

DCP Candidate Questionnaire – Krista Holtzmann

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: Looking at the high achieving districts to our north, students are more successful and have more opportunities when they have the financial support of the community. Douglas County needs to fix and maintain our buildings and bring our salaries up to levels that will allow us to attract and retain the best teachers for our students. The first step for the school board will be to conduct ourselves in a way that allows for respectful discussion and student-focused decision-making. It is important to build community trust in the board. I will work collaboratively with other board members, the Long Range Planning Committee, and the community at large to educate our community on the need for a bond and mill levy override, as I have worked to do multiple times in the past as a parent volunteer.

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

A:

- Restore a focus on Student Growth and Achievement - Under the reform leadership over the past eight years, our schools lost the “Accredited with Distinction” rating granted by the Colorado Department of Education, with eleven of our schools put on Improvement or Priority Improvement Plans last year. Prior to reform-focused school board members, Douglas County School District (DCSD) did not have any schools on Improvement or Priority Improvement plans. Our community deserves Board leadership that thoughtfully evaluates the educational opportunities that we provide our students, focusing on the quality of opportunities for ALL our students.
- Reduce Teacher Turnover - Last year our teacher turnover was 19.04%, (664 of 3,487 teachers left Douglas County); in 2009 teacher turnover was 10.17%. This level of turnover creates significant challenges on many levels. Common sense and research consistently tell us that the most important "in-school" factor affecting student achievement is teachers; so we must continue to restore the culture where educators felt respected and supported. This includes paying teachers a competitive wage, including their voice in decision-making about curriculum and instruction for students, and promoting partnerships among teachers, parents, and administrators to meet the needs of ALL 68,000 Douglas County students.
- Provide Trustworthy, Student-Focused Management of Resources
- Determine Priorities and Then Budget - For years we have failed to prioritize expenditures that most directly affect our students: failing to pay our teachers competitively while awarding central administration bonuses; prioritizing investments in software development over providing instructional time at our high schools; devoting staff time and energy to courtroom endeavors instead of classroom support, and focusing on quantity of educational options rather than quality. I will work with my fellow board members to utilize the valuable input from the District Accountability Committee, Long Range Planning Committee, and Fiscal Oversight Committee to determine the district's spending needs and prioritize those that will advance the quality and safety of our schools.

- Address Capital Needs - Today, we find ourselves with over \$300M in unmet capital needs. In the next year, \$22M to 28.6M are major maintenance needs such as roofing, plumbing or heating. If not addressed, and failure occurs, schools would be shut down for unknown periods of time for repairs. I will work to ensure the community is well educated about the need for a bond and mill levy override and the consequences if these measures fail to pass.
- Value Community Input and Expertise - In the interest of prioritizing student needs, and setting budget priorities, Douglas County must value input and opinions from our community, teachers, and parents. Additionally, the Board should value the research-based recommendations from experts such as the Long Range Planning Committee, the Charter Application Review Team, Fiscal Oversight Committee and District and School Accountability Committees. Douglas County deserves strong leadership that will work continuously towards a common goal of using our community's tax dollars to best serve ALL the students of Douglas County.

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: Ensuring that our District has well-defined spending priorities prior to examining our budget is essential to finding solutions for our students. Our budget does not provide competitive salaries for our teachers. Though some efforts have been made recently to reduce central administration budgets, I am concerned that our secondary school budgets were cut again this year. The current Board of Education has been asked to approve a budget without honoring board member's requests to receive supporting information that is commonly provided to their peers in other districts. It is concerning to me that our District changes budget categories from year to year, which makes it difficult to compare budgets over time. If I am elected to serve on the Board, I would ask for an independent review of our budget by an expert at evaluating school district finances, with the goal of achieving a higher level of transparency and accuracy in regard to the district's budget.

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

A: We must restore the collaborative culture that used to exist in Douglas County, where educators felt respected and supported. This includes paying teachers a competitive wage, including their voices in decision-making about curriculum and programming for students, and promoting partnerships among teachers, parents, and administrators to meet the needs of ALL students. We must also encourage mentorship programs so that our newer teachers have someone to turn to with questions, and we must give our master teachers more time to mentor their less-experienced colleagues.

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: Providing students with diverse educational opportunities to meet the diverse needs of students. With the support of caring teachers, families and a community that provides necessary resources, the future is bright for our students. As Board members, we need to carefully assess the needs of our students and prioritize resources to provide educational opportunities that inspire all our students to reach their potential and become productive members of our community. However, sometimes student opportunities are limited by a parent's ability to provide transportation or pay fees necessary to participate. Other times our student's opportunities are limited because our schools offer limited resources that are not available at every school, such as in the case of special education or gifted and talented students. Other times, our students face reduced opportunities to participate in important areas such as language learning or career and technical training. All our public schools (charter, magnet, neighborhood and online) must work together to meet the needs of ALL students, providing educational opportunities that inspire all our students to reach their potential and become productive members of our community.

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

A: As a person of faith, I believe that religious institutions should support the faith-based education they provide, thereby preserving their ability to teach without government restrictions. Furthermore, private schools are currently able to choose whom they admit. As long as they do not accept public money, this is perfectly within their rights. However, if public money started to flow to these schools, we could be subsidizing discrimination against children for any reason the private school chooses, whether they be children with special needs or any other group the private school may choose to exclude. Taxpayers would lose all accountability as to how their tax dollars are spent. Since the voucher amount would not be enough to pay the full tuition of a local private school for any student, vouchers would really only be a subsidy for wealthy families whose children do not have special needs or any other categorization not accepted by the private school. Finally, as the Board serves the public school students in the district and given the financial struggles of our own public schools, diverting funding from public into private schools would place a further strain on the district's limited resources. Public money must provide opportunities for ALL children, not just some.

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: As a board member, I will look forward to hearing from the community at the public board meetings, and I will work hard to ensure that executive sessions are not abused as they were under the reform board members prior to 2015. Just as I have been available to meet with the public during my campaign at weekly coffees and many other community events, I will continue to value and welcome the input of others. Reinstating periodic board meetings with the goal of engaging with the community on specific issues of interest would be helpful. I will also push for a community survey to be taken on a regular basis as another way to listen to our community members. Once a board member, I especially look forward to visiting each of our schools and listening to the needs of our building administrators, teachers and students.