accountable to the district...
13. Only if that SAME support has already been given to the existing schools without results.
14. I so support walk and bike to school efforts that I see this as the biggest downside to taking children out of their neighborhoods where they have community support. IF transportation is made available through the district, that concern would be answered.
16. Or East High or GW's IB
18. And arts, music, and physical fitness measures
21. Mostly, except we need to reduce some of the admin overhead... or show how that is being paid for (grants, etc.)

Top 3 Ranked Priorities	
	Ranked nine choices as "1", five choices as "2", and two choices as "3", unable to determine top/bottom 3, see full survey in attachments.
Bottom 3 Ranked Priorities	

Denver School Board Candidate Survey - Full questions

1. State of Denver Public Schools

1. Denver Public Schools (DPS) is in need of radical reform.
2. DPS is moving in the right direction with the district's current leadership. The district's interventions in low-performing schools and the development of more high-quality traditional and charter schools (e.g. Beach Court, West Denver Prep, Denver School of the Arts, Denver School of Science and Technology, etc.) are important strategies for improving the quality of Denver's public education system.
3. The reforms proposed so far are too few and moving far too slow. The pace has to be accelerated so that entering kindergartners will leave their elementary school at grade level prepared for middle and high school success.
4. I did support (or would have supported) the turnaround plan for Lake middle school in northwest Denver, as approved by the Denver school board in December, 2009.
5. I did support (or would have supported) the turnaround plan for the schools in the far northeast Denver neighborhood, as approved by the Denver school board in November, 2010.
6. I did (or do) support the new turnaround plan for West High School, as approved by the Denver school board in June, 2011

2. Teaching and Learning

7. Teacher employment, evaluations, pay and "tenure" in Denver should be based primarily upon student results that would include a) adequate "growth" or improvement on standardized test scores and b) preparation of students for college and work.
8. Denver teacher performance ratings as measured by growth and impact on student learning should be available to parents and the public. Your child's teacher ratings should be available to the public, i.e. the average growth scores for an elementary teacher, the AP test pass rates for a high school teacher, etc.
9. DPS should be doing much more to recruit and retain the best and brightest to serve Denver kids through incentives and outreach to the best human capital pipelines in education (for example, Teach for America and The New Teacher Project).
10. Teacher pay should be based primarily upon years of experience and degrees earned, with a smaller percentage of pay based on performance or teaching in hard-to-serve schools, as outlined in the Denver Pro-Comp agreement.

3. School Choice

11. DPS should support struggling neighborhood schools rather than support charters and other new schools.
12. Denver charter schools should receive facilities, bond and mill levy funding equal to other public schools (including funding for facilities).
13. DPS should welcome and assist high-quality charter developers with a variety of resources (such as community investment funds, facilities, etc.) when they seek to locate in neighborhoods where academic performance is low. This should include allowing high-quality charters to operate in closed or underutilized district facilities. Such new options deserve support even when it means nearby schools lose enrollment.
14. DPS should actively support school choice for Denver families (particularly low-income), giving them the opportunity to choose a high-quality school that best meets the educational needs of their child.

4. Accountability and interventions for failing schools

15. DPS and our state should carry out accountability measures that expect improvement in student results on state and/or national assessments, with rewards and sanctions to schools and teachers for success or failure.
16. For schools Accredited on Watch or Accredited on Probation on the DPS School Performance Framework, our state and DPS should provide more funds and flexibility for two years to help them make progress.
17. Our state and DPS should provide additional funding, flexibility and sufficient time (4-6 years) to chronically low-performing schools (Accredited on Watch or on Probation) so that they have adequate resources and opportunity to improve.
18. If after two years in a row a school is still rated Accredited on Probation, it should be restarted or phased out (as has been done at Manual and Bruce Randolph) or replaced by new high-performing schools like Beach Court or high-performing models like West Denver Prep or Denver School of Science and Technology.
19. DPS schools should provide parents with simple and easy to understand performance grades. The grades should be based on student outcomes that include student achievement and growth on state and/or national assessments, graduation rates, college readiness of graduates, and other standardized measures.

20. DPS should support every neighborhood having a high-quality public school option regardless of whether it is a district managed school or a public charter school. (NOTE: There are no high-performing schools in the northwest or southwest quadrants, based on Denver's 2010 School Performance Framework, and several neighborhoods do not have the option of a high-performing middle school.)

5. School Finance

21. DPS is doing the best it can with the resources it has and we should do all we can to support public education in Denver.

22. The more critical funding issue for K-12 education in Denver is not adding more funds, but deciding how to reduce the percentage of per-pupil dollars funds managed by the central office and how to increase the percentage of funds going directly to the schools.

23. DPS requires more funding in order to make progress on student achievement and success.

24. The DPS school finance system needs to be redesigned so that 70% or more of funding follows students to their school of choice, or to programs based upon their needs. Funding should also be weighted to particular needs such as poverty.

25. DPS education spending should be more transparent and have "return on investment" measures so that parents and voters have a clearer understanding of where taxpayer money is spent and what brings the biggest return on public education investments.

26. Innovation schools should have control over nearly all of their finances and be able to choose the programs and professional development that meet the needs of their students. Like charter schools, they should also be accountable for results and their innovation status should continue only if they demonstrate good progress.

(Questions 27 & 28 were sent via email after the original survey was sent to the candidates)

27. I feel the Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction.

28. I feel the Denver Plan is taking us in the right direction but it needs to be refined and clarified so that the general public can support and hold the district accountable.

6. Priorities for K-12 education in our city

Rate in order of importance

- Expand number of new high-performing district and charter schools
- Increase the level of accountability and intervention for low-performing schools
- Ensure that graduation rates are not inflated but are clearly tied to academic proficiency and achievement
- Reward and hold educators responsible for student results
- Provide better support (not accountability) for Denver's teachers
- Reward and assist schools piloting new forms of teacher evaluation (SB 191)
- Increase K-12 funding
- Increase on-line education options and other learning technology
- Reduce size, role of 900 Grant Street (or of central office); increase schools' decision-making authority
- Reduce class size
- Reform/revise pension system so that it is sustainable into the future
- Maintain K-12 funding
- Revise collective bargaining agreements so that schools/principals have more authority to hire and fire
- Change school finance formula and law
- Allow Innovation Schools to choose their principal
- Redesign teacher evaluation, non-probationary status ("tenure") and pay