

## DCP Candidate Questionnaire – Kevin Leung

**Q: In an era of more limited resources, do you support a bond and mill levy initiative? If so, how will you build support from taxpayers for public school spending?**

A: In 2010, Douglas County School District's bond redemption revenue was close to \$70 million, but DCSD received none and has no capital dollars to build new schools, nor make desperately needed repairs to current schools. In 2010, DCSD's mill levy was 46.89, but today is only 41.064 while our neighborhood districts have successfully passed the mill levy overrides. Littleton's mill levy is 53.03, Cherry Creek's mill levy is 53.232, Adams County's mill levy is 65.922 and Aurora's mill levy is 69.685. That puts DCSD at a huge disadvantage to provide competitive pay for our teachers.

Douglas County voters approved four separate mill levy overrides in 1989, 1997, 2003 and 2006 for a total of \$33,713,000. DCSD's recent survey indicates that voters would approve mill levy overrides in order to pay teachers better. As a board member, it is my job to listen to the voters. I will suggest the board go on a listening tour and meet with the people from our community, our superintendent, teachers and school staff. Listening to those who have the most at stake is the only way the board can make the best decision for our children and community.

**Q: What do you see as opportunities and challenges in this district? If elected, what will be your priorities?**

A: Douglas County School District faces several critical issues in the next few years including attracting and retaining high quality teachers, addressing limited state funding while improving fiscal accountability and transparency, and improving declining academic achievement. As a member of the Douglas County School Board, my plan is to work collaboratively with district leaders, teachers and staff, parents and students, and members of our community to find effective solutions that will once again make Douglas County a destination district.

### Attracting and Retaining High Quality Teachers

The majority of teachers and principals have stated that the district's custom evaluation system is failing to attract and retain teachers. As a board member, I will work with them to find a better evaluation system that accurately measures effectiveness while encouraging teachers to work collaboratively with one another and focus more time on their students. Teacher pay in Douglas County has not kept pace with neighboring districts, making it more difficult to attract new teachers and retain high performing teachers. I will work with the community to come up with consent for the mill levy override question to be placed on the ballot for the purpose of increasing teacher compensation. Parents and community members have overwhelmingly said they will support such a measure and it's vital that school board members work collaboratively with our community to ensure the measure passes so we can be a destination district for teaching.

### Improving Financial Accountability in a Time of Limited Resources

With less than 1/3 of additional funding from the state being spent on school budgets, we have to prioritize spending on students. I will work to redirect funding from central administration to our schools. I will also stop the practice of allowing central administration to fund multi-million dollar projects without a budget and to be accountable on an annual basis for the associated expenditures. Finally, it is past time that the school board develops a plan to address the district's capital needs of over \$300 million. This will be one of my first priorities as a school board director.

### Improve Academic Achievement & Create a Destination District for Our Teachers and Students

It's time to have some tough conversations around improving academic achievement in our district. In recent years, Douglas County School District has lost their Accreditation with Distinction ranking and for the first time, has 15 schools on improvement or turnaround plans (\*as of 2016 and does not include on-line or alternative schools). At the same time, the district cut resources to some of these struggling schools. I will prioritize principals and teachers receiving the resources they need to provide our students with challenging curriculum and more choices.

The implementation of the Board of Education's Strategic Plan, has resulted in a working environment where staff members don't feel supported and are distrustful of our district leaders. The community is starting to voice concerns over increasing turnover rates. My plan is to create a teacher and principal advisory group that reports directly to the Board of Education, helping us to direct the superintendent on improving academic achievement and district morale.

### **Q: What are your thoughts on the current budget for DCSD? How will you ensure that our students get the best education for the tax dollars spent?**

A: DCSD's 2016-7 projected revenue is over 650M. In the 2016-17 Adopted Budget Book, DCSD increased central administration budgets by \$18.5 million MORE than they spent in 2014-15. This does not include the special education department and there is no explanation for this increase. I will work with other board members to redirect funding from central administration to our schools. I will also stop the practice of allowing central administration to fund multi-million dollar projects without a budget and to be accountable on an annual basis for the associated expenditures.

The Board must have a 3% Tabor reserve that is required by the state as part of the Tabor amendment. However, this Board also has a 3% additional reserve for the same amount as the Tabor reserve plus 1% more for contingency. These reserves can be used to offset cuts in the future.

Finally, it is past time that the school board develops a plan to address the district's capital needs that exceed over \$300 million. This will be one of my first priorities as a school board director.

**Q: What ideas do you have to attract and retain quality teachers in spite of state and district funding challenges?**

A: DCSD paid teachers \$5,000 less than Cherry Creek and \$2,500 less than Littleton 10 years ago. Today, DCSD pays teachers \$17,000 less than CCSD and \$13,000 less than LPS. Teacher shortages are being felt throughout the state and are projected to increase. The Denver Post reported in its April 13, 2017 article that "As many as 3,000 new teachers are needed to fill existing slots in Colorado classrooms while the number of graduates from teacher-preparation programs in the state has declined by 24.4 percent over the past five years."

While increasing pay for DCSD teachers are a must. DCSD must also focus on the climate and culture within the district. DCSD needs to improve preparation and training for our teachers, and listen to our teachers. Many teachers are in this profession not only for much more than a paycheck. DCSD teachers seldom left eight years ago because DCSD offered a great working environment and administrators built trust with our teachers. We must restore the great culture and climate DCSD used to have.

**Q: How do you define choice as it relates to public education? How would you like to see educational choice implemented in Douglas County under your leadership?**

A: I have always supported Public School Choices. My kids spent six years in a Douglas County charter school and 20+ years in Douglas County neighborhood schools. I was personally involved in evaluating three Douglas County charter schools' applications while serving in the Douglas County School District Accountability Committee and worked hand in hand with Charter School representatives in our state accountability committees. I have visited several charter schools in the past two months to listen to their concerns. I support magnet schools, vocational training, home schooling and online schools to list a few public school choices. Under my leadership, I will ensure that all public school options are available and be known to our parents.

**Q: Do you support the use of public tax dollars for private schools via vouchers and/or education savings accounts?**

A: I do not support using public taxpayer money to fund private schools. Public school funding is a big problem and we cannot afford to divert precious resources to private schools that will lead to weakened public education. Furthermore, once public money is diverted to the private institution, our board has no control to protect the civil rights for students and DCSD cannot demand the level of accountability we put in for our public schools.

**Q: As a school board member, how will you work to ensure that parents, students, and community members have a voice, and that board practices are transparent and accountable to taxpayers?**

A: In DCSD's survey this year, our teachers did not feel respect toward our school board. Incumbent board members have a documented hostility towards a given community and parent groups when those groups have different opinions. The arrest of award-winning documentary maker Brian Malone was a prime example. The most recent example is from the May 9, 2017 meeting. The incumbent board president cut off a special education mom during public comment simply for going a few seconds over the allowed time for public comment. The board president tried to have the mom escorted out of the meeting room! Many people in the community feel unwelcome and left out of decisions which will affect their children.

The board majority conducted its affairs based not on established common practice, but on the sole discretion of the majority. The harassment of then 15-year student Grace Davis, by Director Silverthorn and Director Reynolds, was a prime example. The appointment of the replacement Director in District E without a vote caused great dissatisfaction in the community. The board majority often refused to allow motions from the board minority and refused to consult the board minority in setting agendas. In effect, the board majority refused to work as a team to come up with a win-win solution for our kids.

The board incumbents' majority has set rules to end board meetings at 9:30pm and to disallow public comments in a work session in order to limit public input. The board majority even walked out of a meeting to force it to end when things did not go their way.

The incumbent's majority ignored the advice from 28 members of DCSD's School Accountability Committee's and staff recommendations to consider the mill levy and bond ballot questions in 2015 and 2016.

The ineffective Douglas County School board and in-fighting inside the district have in effect caused great harm to our school district's reputation.

To have a harmonious district, people with different opinions must be included in the process. I will work with other board members to ensure that our board appoints people from all walks of life to serve on the advisory committees and we will listen to and respect our staff's opinion. The Board needs to follow the Robert's Rules of Order as a guide for conducting meetings and making decisions as a group. Our Board needs to give back power to the people by restoring biweekly regular meetings and removing an automatic meeting end time of 9:30pm. I will ask the board to have board meetings in different feeder areas so we can bring our meetings to the community. I will mandate staff and community survey every year to understand what the people want.