



Dear Candidate,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the questions of parent leaders from across the Denver Metro Region. We believe that collaborative leadership and authentic partnership is critical to the success of students across the district. By engaging in our questionnaire and speaking with leaders you are already demonstrating that community leadership is a priority for your campaign and potential tenure as an elected leader.

Following this letter is the 2021 TEN Collective Impact Candidate Questionnaire; the following questions were created by the TEN Collective Impact Parent Leader Council. The TEN Collective Impact Parent Leader Council is a leadership team of engaged, experienced and deeply knowledgeable Parent Leaders from across the district representing multiple schools and grade levels.

Completion of the survey is a prerequisite for consideration for endorsement.

We will be publishing all answers to the following questions on our TEN Collective Impact website because we believe that parents have power when they have access to information.

If you have any questions please contact Nicholas Martinez at [Nicholas.martinez@tencollectiveimpact.org](mailto:Nicholas.martinez@tencollectiveimpact.org) or 720-862-7414.

We look forward to continued conversation and appreciate your service to all students.

Sincerely  
Nicholas Martinez  
Executive Director and Co-Founder  
TEN Collective Impact



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**1. Please share your background, professional experience, and why you would be an asset to the Denver Public Schools community?**

I am a Black and Puerto Rican male that grew up in Montbello. I am also a graduate of DPS. My wife and two kids provide a strong foundation that allows me to be the man that I am. I attended Morehouse College where I earned a BA in business administration. Servant leadership was a key tenet for becoming a Morehouse man, and I have truly embraced that philosophy. Before, during, and after my time at Morehouse, I spent a lot of time volunteering, coaching, and mentoring. Working with the kids in my community is extremely important. After spending about 11 years in the public and private sector, I had the opportunity to get into teaching. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to shape the minds of the future. I was accepted into the first year of the Teach for America Launch Fellowship program. It was through this program that I received education leadership development, enrollment into Relay Graduate School of Education, and job placement as a teacher resident. My first placement was at Strive Prep Montbello. Inside that school I learned how to teach students with very diverse needs. I learned what it looks like to transform a school into a place where every student and staff member can be their true authentic selves; which allowed for a strong shift towards learning and growth for everyone. I contributed to Strive Prep Montbello becoming a part of the community. I continue to teach math in the Far Northeast and continue to develop as a staunch advocate for our children and communities. Since 2017 I have earned 2 masters degrees; one in teaching secondary math, and the other in biotechnology. I also did work as an education policy fellow where I co-authored a report on how to improve retention numbers for teachers of color in Colorado. I am working on an initiative that will become a pipeline for more kids that look like me and come from neighborhoods like Montbello to have experiences in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math). My eclectic experience and infallible commitment to my community is why I would be a great asset to the DPS community. I will spend every day of my tenure tirelessly advocating for the needs of the underserved and least represented. DPS can be an excellent place for all children to be fully supported and thrive as learners that go on to change the world.

**2. Why are you running for the Denver Public Schools Board of Education? How are you impacted by the policies and decisions of the DPS Board?**

I am running for school board because our kids need someone that is solely committed to improving their outcomes and opportunities. My desire is to be a calming voice of reason that makes decisions guided by the wants and needs of the communities that have felt unheard and forgotten. The school board needs to refocus its efforts towards shaping the district to be an inclusive place for all. There have been great policies, resolutions, and efforts enacted by the board such as the Black Excellence Resolution. It is just as important to hold the superintendent accountable to make those decisions impactful. As a classroom teacher, community leader, and a parent of two school aged children, I am impacted by the policies and decisions that the board makes from a few different perspectives. It is extremely important to me that I am the one to earn the District 4 Director seat because I know where my allegiances lie; with the kids that I see everyday, my own and my students.

**3. As a candidate for the DPS Board of Education what are the three priorities and desired outcomes you are focused on and how will you ensure that we reach those outcomes?**

My three priorities are as follows:

1. Improve outcomes and support for our black students, english language learners, and students with disabilities.
2. Putting systems in places that increase retention rates for teachers of color.
3. Amplifying student, family, and community voices when making decisions, while also building more bridges to the vast resources available for our students in our communities.

**4. If you are elected to the DPS Board of Education describe the role that parents play in decision making processes and how will you ensure that parent voice is a key part of the direction of the district?**

Parents must have access to board members in a variety of ways. The idea of community engagement must shift from expecting parents to come to us. As a board member, I will be sure to engage with parents by meeting them where they are at. I intend to provide digital and in person opportunities for families to engage with me to discuss their concerns and have their questions answered. It is important for me to be soundboard for the needs of our parents and their children and communities.

**5. Covid has drastically impacted the learning of students across our district. How will you ensure that student academic needs are being identified and how will you ensure that they are receiving strategic interventions?**

It is important for us to let teachers do the work we have hired them to do. There are a number of diagnostic tools, summative and formative assessments, and checks for understanding that allow teachers to understand where they are. Those tools must be paired with allotted time during the school day, such as intervention or accelerated learning, that is separate from grade level material.

That time is where those gaps will be filled and academic needs will be met. It must be mandated by the board that all schools have dedicated time that helps students fill gaps; as well as, push students that are at or above grade level. These efforts are extremely important in ELA and math, which I believe to be the foundation of many other subjects. These efforts must also include strong trauma informed practices, social emotional learning, and mental health supports that will provide students the basic needs. We must provide our students with these supports in order for them to be able to focus on reaching their full potential.

**6. What do you believe are indicators of a great school?**

Indicators for a good school are wide ranging and must be equitable. I believe that quality indicators are student growth measured by the many various tests that students take throughout the year. I think there should be a huge focus on growth. I have taught 30 students in one class where at the lowest level students could not read sight words, and the highest level students were ready for high school level math. It is not fair to solely judge students based on how well they did on a test, but also how much they have grown throughout the year. Another indicator of a great school is having diverse offerings in art, music, athletics, and other extracurricular or specials classes that broaden the horizons for our students. A school's ability to recruit and retain a diverse teaching staff is also important. Strong leadership that has a commitment to creating culturally sustaining environments where every student matters is another huge indicator for a quality school. Lastly, the ultimate indicator of a great school is when you walk into the building, it looks, feels, and sounds like a place that puts students first. It is a place where students are safe, supported, and challenged to be their best selves.

**7. Will you commit to ensuring that all kids and families have access to great schools regardless of school model?**

I am absolutely dedicated to making sure that every student and their families have access to great schools in their neighborhoods. A diverse offering of schools that can meet the differing needs of every child, no matter the zip code. The argument around school models is an argument for adults that ignores the needs of our children. The communities like Montbello deserve to have that deficit mindset removed from the decision making process. That will allow our communities to take pride in collaborating to create institutions that meet their needs. The school model does not matter as long as the needs of our children are being met, and decisions are being made in collaborations with our communities.

**8. How will you work to improve the educational outcomes for historically and systemically marginalized communities? Specifically, Black, Latino, Indigneous and Working class students?**

Growing up in Montbello and being bused to other communities, I experienced these needs first hand and saw in real time all of these populations struggle in various ways. As a teacher, I strive every day to support the students that come through my doors, yet find myself limited because of

resources or outside limitations that are imposed on us. As a father of two children, I know that every minute in the classroom is vital and not a moment can be wasted to do better to meet these needs. I would ensure that students from underserved populations are having their needs met by requiring trauma-informed practices district wide, putting policy in place that supports the recruitment and retention of more teachers of color, and creating a culturally sustaining district where students, teachers, and staff feel appreciated and heard. These recommendations can be strengthened by moving the district away from punitive disciplinary practices and enacting a strong restorative justice approach that keeps kids in the classroom and elevates high expectations for all of our students.

**9. School choice has become a polarizing topic as of late, what are your views on school choice? And as a board member who will you work to bridge the polarization and put the needs of students first?**

School choice at its core is a good idea. In action, it has done nothing to stop the inequities that exist in DPS. The district has failed to provide quality options in every neighborhood. School choice should not mean that students hope to get into a handful of schools that would require absurd commute times. There must be quality options in every neighborhood for our families to choose from. Those options should be diverse, inclusive, and provide the education our children deserve. We must see the reality of the entire ecosystem and address the inequities that exist everywhere, and work tirelessly to create equity so our students regardless of who they are or why they are from can thrive at any institution that their families choose.

**10. The DPS teaching force is largely white, how will you work to attract and retain a teaching force that is more reflective of our student population?**

It is my belief that recruiting is easily done through two main efforts; grassroots recruitment and having directed recruitment at Hispanic Serving Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We must offer compensation that allows families to afford the cost of living that exists in the Denver Metro area. Those recruitment efforts will be for naught if we are unable to retain our teachers of color.

DPS currently has a teaching staff that is over 80% white. The student body is roughly 70% black and brown. That is why the district must have policies in place that are committed to not only recruiting teachers of color, but also creating an environment where they want to stay long term. Retention of teachers of color should be the priority. I co wrote a policy recommendation as an education policy fellow. In that recommendation, we discussed how state, local, and school level leadership can retain teachers of color. I believe deeply in these recommendations. The following recommendations came from focus groups from teachers of color in Colorado and their experience in the Colorado schools:

1. Accountability and Transparency

This is accomplished by districts and schools being accountable to data transparency around the recruitment and retention of teachers of color by actively monitoring state, district, and school practices. In doing so, we must collect, disaggregate, and publish the data. We can fortify this system by effectively defining the measures to ensure transparency, and utilizing accountability committees.

## 2. Create Culturally Sustaining Environments

Culturally sustaining environments are created by district and school leaders taking appropriate action to make that happen within DPS. The district must commit to equity and anti-bias training; not running away from difficult conversations. We must come together to begin the process of changing the culture in DPS; that commitment must be from teachers, unions, charters, etc. This is where students and teachers can have their identity affirmed and feel safe to be their true authentic selves. Teachers of color, and actually all teachers, benefit from having a level of autonomy to do their jobs the right way. We must also create an environment in the district that creates opportunities for families and communities to better connect with DPS.

## 3. Professional Development and Advancement

DPS should have programs that invest in our teachers of color by having programs that support professional development that is relevant. Much like our students, our teachers need differentiated experiences in order to grow and develop in their education careers. DPS must also ensure induction support that includes mentorship and peer support. Our schools must be safe spaces for teachers of color to be heard. Lastly, there must be intentional pathways to leadership for teachers of color, and programs in place to lift the financial burden of education, cost of living, and teachers having to buy supplies and equipment themselves.

DPS must make a promise to serve our students better by recruiting and retaining a teaching staff that is more reflective of the student body. We must also examine our curriculum to ensure our children can see themselves in what we teach

## **11. One issue we have seen is large rates of attrition across the district but particularly of Black educators. Why do you think that is happening and what can you as a board member do to retain Black Educators?**

I believe that mandating the items listed above will go a long way to retaining more black educators. As a board member I will be dedicated to ensuring that the following things are embedded in policy.

1. Data Transparency and Accountability
2. Creating Culturally Sustaining Environments, and
3. Differentiated Professional Development and Career Advancement Pathways

**12. What are your views on accountability for schools and districts? How will you ensure that DPS is transparent in communicating academic progress with parents and the wider community?**

I like the idea of having dashboards that have all relevant data for each school. Data that is disaggregated so that information regarding every student demographic can be seen in order to make informed decisions. Most data should be completely transparent and separate from needing a CORA request. Higher level academic data should be available but also maintained and utilized in an equitable manner. Far too often data is used to harm underserved communities, we must rally around the data to drive positive change and outcomes for our children. An environment of collaboration must exist between the district, schools, families, and communities. Having transparent access to data will allow all stakeholders to rally around common goals.