

Front Porch readers will vote for **either** a District 3 candidate **or** a District 4 candidate, depending on your neighborhood.

Everyone will vote for one of the at-large candidates on the next page.

Please pull this page out to the left to view these questions next to the at-large candidate responses.

Candidates' responses are posted with this article at FrontPorchNE.com.

Readers can find an explanation of Denver SchoolChoice and related issues at frontporchne.com/article/choice-complex-election-issue/

DISTRICT 3—Lowry, Montclair, E. Colfax



Mike Johnson

I'm the first in my family to go to college. I've practiced law for more than 40 years and am one of Colorado's leading experts on school finance. I began volunteering in our schools when my oldest started kindergarten to make sure my kids received the same quality education that was my pathway to success. My three daughters attended DPS schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. They received

excellent educations in DPS but it required a lot of hard work and hundreds of hours of time by my wife and me. I ran for the school board in 2013 to make it easier for other Denver parents to obtain the same excellent education for their children. My website is www.MikeForDenverKids.com



Carrie Olson

I care deeply about strong public education. I am a teacher starting my 33rd year in Denver Public Schools with a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. I am very familiar with how school board policies impact students, teachers and the community at large. I understand the negative consequences of closing down a neighborhood school and have experienced it first hand while teaching at Kepner

that closed during my tenure there. I am a parent of a George Washington High School graduate and was the Executive Director of a nonprofit that supported Kepner. All of this has given me a strong foundation to understand what is needed in our district.

DPS has done an excellent job in providing high quality neighborhood schools and a wide variety of educational options for students in my district in East Denver. DPS needs to do a better job with community outreach. In order to fix that I have attended hundreds of meetings with residents of East Denver to listen to their concerns, update them and answer their questions.

The most pressing issues in my district are maintaining our high quality neighborhood schools and a wide variety of educational options with the limited resources resulting from the fact that Colorado is in the bottom 10 for funding education. I will continue to lobby my state legislators to spend more money on our schools so we can maintain and improve the quality of our neighborhood schools and the educational options offered in every neighborhood in Denver.

My number one goal is that every student in every neighborhood has access to high quality neighborhood schools and educational choices so that all students can attend a school that meets their needs.

Teachers and school leaders who are on the ground working with students every day should have more control over resources and decision-making because they are in the best position to know what their students need and because, like workers everywhere, they will do a better job if they have more control over their workplace.

I believe that, as a publicly elected body charged with providing the highest possible quality public school education for all Denver kids, the decisions of the school board should always be based on the needs of the entire community. Decisions should only be made after extensive community input and should always be based on what is best for Denver's students.

The SPF is a good starting point. I would like to improve the SPF by adding measurements of school culture such as the results of the survey from our whole child work that asks students how welcoming their school's culture is for them and students like them and whether they feel there are adults in the building who will listen to and help them when they need it. I also think we should focus more on growth, status and school culture sub-scores and less on the overall school rating.

Teacher performance should be measured by whether the teacher is effectively using best teaching practices and whether her/his students are learning. Teachers should be rewarded in a manner that encourages them to use best teaching practices and increase student learning.

The gaps are correlated with inequities that permeate American society. To close the gaps, we need to:

1. Encourage our best teachers and principals to work in the schools that serve traditionally underserved students by paying them more and by providing the additional supports they need to do their jobs.
2. Allocate additional resources to the schools and classrooms that serve these students.
3. Hire and retain more teachers who look like and can identify with our students.

I have made a commitment to not accept corporate or PAC money or money from PAC-like small donor committees whose contributors are not disclosed publicly. I only accept money from real live human beings. To date my top five contributors are five individuals who live in Denver and have contributed \$1,000 each.

DPS took a courageous stance to protect undocumented students. Unfortunately, DPS appears to have strongly embraced the national agenda of privatization: school choice, unlimited charters, non-union workforce, high stakes testing, and business model of teacher evaluations. While implementing these reforms, curricula have narrowed, physical education, the arts and other non-tested subjects have been cut. I would step back from this and use research based evidence which we know is proven and tested.

Families in District 3 are concerned that there is too much testing and focus on teaching to the test instead of developing the whole child through all subjects including developing a love for reading, exploring science and social studies, and developing creative talents in art, music and physical education. Another issue is the concern for the high teacher turnover. They would like to see more support for teachers so that learning increases. The third issue is to focus on strong neighborhood schools that support their communities and the children.

No. DPS has made some improvement but not enough. Charter/innovation schools represent about 50% of DPS schools, an increase of 20% from 10 years ago. The community advocates for DPS to resource existing schools to be able to participate in all the schools' activities close to home. Choice is a large factor in increasing the segregation and an increase in overall inequity. In several Denver neighborhoods the only choices available are one or another "no excuses" charter school. Meanwhile families who don't know how to navigate the system are left behind.

I believe it begins by really listening to our teachers, parents, students and community members. Communities feel that the board has arrived at a foregone conclusion by the time they meet with the district to discuss issues concerning their schools. DPS needs to recognize that the Northfield community uniquely understands what their children need most and what it takes to make their school successful. Evidence shows that the co-located schools end up competing for key resources and the already underfunded public schools usually get the short end of the stick.

I do not. The SPF doesn't achieve its purpose of providing transparency and encouraging improvement. The "Achievement" and "Growth" indicators are measured by standardized tests which reflect socioeconomic status more-so than academic achievement. Thus, in high-need schools the testing environment is unduly stressful as school's fate rests in these scores. Some indicators change every year, making it impossible to set goals. The "equity" indicators are a positive shift. The evaluation tool should be a reflection of our priorities: to foster solid educational communities, not stressful, high-stakes tests environments.

A teacher's performance should be addressed through collaboration between the teacher and the principal based on pre-agreed upon norms. Teachers should be offered time and support to improve their practice. LEAP (<http://thecommons.dpsk12.org/Domain/103>) is a good starting point. However, there is a lack of accountability for evaluators which means evaluations can be uncalibrated and used unfairly. Therefore, a teacher's pay should never be based on LEAP evaluations.

According to a *Chalkbeat* article, "the gap in Denver Public Schools was bigger than nearly 90 percent of major U.S. cities, including similarly sized cities such as Seattle, Washington, D.C. and Memphis." The model of education reform in DPS is not working (See #4). We should look at well-researched studies that delineate frameworks to improve our schools such as ASCD's Book, "Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools." Leadership by teachers and administration that is both collaborative and distributed was critical to the school's success. Schools should foster and support high expectations as well as create a safe nurturing community. (*Chalkbeat* article is titled: "Denver and Aurora Achievement Gaps Among Nation's Highest, Index Finds")

As of September 5, 2017, I had raised \$8,821.10.
 1. DCTA \$5000.00
 2. Jack and Connie Thompson \$500
 3. Dr. Steven Antonoff \$300
 4. Paul Day-Luore \$250
 5. Jessica Timian \$250.

DISTRICT 4—Stapleton and Park Hill



Tay Anderson

I have the most direct experience what our public schools are facing day to day having just spent the bulk of my life in that system. We've heard our leaders speak to the importance of getting our young people involved, but we tell them to sit back and wait when they try. We have been waiting for so long to have a seat at the table and this November I believe that we can invest more funding into student voice.



Jennifer Bacon

As a public school teacher, school administrator, lawyer, and parent advocate, I've committed my career to advancing opportunities through education. Whether through serving as the board chair of a parent organizing group, facilitating "Know Your Rights" trainings for students, or developing teachers on how to make change civically, I work every day on the belief that the best decisions are those

made by those most impacted. I'm running for school board because Denver students and families need that experienced advocate now, who can move us forward together. I'm working to campaign the same way I would govern – accessibly and inclusively. You can reach me on my cell at 720-593-9618, email me at BaconForDenver@gmail.com, or find more information on my website www.BaconForDenverKids.com.



Rachele Espiritu

As a parent of two DPS students, I understand the incredible responsibility of serving DPS. The first immigrant to serve on the board, I am committed to public service and am a deeply engaged member of our community. As an expert on childhood development and wellbeing, I know that children learn and succeed when they are safe, supported, and cared for. Throughout my professional life and during my tenure

on the board, I have focused on the Whole Child and want to continue improving DPS, from Early Childhood Education through High School graduation. I'll continue to partner with community and bring their voices, my personal experience, and professional lens to the important work of the board. w: www.rachelefordenver.com e: rachele@rachelefordenver.com

DPS' commitment to college readiness, IE concurrent enrollment and job preparedness is a move in the right direction in setting our students up for success. DPS has lacked accountability and transparency. I would change the dynamic of community involvement, creating more opportunities for engagement.

Our teaching shortage, in particular, teachers of color, the school to prison pipeline and the expansion of charter schools. Essentially, these issues stem from a lack of equity in the District. As a school board member, equity will be the lens from which I operate.

The word choice is mis-leading at best. Yes, you can choose any school in your district, but that school may burden the parents with long travel times. There should be a quality walkable school in every neighborhood.

The agenda of DPS should be the agenda of the community. DPS serves the community, not the other way around.

The SPF can be one measurement, however we have seen the SPF change drastically over the past 10 years. It is a moving target, disproportionately affecting our public schools. I would suggest putting a moratorium on the use of the SPF as a measurement for school closures until an SPF is vetted by all parties.

Teachers should not be solely evaluated on high stakes testing. The only way we are going to have veteran teachers to mentor the new crop of teachers is by giving teachers time to develop their craft. Parents and students should have a say in teacher's performance too. Mechanisms should be in place to reward veteran mentor teachers for their important role in developing other solid teachers.

Denver has the second worst graduation rate of all metro area districts in Colorado. Last year almost 12,000 students dropped out of Colorado schools. Graduation rates are in greater decline for Black, Brown and Native-American students. The so-called "Reform Schools Movement," which our current school Board has adhered to, has resulted in a move toward the privatization of our public schools and has NOT produced the desired effects. A new school board is required to effectively and fairly represent our students, our teachers, and our community. I am committed to hiring more diverse teachers and staff and providing students with a culturally rich curriculum.

Total: \$13,000
 Susan Barnes Gelt \$1500
 Kayvan Khalatbari \$1000
 Jeannie Kaplan \$750
 Earleen Brown \$500
 Nita Lynch \$650

As a teacher, I believe in the ambitious student-focused outcomes set in the District's 2020 plan, including early childhood literacy and whole child wellness. When it comes to implementation, I have concerns about the pace of growth. DPS' goal is to have 80% of third-graders reading on grade level by 2020. Last year, only one of the 25 elementary in District 4 met that bar. From a process standpoint, there is a wide disconnect between policymakers in central office and the families, teachers, and students who are most impacted.

In conversations with community members, I heard two clear issues I plan to address: ensuring all schools are great options for kids and prioritizing inclusive, transparent decision-making processes. Right now, many families are faced with the false choice of sending their children to a low-performing school or traveling across town. For kids to succeed, DPS needs to invest resources in their neighborhood schools. As D4 looks to the future, we will only arrive at the best answers if we listen to community members on the front end.

When I speak with parents, they want to be able to find schools that meet their students' needs and they welcome the ability to choose schools with specialized programming (e.g., dual-language, arts-based). However, for a "choice" system to work, all schools must be good options. Right now too many families face a false choice: attend a low-performing school or drive across town if you have the means. That's why my platform includes investing in our neighborhood schools, so families have a true choice.

District 4 is the most diverse in Denver, with different neighborhoods each having their own needs and assets. We've also been the epicenter of so much change over the past decade: the challenges of schools facing increasing and declining enrollment, the opening and closing of schools. That's why we need a school board member who engages with the community proactively and puts parents, teachers, and students at the center of decision making processes. This is a public district so the agenda of DPS must be responsive to the public's needs.

DPS' definition of performance is based on tests. This is important piece; we always need to know if students are reading at grade level or if there are gaps in performance within the school, for instance with students of color. However, testing is only one measure. DPS can become a leader in broadening a definition of success. The SPF could be improved by more completely measuring a school's community engagement with metrics like completed home visits, or changing the equity measures to reward those schools that close gaps between students.

When I talk with teachers, most agree it's fair for educators to be accountable to helping their students succeed. However, teachers want a fair evaluation process and recognition that test scores are but one measure of learning. It's also time for a public audit of ProComp dollars, which includes performance rewards, to ensure that money is spent in ways that get us the most impact.

I believe all kids should be able to attend schools that set them up for a fair shot at success. That's not happening equally right now. Achievement gaps are a legacy of our country's history. We see lasting disparities in graduation rates, test scores, and discipline metrics across race, poverty, and student's language. As a teacher, I know that all students can succeed given the right supports. DPS can take steps to make that a reality: diversifying the teaching force to be more representative, investing in wrap-around supports for students, and starting kids off with quality pre-k.

I'm proud over 300 individuals have donated roughly \$30,000. Among my top donors are Denver Classroom Teachers Association (\$5,000), mentors Dawn Bookhardt (\$3,000) and Joyce Moorehead (\$1,000), and my father (\$2,500) and brother (\$1,000). These donors represent my broader support base: teachers, family, and leaders committed to my leadership.

The legacy of the past five years is one of systems transformation. DPS has made strides towards greater equity, given schools more autonomy and flexibility, and worked towards the goal of giving all parents a choice of high-performing schools in every neighborhood. The first implementation of the School Performance Compact was challenging. The need to engage community in decision-making is real; however, we fell short in providing the vision, timelines, and expectations for the stakeholders involved, including some of our DPS teams, and need to improve this.

I stood up to serve on the board to address two pressing issues in our district – the Whole Child and Opportunity Gaps. Many students face enormous economic, social, and societal challenges. I will work towards bringing best-practices in trauma-informed schools that support safety, prioritize relationships, and use a restorative approach to discipline. We also need to improve our efforts to authentically engage community and address community traumas. I have worked extensively with DPS to develop and implement community engagement plans and will continue that work.

School choice in Denver should be about having a great school in every neighborhood – no matter the governance model. I support our school choice policies which provide our community with: enrollment equity for all, data transparency, and a year-round placement process. Choice participation in high quality seats is higher for non-FRL students; there are opportunities to improve access to quality schools for all families. I think that we need to improve and expand enrollment zones to promote integration and inclusion and maximize opportunities for high-needs students to attend quality schools.

While absolute consensus produces decisions of high quality and support for the decision is unequivocal, it is difficult to achieve—especially in a diverse community such as District 4. As a current board member, I always try to make decisions in the best interest of our students. When building consensus, I will collaborate with the community to inform my decision-making, including: implementing a culture of listening; recognizing diverse opinions; considering pieces of opinion within whole district considerations; applying our DPS values of equity, integrity, and accountability; and finding mutually satisfactory interests.

The SPF serves many purposes: as a tool to assess progress on our 2020 goals, informs the tiering of supports for our most high-needs schools, plays a critical role in the SPC, highlights performance discrepancies, serves as a common definition of effectiveness, and informs parents regarding the school choice process. The SPF is complicated, with measures that change often and are difficult to understand and communicate. I support simplification of the SPF and the development of communication tools to make it more accessible to parents, community members, and school leaders.

Leading Effective Academic Performance (LEAP) is the growth and performance system that DPS uses to measure performance through: Observation, Professionalism, Student Perception Survey, and Student Growth. Designed in collaboration with teachers and school leaders, I support the opportunities that LEAP provides for continued improvement and growth, and the rewards based on student growth, market incentives, knowledge and skills, professional evaluation, and teacher leadership.

While DPS students have made significant academic growth in the past decade, gaps between our white students and our Black and Latino students, our English Language Learners, and our students with special needs are significant and unacceptable. While the root causes of inequities are complex (e.g., social, cultural, policies, and economic factors) and many are beyond our control, there are opportunities that DPS can take. We can look at our enrollment policies and structures that support access to high quality schools; ensure integrated classrooms with culturally responsive curricula; and increase diversity amongst our educators.

My largest contributors are family and community members who support my vision for improving Denver Public Schools for all students. I will only accept donations from individuals or committees that are transparent in their funding. I will return contributions from individuals/organizations who want to cut education funding or replace our public schools with private vouchers.