



2023 Poudre 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. PSD Candidates all had until Oct 12, 2023 to submit their responses and were provided several email reminders.

Here we present the Poudre School District (PSD) candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District Seat and alphabetically by first name.

3 of the 7 PSD candidates submitted responses and those are provided here.

We received responses from the following candidates:

District Seat B: Kevin Havelda, Kurt Kastein

District Seat G: Jessica Zamora

We have not yet received responses from the following candidates:

Scott Schoenbauer (District Seat A), Andrea Booth (District Seat F), Conor Duffy (District Seat F), or Caleb Larson (District Seat G)

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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2023 PSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

PSD District B: Kevin Havelda

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 PSD candidate responses by candidate, sorted by District 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.

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

I am running for PSD School Board Director for the same reason I decided enlist in Teach For America's Corps some 15 years ago – because I believe that an excellent public education is the birthright of all of our students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, skin color, gender identity, or zip code. I know from my time teaching that an excellent public education can change the entire trajectory of a student's life. I am running because I believe that PSD and its leadership appreciate this reality, and that they are working for all students. Nonetheless, there are students and families in PSD for whom access to an excellent education may not be a reality yet, or is less so than their peers who are better off financially. I am running to help amplify their voices and to help give them a seat at the table. It cannot be overstated how crucial the role our teachers play in advancing student achievement. As a former teacher, I understand how essential this work is, while also appreciating the many challenges our educators face. My perspective brings this lens to decision-making, which is an important one.



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I am also running because I view the PSD School Board as a stewardship. Having worked in education policy before, I know that implementing policy is not done overnight. Through my prior experience, I believe it requires patience, collaboration, discipline, and reliance on experts in various fields. I can bring in my own perspectives from working on large systemic change to help inform the Board's decision-making. As the last question in this questionnaire illustrates nicely – big problems require a multi-faceted approach, driven by data and experts in the field, as well as difficult decisions about allocation of resources and prioritization. I do not know all the answers, but understand that to solve any problem, I must first recognize that there is a problem and work together with our community, schools, and Board to identify solutions.

Lastly, I am running because my family moved to Fort Collins in large part because of the strength of PSD and its excellent reputation. Our oldest is now a kindergartner at a PSD school, and I have skin in the game. I believe in PSD and the strength of our public schools. And I am committed to working tirelessly to continue the important work it is doing, while challenging our current leadership to make them even stronger.

I believe my experiences in and out of the classroom and my passion for education equity make me uniquely suited for this role. But I also understand the awesome responsibility that comes with it, which is humbling. I vow to work tirelessly to be the best Board Member possible for all our students and families.

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?

One of PSD's District Priorities is Mental Health and Wellbeing. A semi recent study from the Trevor Project found that LGBTQ youth who report having at least one (1) accepting adult were 40% less likely to report suicidal ideation. In other words, the District's second priority literally saves lives. Accordingly, we need to continue our push of having mental health professionals and social workers in ALL of our schools to support our most vulnerable students, and we should continue to push for inclusive environments in all school settings. We need more training for our educators and our administrators. We also need to support LGBTQ+, Latine, and BIPOC student groups and amplify their voices wherever possible. I want my own child to learn acceptance



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and understanding from a very young age, and my wife and I instill in him a sense of understanding and genuine concern for his peers - as I'd hope his peers accept him.

Children are born accepting others and displaying empathy. It's adults who teach them otherwise. I believe our classrooms should continue to focus on a sense of community and belonging. Before our students can learn, they must first feel safe and a sense of belonging.

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?

Never. In my experience as a former educator and an attorney, it is my strong opinion that students need ALL the books they can get their hands on. That this is a question is a sign of the times. According to the Gun Violence Archive, there have been 519 mass shootings in America this year already. At this pace, we will average 2 mass shootings per calendar day. We should be discussing banning things other than books. I stand with our librarians, I stand with our teachers, and I stand with our LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Middle Eastern communities - who all deserve to have their voices amplified. We live in a big, multicultural world and country, and I believe in celebrating the very thing that makes us American - our diversity.

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. Having clerked for a federal judge, one of the most difficult aspects of my job was reviewing sentencing packets for convicted persons. Having taught in an alternative school in post-Katrina New Orleans, I saw every day how our justice and



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education system were failing our kids. In my first year of teaching, two of my students were shot and killed in senseless acts of violence. Schools, and the opportunity of an excellent education are the birthright of all our students, and I know firsthand that they can change the trajectory of a student's life. In PSD, our law enforcement recently gave a presentation that demonstrated reported incidents that led to citations were trending down from the previous year, and there was a collective celebration in the room. THAT is what restorative justice in a school system feels like. Equipping our schools with mental health professionals, social workers, and more staff who care about the development of our young persons instead of punitive measures is what restorative justice looks like. I intend to support these measures if elected to the PSD School Board.

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

Bullying is a problem. While each student deserves support and room for growth, I believe we cannot countenance violent acts towards other vulnerable populations. There needs to be a balance, but there must also be a firm stance against bullying in our schools. All too often this leads to greater tragedies. I do not have a silver bullet for this issue, but I am mindful of the balance that is required, and am committed to learning more to lessen instances of violence and bullying in our 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?

In a word, access. PSD is a very large school district, with a broad geographic sprawl and a diverse composition of students and families. While PSD has incredible resources available, these resources are only as good as the students' and families' relative access to them. For instance, for students who come from multi-lingual families, their neighborhood schools may not provide all the resources necessary to achieve the District's priority of mental health and belonging, forcing these students to choose into schools far outside of their neighborhoods that do. And while this option of school choice is an important one, it should highlight the fact that a student's social and mental wellbeing are directly correlated with attending his/her/their neighborhood



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school, where peer groups and social structures are forged outside of the classroom as well as within it. Meaning, a Kindergarten should not be forced to attend a school far outside of their own neighborhood just to have the same access to education as their peers who do not have the same background.

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

As a Board Director, I would be mindful of the access issues confronting our students on a daily basis when considering systemic changes. In addition, I would promote and continue to highlight the work of our incredible support teams and institutions, like the Early Childhood Program (and particularly their work in Head Start and Early Head Start) that do the important work each and every day to advocate for our most vulnerable families to get our students prepared for Kindergarten and beyond. Finally, I would continue to encourage the Board of Directors to focus not only on expanding resources District wide, but to further the efforts of programs that are doing the vital work of engaging with families and students to ensure that they have access to these resources.

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

My son attends a PSD Kindergarten. I have daily insights into what measures the District is adopting on a local, albeit, anecdotal level. As a Director, I do have the power to help determine what is being discussed - what is on the agenda. This issue runs deep with me, and I will not stop advocating for our vulnerable populations to ensure the District is adhering to its second District Priority of Mental Health and Belonging for ALL students. Identifying shortcomings in schools is critical to ensure the safety of all students.

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. While charter schools by nature operate with increased levels of autonomy (and historically, and in the charter schools in which I taught and helped found, this was to accommodate instructional methodologies that helped get kids from very bad schools up to speed and up to grade level quickly with their more affluent peers), unchecked



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autonomy has ruinous consequences. I have strong feelings about what makes good charter schools good, and what makes bad charter schools bad. In the charter schools where I taught and that had excellent results in accelerating student learning and development, the common feature was accountability and transparency. In addition, while these schools had the ability to be flexible in their approaches to teaching, they were still bound by state canons and state issued standards. I believe all charter schools should adhere to basic and fundamental nondiscrimination policies, while also being afforded the freedom to approach these standards in a way that aligns with their own individual missions.

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. (See above).

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

Accountability is a tricky issue in all schools. The better way of looking at it would be demonstrable achievement through standardized assessment. In other words, schools should be measured by student assessment on these important standards as a prerequisite to maintaining their statutory charter. Rephrased, this question really asks how are schools demonstrating compliance with state and federal law - and how are they educating their students on the legal expectations and policy determinations that we are all bound by and should aspire to as adults? I do not have a simple solution or one-size-fits all answer to this question, but I do believe it drives home an essential point of discussion for our governance entities. I look forward to learning more about what solutions or thoughts have been proposed, or where other schools have implemented these standards with success in other places.

9. Anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for these excellent questions! They were very thought provoking, difficult, and intended to elicit the kinds of values we should expect in our school leaders. I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this important discussion.



2023 PSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

PSD District B: Kurt Kastein

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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.

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

My wife, Andrea, and I have lived in Fort Collins for 29 years and have raised three great kids, each of which attended PSD. Over those 29 years, I've gained valuable leadership experience. I've served eight years on the Fort Collins City Council. I've worked as an engineering director for 12 years, leading teams in Fort Collins and across the US. We love the people of Fort Collins and have grown attached to this place. My opponent moved to Fort Collins in 2022. The difference in our leadership experience in Fort Collins is stark. I'll draw on mine to lead effectively as a school board member. I'll bring a fresh perspective. While respect, civility, and decorum are important, school board members must appropriately challenge the status quo. Hearty debate and dialog is sometimes needed and should take place within the public eye. There should be ample opportunity for public input and for public forums where dialog with decision makers can occur. Drawing from my leadership experience, I'll adopt a team approach toward analyzing problems, identifying root



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causes, and designing solutions that hit the mark. I would apply that approach toward favorable outcomes for our schools.

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?

PSD is a public school district. We must work to create community where we support each other as members of the same team. We must respect the views of all students and work to create a safe environment for all. Nobody should be bullied. I trust our teachers and administrative staff to enforce discipline as needed to address bullying. When enforcement decisions are made, we should support teachers. I would support an educational push to expose bullying, so students are aware and enabled to notify parents and teachers when it occurs.

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?

At times, the phrase “banning books” is used to imply a unilateral decision made by some authority to do away with certain books. I do not support banning books in this sense. Instead, there should be a process to evaluate books for our public school libraries. Obviously, books must be screened for content that is inappropriate, which may be different for different age groups. Inappropriate content would trip some pre-defined standard. Those standards would be defined within the heading of sexuality, violence, adult themes, illegal practices, etc. The evaluation criteria and process should include parents, teachers, administrators.

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.



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- 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 trust our teachers and other school staff when needed to use the appropriate form of discipline for each individual situation. Certainly, restorative justice has its place as a legitimate option. In some cases, a teacher can discretely take a student aside, explain their bad behavior, and recommend the right approach to admit the mistake. In other cases, more serious offenses may not be addressed correctly with restorative justice. In cases where more severe physical or emotional harm has resulted, the offender may need to be removed from the classroom and separated from the victim. Parents and administrators may need to be contacted. Kids need to understand when they've done wrong and the teacher is best equipped to administer the form of discipline that appropriately punishes the offender, with the goal of maintaining a cohesive learning environment.

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

As stated above, in cases where more severe physical or emotional harm has resulted, the offender may need to be removed from the classroom and separated from the victim. Parents and administrators may need to be contacted. Restorative justice may still be pursued, but the immediate need is to protect the victim. Repeated bad behavior may not be resolved correctly with non-punitive approaches. Teachers and school staff are able to understand the sensitivities of their students and whether non-punitive approaches suffice.

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?**

Measures of achievement for English and Math are measured across All Students, English Learners, Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible, Minority Students, Students with Disabilities. The scores are categorized as Meets, Approaching, Does Not Meet. Each of the groups achieve lower English and Math scores when compared to All Students. Minority Students scores approach All Students, Free/Reduced next, then



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English Learners, then Students with Disabilities. There are numerous reasons why gaps exist. Students may have lower achievement because they have part time jobs. Even less support from parents with multiple jobs can be an issue. English language knowledge is a deficit. Physical disabilities may impede learning when using traditional mainstream modes of educational material. Strong family units are shown to benefit student achievement.

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

We should offload teachers from tasks not fundamental to teaching, target resources where needed to address poor achievement, and focus on growth across the board. In addition to standardized scores, test scores for each student should improve from beginning to end of year, showing individual growth. Both are important. We should narrow the focus on academics and provide resources – paraprofessionals, improved classroom facilities, competitive pay – that benefit teachers and lessen the need for specialized administrative staff. We should tap into existing resources to help close gaps. One helpful method would be to utilize family liaisons. There are enhanced English learning opportunities. We should use resources already identified for economically disadvantaged students. We should ensure GED programs stay in place.

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

I answered this question above. Repeating it here: PSD is a public school district. We must respect the views of all students and work to create a safe environment for all. Nobody should be bullied. I trust our teachers and administrative staff to enforce discipline as needed to address bullying. When enforcement decisions are made, we should support teachers. I would support an educational push to expose bullying, so students are aware and enabled to notify parents and teachers 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?

Public schools are better when given the authority to create policies that are appropriate for our schools and not driven by top-down policies from other agencies. I believe that is true for PSD in general and I believe it's true for charter schools within



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PSD. I trust charter schools to have correct policies in place to ensure nondiscrimination.

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?

Similar to my answer above, public schools are better when given the authority to create policies that are appropriate for our schools and not driven by top-down policies from other agencies. I believe that is true for PSD in general and I believe it's true for charter schools within PSD. I trust charter schools to use curricula that appropriately respect and include all students.

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

I trust charter schools to use curricula that appropriately respect and include all students. Public school curricula should be transparent to all stakeholders, including BOE members. Our school board should review curricula to see that respect for all people and people groups is appropriately included. Charter schools have authority to implement curricula as they see fit. I trust charter schools to use curricula that appropriately respect and include all students. Public school curricula should be transparent to all stakeholders, including BOE members. Our school board should review curricula to see that respect for all people and people groups is appropriately included. Charter schools have authority to implement curricula as they see fit.

9. Anything else you would like to share?

Not at this time. Thanks for allowing me to respond.



2023 PSD School Board Candidate Questionnaire: Responses by Candidate

PSD District G: Jessica Zamora

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

As a career educator, active PSD volunteer, and parent of two school-aged children I am uniquely motivated to run for school board. I understand the challenges as an educator as well as as a parent, which motivated me to support PSD as we bridge those relationships. Once elected, I intend to continue to include more student voice into decision making. Education has changed and students broadly know what they need emotionally and academically in order to follow their interests into the workforce. It is my job as a leader to listen and find ways for our system to serve their needs which will subsequently improve our future community.

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

First, we have to collect data and match it to the lived experiences of students to find the root cause of the problem and the changes that will actually improve their treatment in schools. Thankfully, PSD does this already and continues to find new avenues to refine our practice and data collection.

For our LGBTQ+ students, we have to be a safe place for them to express their identity. We do this by enforcing anti-bullying policy, providing gender-affirming plans, and protecting students relationships with trusted adults.

For our BIPOC and students with disabilities students specifically, we have made great strides in improving discipline practices, particularly with school resource officers (SROs). The board has actively changed how schools operate through setting clearer expectations between administrators and SROs. These changes have led to SROs beginning to be seen as truly a resource rather than simply a punishment.

Academic disproportions are more challenging to address because they are rooted in the day-to-day expectations of adults that cumulate over the educational experience of a student. This is a cultural shift that we are tackling through curriculum changes and professional development to support educators to understand their own biases. There is unfortunately no quick fix; however, making systemic changes will result in long-term, permanent change in practice.

As with any disproportionate student experience, we will continue to iterate our practice as we better understand the needs of students. Ultimately, our district serves our students first in order to best serve our community over time.

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 would oppose any effort or policy that bans books solely on the premise of the identities in the book. I generally oppose the banning of books because students need books to both better understand their own identities as well as the cultures and experiences of others. Books build empathy and community.

4. Research demonstrates that zero tolerance discipline policies are often disproportionately used to punish BIPOC, Latine, and LGBTQ+ students. Some



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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 support restorative justice practices. PSD has begun implementing these practices across our school district and continues to iterate in order to improve the long-term outcomes of these practices. As a board member, I can support policies that ensure we move towards restorative justice, encourage community partnerships that support that work, and ask for presentations on the effectiveness of these practices for community awareness.

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

Students and families choosing not to participate in the restorative justice process is a clear limitation. Ultimately, when harm is done, there must be a consequence and reparation. It is impossible to force a person to feel remorse for their actions, we can only offer it as an opportunity. If a student refuses that opportunity than other disciplinary actions will be taken.

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?**

PSD has achievement gaps which can be seen in our data, link below, and we are continuously assessing why they exists. We have heard from students that part of their experience is that they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum nor in our staff. We continue to correct that through adopting curriculum that is more diverse and intentionally broadening our search for staff to include more identities for



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students to better relate to. Unfortunately, as a school district we cannot purchase and implement new curriculum instantaneously; however, we do have a department dedicated to providing resources for our educators to complement our curriculum that does include more diversity. Additionally, PSD offers professional development to help staff learn how to build an inclusive classroom and school that ultimately will impact our achievement gaps.

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieMWE3NzM0ZmQtYmQyOC00YzE3LWJmNjYtYzViZmQ3NWJiZWQxIiwidCI6IjBkNmQ4NDZjLWVhZGQtNGI2Yy1iMDNILWYxNWNkNGI3ZTIjZiIsImMiOjZ9>

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

I support professional development to help staff better understand how to improve their classroom culture to be more inclusive and incorporate diverse materials to ensure students feel connected to the content. I support our revised curriculum adoption process that looks at a curriculum both for its academic quality as well as for its inclusiveness of identities and cultures. Lastly, I support continuing to be transparent with our data to ensure that our students and community know that the disparities exist and can hold us accountable to our actions as we close the achievement gap.

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 support district staff as they revise our central bullying prevention policy since it has not been revised since 2016. While it may not require substantive changes, ensuring it is accurate and up-to-date is essential to set expectations for compliance with the policy. Consistency of policy implementation is imperative to ensure that students feel safe in their school. This includes providing clear guidelines for administrators to follow when a bullying incident happens that includes a restorative justice opportunity.

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



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Charter schools should have nondiscrimination policies; however, they do not inherently have to follow all of the policies set out by the district since they are their own unique institution. Forcing charter schools to abide by our policies would create conflict that would be detrimental to achieving a community-wide antidiscrimination plan because charter schools by their very nature strive for independence. We can however, work with our charter schools to develop consistency in expectations and safety for 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. Charter schools are state funded and therefore should be expected to follow the same guidelines and expectations of every other publicly funded school.

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

Colorado Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that school districts follow the law and adopt the standards set forth by the Colorado State Board of Education. The same accountability measures that are used to ensure schools are following all other rules should also apply to the Social Studies standards.

9. Anything else you would like to share?

[no answer provided]