



OUT BOULDER COUNTY

## **2023 Boulder Valley School District School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate**

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Candidates all had until Sept 28, 2023 to submit their responses and were provided several email reminders.

Here we present the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

8 of the 10 BVSD candidates submitted responses and those are provided here.

We received responses from the following candidates:

District Seat A: Jason Unger, Neil Fishman

District Seat C: Alex Medler, Cynthia Nevison

District Seat D: Andrew Brandt, Lalenia Quinlan Aweida

District Seat G: Jorge Chavez, Stuart Lord

We did not receive responses from the following candidates: Anil Pesaramelli (District Seat G) or Andrew Steffl (District Seat C).

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we cannot endorse any candidate. Rather, we work to understand and share information with our constituents about the candidates and their stances on topics that are important to our community.



# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District A: Jason Unger

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I have spent more than twenty-five years working in education - as a fourth and fifth grade teacher in Compton, CA; as a school administrator at a school serving students with special needs in the Boston Public Schools; as the education advisor to the former U.S. Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid (D-NV); as a parent of two - soon to be three kids - in BVSD schools; and as an involved and active volunteer at our neighborhood school and member and former chair of our school's School Accountability Committee. Additionally, with four of the seven seats on the board open this fall, it is critical that we elect board members who have experience and are prepared for the challenging issues facing our district. And lastly, I am deeply concerned about some of the recent anti-equity policies supported by school boards around the country - and want to ensure that BVSD remains a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive district for all kids and staff. I am running for BVSD School Board because, with my experience at all levels of education, I am prepared and ready to serve to help make BVSD even better for all kids.

### **2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities,**



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**experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

As a former elementary teacher and administrator, I worked to ensure that classrooms, the curriculum, libraries and our school's environment were inclusive and welcoming for all students, particularly marginalized students. As I did in my own classroom and school, for all grade levels there are age-appropriate ways to promote and include a broad understanding of history and literature. As a parent and regular volunteer in my kids' classrooms, I believe our school - and BVSD as a district - has done a good job offering materials and supporting environments where all students feel welcome, represented, and seen. Additionally, ensuring that our teaching and administrative staff represents and reflects the diversity of our students is essential. The district should continue to prioritize building on the current efforts to attract and retain a more diverse teaching staff.

**3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

Yes

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

**a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

We know from statistics and decades of research that, due primarily to institutional racism and discrimination, students of color and LGBTQ+ students are more likely to be subject to exclusionary discipline practices than their white counterparts. While we have made some progress in addressing this issue in BVSD by, first, acknowledging the



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## **BVSD District A: Jason Unger**

problem and then reforming discipline policies, we must continue to work to address these inequities. The district should continue to be transparent by tracking and making data on disproportionate discipline available to teachers, administrators, and staff, and the BVSD community. The district should also continue to embed and encourage restorative justice practices. I have seen firsthand - as a teacher and administrator, and as a parent at Creekside Elementary - how effective these practices are at addressing behavioral issues, reducing exclusionary discipline, and in helping to ensure students of color are not disciplined at disproportionate rates. Research also shows that building a more diverse staff and ensuring representation helps address disproportionate discipline, and the district should build on efforts to hire more teachers of color.

### **b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

I believe that punitive discipline is ineffective, does not teach students the skills they need to change behavior, and can do more harm to students over the long-term.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

### **a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

We should be proud of the work that the district has done to help close achievement gaps and help our lower-performing schools make real improvement. However, as CMAS scores have shown, BVSD still has notable gaps in achievement between different schools and across different communities and student demographics - particularly for students of color, English-language learners, and special needs students.

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

I strongly support continuing to prioritize and build on the work the district has done to help close achievement gaps for minority students and those who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. The differentiated funding provided to schools over the past few years has helped some of our lower-performing students and schools make real improvement. Should I be elected to the school board, I will want to make sure we find ways to continue this targeted approach. We also must continue to focus on ensuring instruction



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and curriculum are challenging, engaging, and relevant. My experience as a former teacher and administrator at schools where all of our students qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch has shown me that there is nothing more important than raising the bar for all students and making sure all students are challenged and engaged.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

Bullying is a serious concern. BVSD has a strong anti-bullying policy which correctly focuses on well-designed and school-wide prevention efforts. To ensure that the policy is being implemented effectively, it is important that the district continue to collect and analyze data related to bullying. Using this data, the district can identify areas of concerns or schools where there are challenges, and help address them. I would support a regular review of bullying prevention data in order to ensure that the district's policies are being implemented.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

I strongly support these new, more inclusive standards and believe all schools, including charter schools, should follow them.

#### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

I believe there is a role for public charter schools, as we have shown in BVSD. In this district and in other districts across the country where successful public charters operate alongside traditional public schools, they must have local approval and oversight - which would include ensuring that these schools follow the same laws and requirements, including around state-mandated curriculum, adhere to the same anti-discrimination policies, are required to assess their students, provide protections for teachers, and



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create opportunities for parents to be engaged and involved with governance. As with all schools, districts should review the agreements authorizing these schools on a regular basis to ensure accountability and that the requirements and commitments, as well as new challenges, are being met and addressed.

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

As a parent of two BVSD kids, I am able to stay involved and updated on most school and district-related issues. Our third child is not yet a BVSD student but will keep us active and engaged in the schools and district until 2039. While having kids in BVSD schools is not a requirement for board members, I believe there is no better way to understand what is happening at the school level and in the district.

I have also served for five years on the Creekside Elementary School Accountability Committee, which has kept me informed about district policies and how they impact our school, and the unique needs and concerns of our school community. In addition, over the course of the campaign, I have worked to meet with parents or parent leaders from each of the 56 schools in the district (as of today, I am at 41!). This has really helped me develop a better understanding of the school community and the unique issues and challenges facing each school. Should I be elected to the school board, this knowledge and the relationships I have formed, will help me be a more thoughtful and responsive board member - and I will work to continue this outreach and engagement throughout my service on the board.



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# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District A: Neil Fishman

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I am the product of the public school system. I attended K-12 in the Denver Public Schools, and I earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in geology from CU. My husband and I ushered our kid (K-12) through the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD). I owe many of my personal and professional successes to my public-school education. Thus, it is not surprising that I am an ardent supporter of public schools and have a sincere passion to ensure that all kids have access to an excellent public-school education, well into the future. I have also worked for decades in the social justice arena at the local level—from local non-profits (e.g., BCAP, Out Boulder) to governmental levels (municipality, county, state)—and have considerable involvement as a parent and citizen in the public schools. An example of my involvement in BVSD policy formulation comes from when I was a member of the BVSD District Parent Council. As a committee member, I played a pivotal role in expanding the BVSD non-discrimination policy to include gender identity and gender expression. Another example of my involvement in the schools is from 2022, when I worked collaboratively and strategically to get the progressive social studies standards passed by the CO Board of Education (BOE). Passage of the new standards now make it possible to readily recognize the contributions of people from marginalized groups, including those from the LGBTQ



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community, through a progressive set of social studies standards for all kids (K-12) attending Colorado's public schools. I considered revising the social studies standards as a critical goal given the extreme vulnerability right now of LGBTQ students in the America. In fact, the 2021 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey indicates that LGBTQ kids are much more likely than kids in other groups to contemplate or pursue self-harm. These vulnerable kids need unwavering district support, which starts with our schools being safe and welcoming for all students and staff. So, my passion for public education along with my devotion to social justice work at the local level motivates me to seek a seat on the BVSD school board. And I am very well connected to the community in the BVSD area.

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

The first thing to do is acknowledge the problem. Bullying and disproportionate discipline persist in our schools based on 1) results from new research (American Psychological Association), 2) data presented in the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, and 3) anecdotal information from students, parents, and teachers. As for bullying, policies intended to address such actions appear to be inconsistently enforced in the BVSD. So, one way to support students in this area is to ensure that BVSD policies on bullying, harassment, and other egregious acts are consistently enforced district wide. Consequences to egregious actions can then serve as a deterrence.

There remains a disparity in disproportionate discipline for students of color vs white students in BVSD. Teacher and administrator response to misbehavior may be due, in part, to perceptions and bias, which can lead to inconsistent responses to student misbehavior. In addition, the nature of misbehavior—e.g., smoking on school grounds vs defying authority—can by itself lead to disproportionate discipline as a function of race. But there are some ways to further reduce disproportionate discipline, including 1) enhanced cultural training for educators and administrators, 2) restorative practices, and 3) increasing staff diversity. There is an improvement in disproportionate discipline that is attributed to restorative practices in BVSD. There is also improvement in BVSD as measured by a decline in law enforcement referrals. As such, I believe that BVSD is moving in the right direction but more needs to be done. But what we see in terms of disproportionate discipline in the schools mimics what is happening in the community





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around the schools. So, a clear 'fix' to this problem will require concerted efforts both inside and outside of the schools.

And then there is the matter of limited educational opportunities. Recent research demonstrates how limiting the teaching of life issues (e.g., how sex and gender are taught) presents challenges for some kids, especially those who identify as transgender. In the absence of gender-inclusive content to courses, trans kids experience lower academic performance when compared to their classmates because they feel isolated and unsupported. And the effects of some legislation in the U.S. is serving to discourage LGBT students from entering science and other fields of study because of the discomfort they feel when the world is taught as effectively being black and white rather than multiple shades of gray. Moreover, the effect on all students is to diminish teaching the complexity of humans, which limits development of critical thinking skills. So, as a board member, I would prevent anti-trans and anti-inclusion policies from finding their way into the BVSD curriculum.

And finally, supporting marginalized students includes access to mental health resources designed to specifically help them. This is a place where BVSD can reach outside of its walls and form solid collaborations and partnerships with outside agencies, not only to assist the students but to provide training resources for educators to help create an inclusive environment that welcomes all students. In addition, employing staff (e.g., teachers, paraeducators, administrators) that are accepting, supportive, and perhaps themselves members of marginalized groups is also key to providing students with support in the schools. And for some students, these accepting and supportive adults can be seen as trusted adults in their schools. Having trusted adults as well as role models is an excellent way to promote mental wellbeing for some students.

### **3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

I would oppose efforts to ban books or the development of policies that would target books for exclusion from the schools if they were written by LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern authors, or those books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters or content. In fact, I believe all kids should be able to see themselves represented in educational resources including books and other media. It is important to note that the preliminary BVSD Policy Platform, which will be voted on in early October 2023, has a component in it that states that the school board trusts teachers and librarians to make appropriate selection of books and media for classrooms and libraries. Although this component can



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be challenged, it shows the clear intent of the BVSD to support staff to make informed decisions in the area of providing resources to help students.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

I do support restorative practices in our schools, as mentioned in a previous response. BVSD has been increasingly implementing such practices, and the results seem to be showing that this practice is working insofar as there have been fewer Latino students being suspended in the past school year. So I believe BVSD is moving in the right direction. Elements of restorative practices include the development of skills around community caring, conflict resolution, and empathy for others, so these practices are rooted in social emotional learning. I believe that there are some ways to further reduce disproportionate discipline, including enhanced cultural training for educators and administrators, and increasing staff diversity (repeated here from above for emphasis). As a board member, I would support new goals to enhance the diversity of staff as well as further integration of restorative justice practices in the schools though expansion of the budget in these areas.

- b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

Adequate expertise and training of staff. Adequate diversity of staff.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**



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## **BVSD District A: Neil Fishman**

### **a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

An achievement gap persists in BVSD, and lowering it is one of my priorities, especially in elementary schools but also in middle and high schools. The gap represents the differences in academic performance between students in different groups, and exists in language arts, math and other core studies. Although there have been some successes, including those at Alicia Sanchez Elementary in Lafayette, much more work remains to be done. Students of color, as well as students eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL)—students whose family income is <130% of the federal policy level—still lag their white classmates in achievement measures. Although some improvement has been documented in the past year, the achievement gap continues to exist at unacceptable levels. There remains a residual effect on achievement from the pandemic, but the long-standing disparity continues between Latino and white students. A more rigorous and consistent effort in applying the BVSD's Data Driven Instruction (DDI) methodology may lessen the gap, and I would advocate for following this approach for an additional period of 2-3 years to determine its sound effectiveness. But along with DDI, I would seek to further close the gap by working to improve school climate and the mental wellbeing of students so that a safe and welcoming school environment exists for all students, which will provide improved conditions for effective learning. As for why the gaps exist, there are several reasons including 1) socioeconomic status of some student families in BVSD, 2) bias and racism, 3) structural inequalities that leads some students of color a to believe they are not ready or able to learn at the same level as white classmates, and 4) minimal culturally responsive instructional practices.

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

I advocate for continuing the Data Driven Instruction (DDI) to readily identify students in need of additional resources to improve their learnings. So I support the continued involvement of this methodology for at least another couple of years. But I would also advocate for making schools safer and more welcoming, to maximize the learning environment for all students. Previous answers to questions above help to outline what I would like to see happen including enhancing the mental wellbeing of students and more staff diversification.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**



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As discussed earlier in this questionnaire, bullying persists in our schools. I believe that disparities in the implementation of bullying policies are part of the problem, and so as a board member I would insist that the superintendent (the only employee supervised by the board) ensure that there is institutional adherence to all policies, at all levels in the district. This would be the case regardless of where or how the bullying was occurring (e.g., classroom, hallways, cafeteria, outside the building, or cyberbullying). But root causes of bullying at some schools requires a deeper dive into why this is happening—what is the climate in a school in which bullying persists? And what will it take to change the climate sufficiently to see a reduction of bullying incidents? The superintendent's annual review by the board would provide a means to ensure that board direction is fully considered.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes, a charter school should be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies. My feeling is that if a school is funded with public money, as are charter schools, these schools should be required to abide by a comprehensive nondiscrimination policy. And a charter school's nondiscrimination policy should be fully in line, in this case, with the BVSD nondiscrimination policy. If a charter school application came to the board and it did not have a draft nondiscrimination policy, or the draft in the application was not in alignment with the BVSD policy, I would flag this shortcoming and determine if the BVSD District Accountability Committee review of the application, as well as staff review of it, had also made note about this deficit. Surprisingly, charter school applications apparently do not require a draft nondiscrimination policy for submission of their application—I'd work to amend state law so a draft nondiscrimination policy would be required in the application packet. But in the end, I would vote to not approve a charter school application if it did not have a comprehensive nondiscrimination policy.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes, I believe a charter school should follow the revised social studies standards. I worked extensively in 2022 to help the Colorado State Board of Education see the value



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in the standards that were passed, and so I would want to make sure all kids in any school funded with public dollars followed the inclusive social studies standards adopted in 2022.

### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

As a board member, I would ask to see the annual review of the BVSD curriculum, which in this case would be based on the BOE standards, insofar as curriculum is developed within the framework of the standards. I would then seek specific information about the social studies curriculum to ensure that they are indeed inclusive and equitable as outlined in the new progressive social studies standards and to see if content was being effectively learned by students. But direct feedback into the schools would be through the superintendent. If the curriculum was not in alignment with the social studies standards, it would be the board's responsibility to direct the superintendent to ensure that changes were made so that they did align as intended. A charter school would likely have to account for their adherence to the social studies standards during its annual review, and these reviews "...shall be considered in connection with any decision to renew, revoke, or renegotiate the district charter." (BVSD policy LBD-R).

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

As a cisgender gay man, my comments and thoughts are informed, at least in part, through my many life experiences growing up and living my life. But my thoughts are also informed by my experiences as a father and having learned about the inner workings of the BVSD schools through my kid's experiences at all levels —elementary, middle, and high school. And I have deep roots in the community and care a lot about it and the kids who live here.



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# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District C: Alex Medler

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

My top reasons for running include my desire to prioritize student mental health, well-being and sense of belonging; to advance and sustain current initiatives to advance student equity; and to ensure all our students are engaged in challenging content that prepares them for their life after school.

First, when it comes to mental health, as many parents are painfully aware, too many students are hurting. I will prioritize student mental health, well-being, and sense of belonging in our schools. The district has begun to invest in personnel and programs to focus on mental health. We should monitor these efforts and adjust as needed to help more students. This includes ensuring our LGBTQ students are supported, as these students report much higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide than their non-LBGTQ classmates. The district also needs to improve its response to student bullying.

Second, the district is getting strong results after providing extra financial support to our schools and students who need more support. As one-time money expires, we should



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## BVSD District C: Alex Medler

find a way to institutionalize these investments. The district should continue to support schools with higher proportions of English learners, students from low-income families, students with disabilities and other historically under-served student groups. I am concerned that these investments, which appear to be having a very positive impact, may be difficult to maintain in the long run. Hopefully these sorts of investments can be supported by “hard money” and permanent district policies and procedures. We should think expansively about historically underserved populations, and continue to support programming, budgets, and partnerships.

Finally, we should expand high school students’ access to challenging content and activities that prepare them for whatever they choose when they leave BVSD, including students not interested in selective colleges. This preparation includes everything that can make high school more engaging, such as access to Career and Technical Education and post-secondary options -- like advanced placement courses and concurrent enrollment.

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

I think the most effective strategies related to these issues require a strong school-based approach. School leaders, staff, and students and families should be involved. Partners with expertise can help, and the district can also provide support and reinforce the prioritization of this work. The district can articulate goals and expectations and provide resources and hold schools accountable for progress, however, the most important work will be conducted in schools.

The district and the board can reinforce this approach by gathering and sharing data on related issues. The district can also reinforce the value of this data when holding school leaders accountable. Information on students’ perceptions of safety and staff feedback can all inform the district’s analysis.

**3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

Yes.





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I would oppose any effort to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content. I support the state's social studies standards and know that Boulder parents helped promote standards that reflected all the people in our communities.

All students deserve to see their families, their culture, and their heritage represented in the materials and content in our schools. Our history needs to accurately reflect all people's experiences, challenges, and accomplishments.

I am concerned about the presence of advocates in our community who do not believe in the rights of LGBTQ students and families, as well as threats from those who want public schools to reflect or act on extreme ideologies. I will work to prevent the infringement of students, families, and staff's rights and sense of belonging. Our schools must reflect everyone and be places of reflection and learning, not hate or denial.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

Yes.

Addressing disproportionate and exclusionary discipline is crucial to promoting strong outcomes for Latine students and other student groups subject to these threats. Students with disabilities, for example, are also subject to excessive discipline too often.

In my professional work, I have helped design professional development forums and materials highlighting exemplary practices on these topics for the U.S. Department of Education. Schools can make great progress on disproportionate discipline when it is a shared priority among all the leaders and staff in the school and people in the school act with support from system administrators and expert partners. Families and community partners should also be part of this work.





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## **BVSD District C: Alex Medler**

I support the move toward restorative justice. When implemented well, restorative justice can contribute to strong school culture and increase students' sense of belonging and security in their school. BVSD has issues/problems recently with bullying and sexual assault, among other issues related to students' sense of belonging and safety in school.

BVSD should maintain a spirit of transparency and be open to learning about how their efforts are working and what the data says. These efforts should also not be done in isolation from other initiatives, including efforts around mental health and student engagement.

### **b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

Restorative justice must be implemented well and with consistency to be effective. When implemented poorly, for example, it can add to the trauma that victims of bullying experience. The district should continue to support training, including all staff, in how to participate in and lead restorative justice work. Support from expert partners can help school teams manage and sustain this work. There are strong partners in Colorado to bring to this work. Efforts to address these problems begin with a strong effort to gather and consider available data and information on what is happening in schools.

## **5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

### **a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

BVSD has substantial achievement gaps between several student groups that reflect problems like the rest of Colorado. BIPOC students, English Learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families perform lower on growth and achievement measures than comparison groups.

The specific causes of why these gaps exist are complex. There is no single cause. Different students and student groups, in different schools, and different communities are likely facing different root causes of the gaps.

School improvement efforts with strong practices generally start with an analysis of all available information about their school and its context. It is most important for



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## **BVSD District C: Alex Medler**

improvement purposes that the leaders and educators in a school determine what they believe is most relevant to their school's specific achievement gaps.

Historically, many schools' gaps are exacerbated by issues like implicit bias, structural racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and lack of cultural expertise. They can also be due to staff experience, capacity, training, or programmatic support.

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

I support the ongoing investment of targeted resources and the provision of district staff support to our schools with the highest proportions of historically underserved students. Partnerships with effective groups like UVA are also showing strong results in BVSD. I will support long-term allocation of resources to these sorts of programs on a permanent basis.

I believe we should also engage with communities, parents, and teachers as we maintain our focus, and that the families and school staff's perceptions of what is needed should always be considered as we figure out what to prioritize.

We also need to continue to pursue the recruitment, induction, and retention of teachers of color so that our students see themselves represented in the adults working in their schools.

Finally, I also believe that we should encourage the use and sharing of data and information, and that transparency and open communication about our progress and the obstacles we encounter is part of an effective improvement strategy.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

The role of the board member is not to directly oversee or evaluate staff work. Board members establish policies, develop and approve the budget, and evaluate and hire and fire the superintendent. They can communicate their expectations to the superintendent, and their prioritization is reflected in things like the strategic plan. The board can ask the district to gather information, and request analysis of that information to understand the fidelity of implementation of anti-bullying policies. Various survey instruments are administered by the state that can help the board understand how students are experiencing the school's practices, how teachers feel about the work and the support they receive.



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## **BVSD District C: Alex Medler**

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

This is a topic I have worked on professionally for more than 30 years. I have consulted with BVSD on its efforts to adopt best practices in charter school authorizing. I have also consulted with BVSD during its two most recent charter application reviews. As a board member, I will continue to advocate that the district adopt practices that give us the best opportunity to reject unacceptable proposals. I would work to ensure BVSD has tools to promote positive changes in charter schools that should do better on any shortcoming and the mechanisms to hold charter schools accountable.

BVSD's charter schools are established members of our community and our public school system. They provide unique programming and services that families appreciate and value. There are opportunities to make incremental changes in both district and charter school policies and procedures that could increase the ability of all our charters to serve representative populations. The strong authorizing practices I will promote will make this type of change easier.

I am firmly committed to ensuring charter schools – and all public schools – fulfill their obligations and comply with applicable non-discrimination requirements. All charter schools should be required to comply with all applicable state and federal laws and policies; and students, families, and staff in charters should enjoy all the civil rights protections available under state and federal constitutions.

I support BVSD's contractual approach, which is to insist that charter schools follow the district's non-discrimination policies. BVSD has rightly denied a charter application, in part, for failing to provide information on the policies it wanted waived and its replacement plans as part of an application.

Checks on faithful implementation of any replacement policy should be a regular district activity, and a charter school's failure to comply with policies should be treated as a serious problem requiring a timely remedy. Material non-compliance should also be part of the body of evidence used to evaluate a charter for renewal or revocation, and revised charter contracts should support district priorities.

An example of my commitment to this approach is work I led in the state to ensure students with disabilities do not face discrimination when their families apply to charter schools -- or engage in any other form of public school choice. I helped the state identify a long-standing problem. Colorado has among the lowest proportions of students with disabilities in charter schools of any state in the nation. There are multiple causes of this problem, including district policies, school practices, and the widespread misunderstanding of charter schools' responsibilities among parents. The initiative I led



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## **BVSD District C: Alex Medler**

eventually resulted in the Colorado State Board of Education adopting new rules that prohibit any charter school from asking about a student's disability status prior to enrolling the student. The same rules also apply to district-operated schools and all open enrollment programs. Eventually, this should expand access to charter schools, focus schools, and open enrollment programs for students with disabilities across the state.

I also helped found and chaired the board of the Center for Learner Equity, a national organization dedicated to ensuring charter schools serve all students appropriately.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes.

Charter schools should be accountable for teaching and helping students achieve all state standards, including the new Social Studies standards.

#### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

Charter schools should share their curriculum materials, which are also described in charter applications and referenced in charter contracts. Districts are required by Colorado law to provide every charter school with an annual report summarizing the district's evaluation of the charter school's performance. This includes academic, operational, and financial aspects. Districts with strong practices include site visits and reviews of documents and materials as part of that process. I will advocate that BVSD improve its annual reporting process and look for ways to include the Social Studies standards in that work.

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

I believe the district and our schools should be a source of support to families and students. This includes LGBTQ students and their families. The district could do more to communicate to parents of all students its commitment to partnering with families.



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# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District C: Cynthia Nevison

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we cannot endorse any candidate. Rather, we work to understand and share information with our constituents about the candidates and their stances on topics that are important to our community.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I'm a capable and well educated person who can listen with genuine respect to a wide range of opinions, both liberal and conservative. I also bring an important science-based perspective to the table. I hope to bring more diversity of thought to the board and try to represent the parents who feel disenfranchised to the point that they are pulling their children from public schools. I am concerned that the erosion of trust in public schools we are seeing in this country (public schools have lost 1.5 million students in the U.S. over the last few years) will lead to further divisions in society that undermine democracy. A supporter recently told me, "It will be heartening to so many parents who want freedom for their children to have someone like you on the board to speak up for them."

### **2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative**



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## **BVSD District C: Cynthia Nevison**

**disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

At two BVSD meetings I attended last spring, many parents reported that, although their children had Individual Education Plans (IEPs), their needs were not being met due to the critical shortage of paraeducators and special ed teachers. BVSD needs to find more resources to help these kids, as required by federal law (i.e., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The diverging rates of neurodevelopmental disabilities among all students, particularly Black and Hispanic boys, also have serious implications for academic achievement. In BVSD, Latinos are 50% more likely than whites to have an IEP, which indicates a learning disability, while Black children are twice as likely to have an IEP. An IEP is generally not issued just because English is not the child's first language, but rather indicates a neurodevelopmental issue or learning disability. The root causes of increasing neurodevelopmental and other chronic conditions in children need to be addressed by public health officials in partnership with schools.

**3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

Yes, I oppose censorship and book banning on principle, although I do think that parents have the right, under the 1974 Pupil Privacy Act, to review school materials and opt their children out. I have not heard of any attempts to ban books with Black, indigenous, Latin, Asian or Middle Eastern characters, but I am aware of conservative or religious groups seeking to ban certain materials that they find offensive. Conversely, the left has also advocated for censorship, demotion or revision of authors from past centuries, like Laura Ingalls Wilder and Roald Dahl, who are judged by 21st century standards. A Canadian school board recently went so far as to purge all books written before 2008 from its libraries. Also concerning is the censorship of accurate information (e.g., the statement that SARS-CoV2 originated in a Chinese virology lab) and the Biden Administration's role in pressuring social media companies to censor viewpoints (even if true) that contradict its policies. In a recent Pew poll, 55% of adults (and 70% of Democrats) said that government should take steps to limit "false information" online. This poll and all the various efforts at censorship described above reinforce the need for BVSD to teach our students about the fundamental freedoms in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, of which freedom of speech is arguably the most important of all.



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## **BVSD District C: Cynthia Nevison**

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

Yes, I agree that restorative justice, when possible, is always preferable to punitive discipline. I do not have specific experience in this area but would educate myself on and support existing programs in BVSD if elected.

- b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

They don't fully take into account that there are people in the world who can act in a cruel or dangerous way toward others. Denver found this out the hard way recently when a student was fatally shot and two school officials were shot outside East High School. The shootings prompted Denver to reinstate armed officers in its schools.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

- a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

The achievement gaps are large according to BVSD's CMAS data from Spring 2023, which show that about 62% and 75% of white students met benchmark expectations in math and reading, respectively, compared to only 25% and 38%, respectively, for Latino students. These are challenging problems that involve factors such as poverty, parents who work multiple jobs and thus don't have time to help kids with homework, and the challenging of succeeding in school when English is not a child's first language





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## **BVSD District C: Cynthia Nevison**

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

BVSD to its credit has tried hard to address these gaps, but they involve socioeconomic issues that are not entirely under the district's control. Smaller class sizes and more individual attention for students who are struggling academically are a key strategy for closing these gaps.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

I abhor bullying, having seen within my own extended family that it can have a lifelong negative impact. As a board member I would be attentive to reports of bullying from constituents and would contact administration and staff at the schools to inquire how they are handling the situation. I also think that bullying is to some extent a part of human nature, stemming from our tribal past, and that education programs should also include skills for students to disempower bullies, e.g., by deflecting the aggression with humor or refusing to be baited by it. Bystanders should also be encouraged to come to the defense of students being bullied.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes, by law charter schools are required to follow the same nondiscrimination rules as any other school.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes, again by law charter schools are required to follow the state standards.

#### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

I'm not sure. I think individual teachers should have some discretion in what they present in the class.





## **BVSD District C: Cynthia Nevison**

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

I have done pro bono research for many years on the increasing rates of chronic health conditions and disabilities among children. I am very interested in this issue and would like to try to bring awareness to it on the board, as it is having a major impact on public schools.



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# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District D: Andrew Brandt

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I have two kids who are nonbinary and I think you'd have to be living under a rock to not be concerned about what groups like Moms for Liberty are doing around the country. I decided to run for the board because I would like it to continue its existing work towards greater equity and inclusion across its student body. But I also recognize that work is not yet complete, and that BVSD needs ethical, courageous, creative problem solvers who would champion the continuation of that work for the betterment of everyone in the district. I think I can be a Director who brings a diverse and unique perspective to the board.

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best**



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## **BVSD District D: Andrew Brandt**

### **way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

While BVSD is miles ahead of school districts in places like Florida, that doesn't mean we don't have problems. BVSD has a very good track record with equity and inclusion, but there are no guarantees for the future if we don't step up in support of those things. While BVSD has made significant strides in transparency about these issues, we need to do additional work around supporting schools in mitigating these discrepancies and in having clear standards and expectations for our staff around these issues, including additional implicit bias training and ensuring more oversight of subjective discipline. I am a strong supporter of restorative justice practices and would seek to expand their use within the district as the first line of disciplinary action.

### **3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

I will state right off the bat that I oppose the kinds of reactionary book bans that have been done around the country the past two years. It is not controversial that some books feature BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+ characters or families. I don't see an issue that children become aware of the fact that LGBTQ+ families and relationships exist at around the same time they become aware of the fact that hetero families and relationships exist. I see no problem that books for kids exist that address these topics in age-appropriate ways. Representation matters, and as a people we are better prepared and able to navigate the world by being exposed to a wide variety of cultures and people. We're seeing school districts elsewhere make decisions that limit the knowledge a student can access about the history of our world and the country. School boards are not supposed to \*restrict\* what people can learn. That's not a job. The school district employs educators and experts in child development, and those experienced, specialist professionals in their field should be the ones making decisions about what constitutes developmentally appropriate study materials.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices**



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## **BVSD District D: Andrew Brandt**

**consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

The past several years, my oldest kid has been an organizer and active participant in the restorative justice (RJ) group at his school, New Vista. NVHS runs their RJ program a little differently than the other high schools, in that it is entirely student driven and operated, with support but not direction from the administration and faculty who participate. I think that model works great.

Recent studies on the use of restorative justice practices in school settings show that student outcomes are better when a person who harmed something or someone else goes through this process. Kids reflect on their behavior and make meaningful amends for wrongs, and learn empathy and social skills. Those same studies found that traditional punishments not only alienate the punished student, but make it more likely they quit before graduating high school.

- b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

When it comes to situations involving acts of violence, routine or habitual discrimination, harassment, bullying (including cyberbullying), or other crimes against people, restorative justice may not be appropriate. RJ can only operate with the cooperation of all parties, and it may be neither possible nor desirable for a victimized student to participate in RJ with the person who harmed them.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

- a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

There are achievement gaps that affect students from latino families, gaps that affect girls, and gaps that affect children for whom English is not their first language or the language spoken at home. The gaps that existed pre-pandemic were exacerbated by the pandemic and now persist as the children are aging and advancing through



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## **BVSD District D: Andrew Brandt**

school. Kids suffered trauma and loss and isolation during the period when schools were under lockdown and these experiences affected their ability and their desire to use technology in education, to stay focused in school, and to relate to their peers. I don't have all the answers about why these problems exist, but I recognize that our experts in the district have identified these problems and that they are issues we need to address.

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

I have a lot of answers to this question, but to keep the answer in this form short, I support the district's differential funding model that assigns extra funding to schools with greater need; I also think that in-school Wellness Centers have made huge impacts on the unmet mental health needs of students. I support continuing these methods and asking our administration to find other solutions to address these problems.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

BVSD is not immune to the wider problems in society involving prejudice. But there's hope that, in the future, we can start to make repairs through the use of greater oversight, more frequent and varied training for staff, and regular communication between board and administration about outcomes. I also find the district has a tendency to avoid discussing the failures that have taken place, in detail, and it's very hard for anyone to fix a problem if you don't openly talk about them.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes, any school that operates within the purview and under supervision of the district should follow applicable state and local regulations, including nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, anti-bullying, and equity policies. This is a baseline requirement for me, and I would not consider any charter school application for BVSD that did not agree to these principles.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**



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## **BVSD District D: Andrew Brandt**

- a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes.

- b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

Strict supervision, strong and clear policies that dictate principles, and extensive community and stakeholder involvement in the development of policies to address inclusivity and representation. As a board member I will hold regular town halls to seek out community input on these and other issues, and want to be engaged with educators and professionals to remain informed on these issues.

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

As a technologist and a person whose professional life has been shaped through the need to combat disinformation, I have several ideas about how to apply my knowledge in subjects like generative AI or data privacy to help the district come up with policies that would address the use of technologies like ChatGPT in the classroom. We cannot hide from these technologies by forbidding their use, as they will get used regardless. But I think we can use ChatGPT in productive ways to teach critical thinking skills, for example, by turning it into a project for students to fact check generative text, and I would like BVSD to be a national leader in finding creative ways to address these and other technology issues confronting education.



# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District D: Lalenia Quinlan Aweida

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I grew up in Boulder and have three children in public school. I've worked inside our BVSD classrooms in child sexual abuse prevention for Blue Sky Bridge. I've also taught a consent and healthy relationship curriculum (Peers Building Justice) in our middle and high schools for Moving to End Sexual Assault (MESA). I currently serve on the BVSD Title IX Advisory Council, helping build consensus with a diverse group of stakeholders to help our district to protect kids from discrimination. I also work as a Restorative Justice Facilitator for the District Attorney's Office.

I'm running for this office for two reasons. I'm here to enact and support policy that gives students the tools they need for post-graduate success. These tools include academic and critical thinking skills. Also of major importance, students must have a sense of belonging, community connection, and confidence that enables them to meet adult challenges.



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## **BVSD District D: Lalenia Quinlan Aweida**

The second reason I'm running is that I'm passionate about student safety, as evidenced by my body of volunteer work. I've been a community safety advocate in Boulder for many years. I believe bodily autonomy must be protected for our schools to be safe for all.

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

We need to remove barriers for people who have historically been impacted by systemic injustices. We need to understand the relationship between power and oppression. Diversity should be celebrated, rather than othered. We need to have a deep understand of implicit bias and explore our own. We must expect students (and staff alike) to respect the rights of every member of our community.

**3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

Book Bans are a hard no for me.

All book selection policy and reconsideration policy for BVSD should be informed by the American Libraries Association and the Office of Intellectual Freedom. The freedom to read and to identify with characters is essential to our students. As an interesting sidenote, just this year Illinois successfully passed legislation making it illegal to ban books.

As José Martí said, "Only oppression should fear the full exercise of freedom."

Also, I fully support BVSD's nondiscrimination policy, as well as AC-E3 which gives our gender nonconforming students and staff protections.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices**





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## **BVSD District D: Lalenia Quinlan Aweida**

**consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

I'm proud that I facilitate Restorative Justice circles for our District Attorney. I look forward to supporting BVSD in using this enlightened and non-punitive form of conflict resolution. Over 1000 restorative practices were used in BVSD in the last school year! To prove effective, BVSD practitioners need continuing education to keep abreast of best practices. They also need strong communication skills, experience in conflict resolution and a deep understanding of implicit bias.

- b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

In my experience, the limitations are around the facilitation, rather than the non-punitive approach. Facilitator preparation, training, and excellent communications skill are necessary for RJ success.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

- a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

Please note that BVSD tracks student data using the descriptor Latino/Latinx and/or Latine. I will use the term Latine when answering this question. Here are a couple of BVSD statistics that are enlightening. If we look at 5th grade mathematics achievement we see that 60% of kids are meeting benchmark, while only 43% Latine students are reaching benchmark. If we look at secondary literacy, 62% of overall students meet median achievement percentile, while only 33% of Latine student do.

These gaps exist because of historic oppression baked into the system!

- b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**



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## **BVSD District D: Lalenia Quinlan Aweida**

Because the achievement gap for Latine students persists, I support the use of differentiated funding. Differentiated funding allocates resources to schools based on their percentage of high-needs students. BVSD's Student Based Resource Allocation Committee did an outstanding job identifying areas where differentiated funding could make an impact, and we have seen progress to close the gap in school such as Alicia Sanchez Elementary. The continued use of resources, above and beyond regular funding, has shown promise to narrow the achievement gap.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

As we know, kids who are bullied often have negative mental and physical health outcomes. In June of 2020 the Board of Education revised its bullying policy. Three years later, I think this policy should be reviewed for best practices.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes, charter schools should follow the policy.

The Board of Education has the final say in charter school contracts. Charter schools need to adhere to rules that are acceptable to our community, diversity and inclusion being basic examples.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes, I do.

#### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

Accountability must be contractual with our charter schools. Charter Schools come before the Board of Education every third year for renewal, so there is ample opportunity to demand they be held to the same standards as other BVSD schools.



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## **BVSD District D: Lalenia Quinlan Aweida**

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

As highlighted, I've advocated in BVSD for many years. If elected, I plan to utilize my strong community relationships to promote mental health, safety, and equity for our students. These connections to community experts help us to provide our students with the most up to date support and information. Partnerships with Blue Sky Bridge, SPAN and Safe Schools Coalition help our teachers to focus on education, while community members provide support around social and emotional aspects of navigating adolescence. I am endorsed by BVSD's Teachers Union (BVEA), in part because I have spent so much time in our classrooms. Our teachers know my passionate for protecting and serving our students. Please see my platform and full list of endorsements at [lqaforbvsd.com](http://lqaforbvsd.com).



# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District G: Jorge Chavez

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I am a parent to 3 BVSD students. For the past 5 years I have been a parent volunteer with BVSD in different capacities. I started volunteering at Escuela Bilingue Pioneer Elementary School with various school events, the PTA, and Families and Educators Together (FET). This led to me serving on the School Accountability Committee (3 years as chair), and then as the representative on the District Accountability Committee, where I have served as chair for the last 2 years and now as vice-chair. Through my work as a parent volunteer in BVSD I have met with families, teachers, and administrators to learn about the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities in BVSD. I am also an Associate Professor in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver. Because of my volunteer roles and education, I have been able to leverage my research background as well as time spent connecting with families and educators in BVSD and learning about issues to make recommendations to the Equity Council, the Superintendent and upper administration, and the Board of Education across a range



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## BVSD District G: Jorge Chavez

of issues including budget, policy, data transparency, unified improvement plans, diversity, equity, and inclusion, mental health resources, school safety and climate, school discipline, and long-term planning. I recognize the challenges facing BVSD and also its potential.

I'm running for the school board because I want to ensure that BVSD teachers and schools have the systems, supports, and resources to educate and meet the needs of all our students so they can be successful. I will work to:

- Grow an inclusive school community so that all our kids feel welcome and safe
- Increase supports and resources for mental health and well-being for our students and teachers
- Expand access to engaging curriculum and programming so all students can achieve their own pathways to academic excellence
- Center equity, transparency, and accountability in decision-making

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

We need to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all BVSD students – regardless of socioeconomic status, race & ethnicity, language, gender identity, learning needs, or what school they go to in BVSD. BVSD has long-standing inequalities in educational outcomes and lack of access to advanced coursework; relatedly, we have long-standing problems with inequalities in punitive discipline practices which affect these same groups of students. The two go hand in hand. I support the new emphasis in the strategic plan to address these inequalities, which include continuing expanded investment in differentiated funding for schools serving the students with the most need, expanding promising pilot programs at schools that have shown academic improvement, and continued investment in restorative justice practices to reduce disparities across the district. BVSD can build on these efforts by having schools track disciplinary and law enforcement referral data, evaluate disproportionalities across vulnerable populations, and publish a discipline equity scorecard for the district and individual schools to improve transparency. In addition, while BVSD hired a restorative justice coordinator last year, additional investments are needed to expand district-wide implementation of restorative justice programs, as



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## BVSD District G: Jorge Chavez

well as training on cultural competence, conflict resolution, and de-escalation. Finally, recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, in particular those who reflect the student population, is also an important step toward addressing these inequalities.

### **3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

I am opposed to book bans. I support current BVSD policies and recent efforts in support of inclusion of contributions by individuals who are LGBTQ and individuals of color in state social studies standards. An inclusive curriculum provides a more accurate representation of our community and of our history. Representation and diversity of identity and experience should be the default. Our kids need to recognize the wonderful diversity of individuals and families that exist in our society from the earliest point possible. We also need to recognize that these students are kids who are navigating what can often be a difficult transition into young adulthood. And kids who are LGBTQ, and transgender in particular, are at much greater risk for abuse and victimization, suicide, and mental health issues during this time period. So, the last thing we want to do is isolate or marginalize our kids. Our curriculum needs to allow our kids to see themselves in it.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

#### **a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

I support the expansion of restorative justice practices in schools. Recent research finds that use of restorative practices is associated with reductions in suspension rates and disparities, in addition to reductions in inequalities in educational outcomes. During my time as chair of the District Accountability Committee we recommended investment in proactive strategies to address school safety and disparities in punitive



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discipline, including school safety advocates, mental health resources and supports, socioemotional learning curriculum, restorative justice practices, and building school community and public engagement. BVSD took a critical first step by hiring a restorative justice coordinator last year, additional investments are needed to expand district-wide implementation of restorative justice programs, as well as training on cultural competence, conflict resolution, and de-escalation. A key component is expanding this training beyond teachers to all staff that interact with students. These practices work best when the message is consistent, there is fidelity to implementation and when all students have access to restorative practices. We need to prioritize continued investment in these proactive strategies.

### **b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

The training and consistent message component of implementing restorative justice practices is critical. If there is not fidelity in implementation, if teachers and staff are not appropriately trained, or do not fully buy into the program to implement practices then we run the risk of subjecting victims to additional harm, and reinforcing student beliefs that there are no consequences for actions. Restorative practices only work if they translate into action by front line practices and behaviors.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

### **a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

We need to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all BVSD students – regardless of socioeconomic status, race & ethnicity, language, gender identity, learning needs, or what school they go to in BVSD. BVSD has long-standing inequalities in educational outcomes and lack of access to advanced coursework; relatedly, we have long-standing problems with inequalities in punitive discipline practices which affect these same groups of students. Black and Latinx students are also more likely to be disciplined for subjective infractions (categories like insubordination and disrespect) and are disciplined more harshly than white students for the same behaviors. The two go hand in hand. In addition, lack of evidence based culturally competent curriculum and professional development for teachers, as well as



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lack of differentiated interventions and supports across schools have until recently been an issue.

### **b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

I support the new emphasis in the strategic plan to address these inequalities, which include continuing expanded investment in differentiated funding for schools serving the students with the most need, expanding promising pilot programs at schools that have shown academic improvement, and continued investment in restorative justice practices to reduce disparities across the district. Expanding access to advanced course work and expanding programs like AVID which support students transitioning into advance coursework by providing support to academically proficient students in reaching and succeeding in advanced academic courses which. In addition, recruiting and retaining excellent teachers, in particular those who reflect the student population, is an important step toward addressing these inequalities.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

I support the recent BVSD focus on increasing awareness around bullying and creation of systems for reporting bullying behaviors, including mechanisms for reporting bullying, reporting discrimination, and reporting sexual harassment and discrimination (Title IX). However, this is focused on reactive responses after an incident has happened. BVSD also needs to expand proactive strategies which prevent bullying and related behaviors by focusing on building an inclusive school climate and by expanding training on bias, cultural competence, and equity for all school staff. In addition, district wide expansion of training on de-escalation and conflict resolution, social emotional learning, and coordination with school counselors and other student support professionals would facilitate building an inclusive and welcoming environment where all students may feel safe.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

[no answer submitted]





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**8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

**a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes, charter schools should be required to follow these standards. An inclusive curriculum provides a more accurate representation of our community and of our history. Representation and diversity of identity and experience should be the default. Our kids need to recognize the wonderful diversity of individuals and families that exist in our society from the earliest point possible. We also need to recognize that these students are kids who are navigating what can often be a difficult transition into young adulthood. And kids who are LGBTQ, and transgender in particular, are at much greater risk for abuse and victimization, suicide, and mental health issues during this time period. So, the last thing we want to do is isolate or marginalize our kids. Our curriculum needs to allow our kids to see themselves in it.

**b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

Yes, charter schools should be required to follow Colorado State Board of Education Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. Charter school approval falls under the purview of the Board of Education and review and recommendation is conducted by the District Accountability Committee. Discussion of a plan for an inclusive curriculum should be part of any charter school proposal and review process.

**9. Anything else you would like to share?**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss so many of the important issues facing BVSD. I am running for the school board because I believe in the potential of BVSD and that we can do a better job serving our students. I have been working as a parent volunteer for the past five years, this has allowed me the opportunity to know our students, our families, and our educators and staff and to know the unique needs and challenges of BVSD. Our schools are best served by a board which is experienced and knows BVSD well. We have made slow and incremental improvements over the past few years, and I have the education, background, and experience to help BVSD build on the progress we have made.



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# 2023 BVSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

## BVSD District G: Stuart Lord

This questionnaire was distributed to all the School Board candidates in the following districts: Boulder Valley, Poudre, St. Vrain Valley, and Thompson School Districts. Here we present the BVSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we cannot endorse any candidate. Rather, we work to understand and share information with our constituents about the candidates and their stances on topics that are important to our community.

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### **1. What motivated you to run for the School Board and what do you hope to accomplish, if elected?**

I was inspired to run for the School Board by a deep commitment to ensuring that every student in our district receives a quality education that equips them to thrive in a diverse and ever-changing world. I believe education should be a force for positive change, fostering inclusivity, diversity, and personal growth. If elected, I hope to accomplish several key objectives:

1. Equity in Education: I aim to reduce achievement gaps among students, focusing on underserved communities and those with specific needs.
2. Teacher Support: Prioritizing competitive compensation for educators and offering professional development opportunities to attract and retain top-quality teachers.
3. Student Well-being: Ensuring that mental health and well-being support for students is readily available by directing funds toward in-school mental health services and counselors.
4. Sustainability: Embracing sustainability initiatives, including investments in energy-



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efficient infrastructure and environmentally friendly practices, to achieve long-term cost savings and environmental stewardship.

Additionally, I'm determined to guard against recent trends in other states, such as the banning of books and the rewriting of history. I believe in preserving academic freedom and promoting diverse perspectives in our curriculum.

Furthermore, my personal experience with my daughter, who waited until her junior year to find an advocate in her school while navigating bullying, has driven me to ensure that we have more responsive, caring adults in our schools who are trained to help students navigate their mental wellness.

In essence, my goal is to promote equitable education, teacher support, student well-being, sustainability, and the preservation of academic freedom and inclusivity within our school district.

**2. Many historically marginalized students, specifically LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and students with disabilities, experience more limited educational opportunities, disproportionately negative disciplinary decisions, and higher rates of bullying. What do you think is the best way to support these students and address differences in their treatment in schools?**

The best way to support historically marginalized students is through a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes equity and inclusivity:

- **Culturally Responsive Education:** Implement culturally responsive curriculum that reflects the experiences and backgrounds of LGBTQ+, Latine, BIPOC, and disabled students. This fosters engagement and helps students see themselves in the materials.
- **Implicit Bias Training:** Provide ongoing training for educators on recognizing and mitigating implicit bias to ensure equitable treatment. This can create a more inclusive and respectful classroom environment.
- **Restorative Justice:** Promote restorative justice practices to address disciplinary disparities. Focus on rehabilitation and learning rather than punitive measures, reducing negative disciplinary decisions.
- **Mentorship and Support:** Establish mentorship programs with positive role models from diverse backgrounds. This can empower marginalized students and help them navigate challenges.



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- **Community Engagement:** Foster stronger connections between schools, families, and communities, encouraging active participation to address bullying and limited opportunities.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensure equitable distribution of resources, including access to advanced coursework and extracurricular activities, to address differences in educational opportunities.

By addressing these aspects, we can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for historically marginalized students.

### **3. Would you oppose any effort or policies to ban books that have LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content?**

Absolutely not. I firmly oppose any effort or policies aimed at banning books that contain LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, or Middle Eastern characters, authors, or content. Banning books with diverse representation deprives students of the opportunity to learn about different cultures, perspectives, and identities. Education should be inclusive, fostering empathy, understanding, and critical thinking. Instead, I advocate for promoting diverse literature that reflects our multicultural society, encourages tolerance, and enables students to explore a wide range of experiences. Banning books only limits intellectual growth and stifles the rich tapestry of voices that make up our world.

**4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some school districts across the country have moved away from punitive punishment in favor of restorative justice practices, which emphasize repairing the harm caused to victims and the community by offenses and involve working with the participants to foster dialogue to determine a path forward. Restorative justices consider wrongdoings an offense against relationships, rather than the state or school.**

- a. Do you support restorative justice practices in schools? If so, how would you, as a board member, support restorative justice practices in the district?**

Absolutely, I would also collaborate closely with school safety advocates in our schools to monitor the progress of restorative justice practices. These advocates play a critical role in ensuring the well-being of our students. Additionally, I would work



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with the superintendent to ensure that quarterly reports on the work of student safety advocates are produced. Transparency and accountability are essential to gauge the effectiveness of our efforts and make any necessary adjustments to best serve our students and create a safer and more inclusive learning environment. Here are six more points on how I would support restorative justice practices in the district:

1. **Teacher and Staff Training:** Ensure that teachers and staff receive comprehensive training in restorative justice principles and practices to effectively implement them in classrooms and schools.
2. **Community Outreach:** Collaborate with local community organizations and leaders to create a network of support for restorative justice programs, involving the broader community in the process.
3. **Student Involvement:** Encourage student participation in restorative justice initiatives, empowering them to be active contributors to conflict resolution and community building.
4. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms for students, parents, and educators to provide feedback on the implementation of restorative justice practices, allowing for continuous improvement.
5. **Restorative Spaces:** Create dedicated spaces within schools where restorative justice practices can be conducted, ensuring that students have a safe and comfortable environment for dialogue and resolution.
6. **Restorative Consequences:** Explore alternatives to traditional punitive consequences, ensuring that consequences for harmful actions align with restorative justice principles, focusing on repairing harm and promoting growth.

By taking these additional steps, we can further enhance the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in our district, ultimately creating a more equitable and compassionate educational system.

### **b. What limitations do you see in non-punitive approaches to discipline?**

Non-punitive approaches to discipline, while valuable, do have limitations. First, there may be resistance from some community members who perceive these methods as lenient. Second, effectively implementing restorative justice requires significant training and resources. Third, some behaviors may pose immediate safety concerns, necessitating swift action. Finally, it can be challenging to strike the right balance between holding individuals accountable for their actions and fostering an environment of healing and growth. Addressing these limitations requires careful



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planning, community education, and clear protocols to ensure that non-punitive approaches are applied judiciously and effectively, with the ultimate goal of promoting a safer and more equitable learning environment.

**5. Educational researchers for decades have identified opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. There is data in CO that supports those findings.**

**a. What are the achievement gaps in your district and why do they exist?**

In our district, as in many others, there are significant achievement gaps between white students and BIPOC students. These gaps persist due to various interconnected factors. Socioeconomic disparities often result in BIPOC students having limited access to quality early education and resources. Additionally, there's a lack of representation among educators and leaders from diverse backgrounds, making it difficult to relate to and engage BIPOC students fully. Furthermore, curriculum and teaching methods may not always be culturally responsive, leading to disengagement. Implicit biases in discipline practices can disproportionately affect BIPOC students, pushing them out of the educational system. To address these gaps, we need equitable resource allocation, culturally responsive curriculum, diverse educator recruitment, and anti-bias training, alongside community involvement, to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students.

**b. What strategies and policies would you support to address these disparities?**

To bridge the persistent academic achievement gap, especially affecting Latino students and those eligible for free and reduced lunch, I propose working with the superintendent to create the "Pathways to Success" program, which encompasses:

1. Academic enhancement: During the school year, students would benefit from personalized academic support, including one-on-one tutoring, mentorship, and access to advanced coursework. These resources will ensure that students are well-prepared for academic success, regardless of their socio-economic background.
2. Internships: Over the summer, middle and high school students would engage in career-aligned internships. These hands-on experiences foster skill development, expose students to potential careers, and facilitate valuable networking opportunities.
3. Community engagement: The program would prioritize community service projects,



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instilling a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement. Active participation in the community fosters personal growth and empowerment.

4. Stipends: To alleviate financial barriers, participants would receive stipends for their internship involvement and for achieving academic milestones. This financial support ensures that economic challenges do not hinder their journey to success.

"Pathways to Success" takes a holistic approach, addressing academic, professional, and community development. By empowering our Latino and diverse students through this program, we aim to close the achievement gap and provide equal opportunities for academic and personal growth. Together, we can build a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

### **6. As a board member how would you ensure that school administration and staff are correctly implementing bullying prevention policies?**

As a board member, I would collaborate with the superintendent to ensure that our school administration and staff effectively implement bullying prevention policies. This would involve several key steps:

1. Regular Reporting: Work with the superintendent to establish a system for regular reporting on bullying incidents within our schools. This data would help us understand the scope of the issue and identify trends.
2. Policy Review: Collaborate on a comprehensive review of our bullying prevention policies to ensure they align with best practices and are up-to-date with current research and legislation.
3. Staff Training: Advocate for ongoing training for school staff, including teachers, counselors, and administrators, on recognizing, addressing, and preventing bullying. This training should be evidence-based and culturally responsive.
4. Community Engagement: Promote community engagement by encouraging the superintendent to involve parents, students, and community members in the development and review of anti-bullying policies and procedures.
5. Transparency: Ensure that information related to bullying prevention efforts, including policies, reporting mechanisms, and support services, is readily available to all stakeholders through the district's website and other communication channels.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation: Collaborate on the establishment of regular monitoring and evaluation processes to assess the effectiveness of our bullying prevention programs and make necessary adjustments.
7. Support Services: Advocate for the availability of support services, such as





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counseling, for both victims and perpetrators of bullying, addressing not only the immediate issue but also the underlying causes.

By working closely with the superintendent and the broader school community, I would strive to create a safe and inclusive environment where bullying is actively prevented and promptly addressed when it occurs.

### **7. Should charter schools be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies? How would that influence your decision about proposed charter schools in your district?**

Yes, charter schools should be required to follow district nondiscrimination policies to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, receive equal and fair treatment in education. This commitment to nondiscrimination aligns with the principles of equity and inclusivity in education. When considering proposed charter schools in my district, adherence to district nondiscrimination policies would be a critical factor. I would carefully assess whether the charter school demonstrates a commitment to these policies and whether their practices align with our district's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It would influence my decision, as I believe all schools within the district should uphold the same standards of nondiscrimination and inclusivity to provide a safe and equitable learning environment for all students.

### **8. The Colorado State Board of Education recently approved accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards that fully include LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities.**

#### **a. Do you believe that charter schools should be required to follow those standards?**

Yes, I believe that charter schools should be required to follow the accurate and inclusive Social Studies standards approved by the Colorado State Board of Education. These standards are designed to provide a comprehensive and equitable education for all students, including those from LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. Consistency in following these standards ensures that all students receive a well-rounded education that reflects the diversity of our society and history. Charter schools, like all public schools, should adhere to these standards to promote inclusivity, diversity, and an accurate representation of our world in their curriculum. This ensures that students in charter schools have access to the same quality education as students in traditional public schools.





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### **b. What accountability measures would you support to ensure that schools, including charter schools, follow this policy?**

To ensure schools, including charter schools, follow inclusive Social Studies standards, I'd support these accountability measures:

1. **Regular Audits:** Conduct impartial audits to check if schools implement inclusive Social Studies standards.
2. **Teacher Training:** Mandate ongoing teacher training in inclusive teaching practices.
3. **Community Engagement:** Encourage input from parents, students, and communities on standards implementation.
4. **Report Channels:** Set up clear reporting systems for concerns and violations.
5. **Performance Metrics:** Develop public performance metrics to evaluate school commitment to inclusivity.
6. **Compliance Reviews:** Investigate non-compliance claims and impose penalties when necessary.
7. **Advocacy Platforms:** Empower parents and students to advocate for inclusive education.
8. **Charter Oversight:** Ensure charter schools have effective oversight for standards adherence.

These measures enhance accountability and transparency, ensuring adherence to inclusive Social Studies standards.

### **9. Anything else you would like to share?**

I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspectives and priorities. Education is the foundation of our society's progress, and it's crucial that we continually strive for improvement and equity in our schools. If elected, I am committed to working tirelessly to ensure that every student in our district has access to a high-quality education, regardless of their background or circumstances. Together, we can create a brighter future for our students and our community, where every child can be seen, be heard, and be valued. Thank you for considering me for this important role, and I look forward to serving you.