



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 in 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 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



Karolina Villagrana

NAME

karolina@karolinaforsouthwestdenverkids.org

E-MAIL

Denver Public Schools Board of Education Director

OFFICE SOUGHT

District 2

DISTRICT

Karolina for Southwest Denver Kids

NAME OF CANDIDATE COMMITTEE

Gianina Horton

CAMPAIGN MANAGER/CONTACT

<https://karolinaforsouthwestdenverkids.com/>

CAMPAIGN WEBSITE

<https://www.facebook.com/KarolinaforSouthwestDenverkids>

FACEBOOK PAGE

N/A

TWITTER HANDLE



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

I am proud to be both a daughter of Immigrants and a native of Denver. My parents immigrated to the United States from Zacatecas, Mexico seeking a better life for themselves and their families. That experience has served as a cornerstone of my life and one that mirrors the experiences of many of our students in DPS especially in Southwest Denver. As a first generation citizen I learned first hand the value of hard work and the importance of a quality education for all. After graduating from the University of Colorado at Denver I joined Teach for America and taught at all three K-12 levels, elementary, middle, and high school across multiple states eventually helping to found and lead a highly successful elementary school in San Jose California, Rocketship Alma. My time at Rocketship as well as serving my community here in Denver has demonstrated the importance of deep authentic community leadership in the success of a classroom, school and district. As a Board member I hope to bring my experience as a long time classroom teacher to the school board and help bridge the gap between policy and practice as well as ensure that loved ones and the community will always have a key voice in the direction of their children's education.

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 the Denver Public School Board of Education because I believe that my lived experience as a child whose immigrant parents had to both advocate for equitable quality educational experience and who had to sacrifice to access that education connects me with many of the students our schools serve today. Additionally my experience as an educator, school leader, and instructional coach has given me a wealth of knowledge that will allow me to be an effective and pragmatic policy maker that understands the impact that decisions made on the board affect the classroom. I believe that we need to ensure that all decisions are made with the best interests of students in mind but that we also set up our educators for success; in order to do that, we must understand what it takes to implement changes with fidelity and ensure that we are supporting those we have tasked with caring for our 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? As a candidate the three priorities I am focusing on are

1. Pathway readiness, ensuring that we are supporting all our learners from day one, starting with a strong literacy foundation.
2. Meaningful Metrics we must understand that our students are complex, thus we need benchmarks that leverage comprehensive data points that are inclusive of supporting ALL our students.
3. Loved Ones and Community Partnership, quality education does not only happen during school and it cannot be achieved without loved ones and the larger community. It is key that we create partnerships to enrich student academic programming and wellness.

In order to ensure desired outcomes we must do two things 1. Backwards plan from success in order to build the systems, structures, tools and benchmarks to guarantee that we meet our goals. 2. We must be honest with each other and community about progress which means that we are providing regular updates and progress monitoring where we are communicating progress and soliciting feedback and support if and when we need to adjust our plan in order to achieve collective success.

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?

I believe that loved ones are critical in the success of our district and they must play a key role in deciding what is best for their children and their community. Additionally we must leverage the love and talents of families for the academic success of our students. As educators we are only in the lives of students for a short period but parents will be their first and best advocates for their whole lives. If we truly invest and partner with loved ones then we can work in tandem towards our collective success.

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 key to understand where students are, therefore we must gather meaningful data to understand where students currently perform so we can have a holistic picture of understanding what we need to do to best serve students. Then we need to identify what pathway readiness looks like for our kids in 6 months, 2 years and even 3 years. We need to get clear of what these benchmarks are so we know if our students are making progress towards these benchmarks. We must backwards plan from success, whether that is graduation or moving to the next grade and ensure that we are providing the tools necessary for students to be successful. Further, it is key that we communicate with our loved ones and make a plan to partner with them. Having data and clear benchmarks will help make a detail plan of interventions on how to best support our kids.

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

Great indicators are dependent on the school model and level. For example all students in elementary

should be reading by the end of 2nd grade and depending on the model this can mean they are comprehensive readers in the language they are learning in, if students are on grade level then they should remain on grade level for the remainder of their academic career within reading. If for some reason a school is not able to ensure their elementary students are on grade level while transitioning to middle school, then the middle school focus should be keeping students who came on grade level to remain on grade level and to measure student growth for those students who did not.

Two other indicators I highly value is love, satisfaction and how families view their partnership in this work and student culture.

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

Yes

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

As an educator who has served as Multilingual Language Learner Instructor and the Director of Early Literacy and Language Acquisition Kindergarten-8th grade, it is key that we are supporting our exceptional learners throughout all spaces. Therefore, it is key to truly understand what are meaningful metrics to support our students, what pathway readiness looks like for our youngest learners so that they are ready for choice-filled life and how we are collaborating with loved ones.

First it is key to understand and identify meaningful metrics for our students that are comprehensive. Thus, there must be metrics for students to be on grade level starting in kindergarten while also measuring these metrics in relation to our subgroups metrics. For example, when looking at our Multilingual Learners, the goal is to ensure their academic success by first building their academic and social English language access towards grade level. Thus, it is important to support all our students with a greater understanding of intersections that impact what it means to be on grade level ready. Thus, pathway readiness is key, especially starting day one in kindergarten. Therefore pathway readiness is crucial so that it can lead towards success beginning with a strong literacy foundation. In order to drive pathway readiness, our district needs to focus on ensuring that our educators have a deep understanding of the content and specializing to support our exceptional learners; this is inclusive of our truly developing and specializing early literacy and language development for our youngest learners as it will have a long term impact on student learning. Further, it is crucial we have the right resources and tools that can support our educators in developing deep content knowledge, including professional development for educators, curriculum and designing a structure that promotes this. When we focus on specialization early in our students careers then it allows our educators to respond to any gaps immediately while meeting the needs of all our students. This would allow our students academic success to continue throughout their academic career, where they truly build a love of learning because they have the knowledge and skills to access it.

Additionally I truly believe in voice and partnership, we can not do this without work with loved ones and communities. As an educator, this was always at my core, partnerships with loved ones. I would

share with caretakers that I was only in their child's life for such a short moment but they are their true child's advocate, just as my parents were for me. When my parents found out I was in third grade, performing on a first grade level was unacceptable. With meaningful metrics, educators who knew how to get me back on track, and my parents' advocacy made all the difference in my academic success.

The extension of our students' success stems from what our Southwest Denver Kids deserve, it is having a strong academic foundation and the opportunity to partner with amazing programs that were developed by our own community. I strongly believe that our students will thrive if we ensure there is a strong curriculum that builds knowledge while also connecting it to real world experiences, and can lead our students in finding passion and purpose early on. These opportunities of collaborating with the community and with strong academics, can truly expose our kids to a life full of opportunities. Learning habits that support our youngest readers. This means loved ones should have the skills to support their child at home to collaborate in building the foundations of early literacy as well as the knowledge and skills to advocate for their learners to ensure they are getting what they need in their classes.

These are all initiatives that we can take as district to respond to the impact onto learning by the pandemic and it is key to recognize these are not only short term solutions but ones that we can truly invest in for the long term future success for our children across Denver Public Schools

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?

My parents needed to make a choice for me when they found out I was performing on a first grade level, while being in third grade. They were able to make an informed decision about what I needed by having transparent data at hand and moved me to a school they believed I would be most successful. This required sacrifice of time and money to provide me a quality education they could afford. I look back at that experience with gratitude and sadness, because our kids in Southwest Denver experience this too often. I believe our students deserve the best education, no matter the model of the school. Just like my parents, my focus is to make sure our kids have the quality of education they deserve in all our Southwest schools.

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?

A quality education serves and impacts both our Black and Latino students. When we understand this then we can focus on the exceptional education all of our students deserve. If we are truly invested in what is best for our students, then we need to ensure our school leaders have the skills to develop a team to support all our students. This means the strongest school leaders are able to understand at a systems level how to develop our teachers within building their content knowledge so this quality instruction can lead to all our students learning. It also means that we are trusting and supporting our school leaders, especially those who reflect their community in order to implement changes and improvements.

The most effective teachers I have seen are educators who have been highly developed to support all

learners, for example teachers who have specialized in our language learner instruction teach with some of the strongest instruction practice due to their knowledge of the content and knowing how to differentiate instruction, thus allowing all our students to have access to grade level instruction. Thus, it is key to have strong leadership who knows how to develop great teachers for our students and that they are able to define the measurement of success for all our kids.

Additionally, we need to truly take into account and make sure that we have a team of educators who represent our students and their backgrounds. This means we need to ensure that we both recruit school leaders and educators of color and retain them. Further, we need to really develop a pipeline for our future educators while also promoting them in their own professional goals.

Further, we need to recognize the additional external factors that impact our BIPOC community, these are not isolated but impact both the Latino and Black community. We saw these external factors exacerbated and illuminated by the pandemic, thus the focus must be both academic support and development along with the social emotional support systems that extends outside of the classroom. As a former assistant principal, I recognized my limitations of how I was able to support my students who were facing external challenges. The counselors of the school were a true support system that I can rely on during these times of supporting our students and families. Additionally we need to make sure we are partnering with community organizations and connecting families to wrap around services to address those external needs so that students can focus on their learning in the classroom. I am a proponent of truly doing a forensic analysis of the budget in order to provide essential services. I believe our district should be able to set up a strong system in providing what our kids need to thrive.

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 it starts with making sure that our educators, particularly our educators who are reflective of our communities are supported. That means that we are meeting them where they are and supporting both their professional development needs and career goals. It is on us as district leaders to ensure that we are creating a culture for our black educators to authentically themselves because we know that when they thrive our students thrive. Additionally we need to ensure that it is possible for our most talented educators to continue serving in the classroom long term and ensuring that those who are capable of having the greatest impact are serving our communities with the greatest needs.

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?

Accountability for all members of our school community is critical. We must be able to identify what is working and what isn't so that we can continue to improve, adapt, and change our practices to better serve students. At the end of the Denver Plan 2020 we missed our goals of providing high quality educational environments by YEARS, our students deserve better than that. It is unacceptable that we can predict

academic performance and opportunities based on zip code, income and race. We owe it to our students to continue to improve. However the burden of continuous improvement does not fall upon our school level communities alone. We must rethink how we support, serve and evaluate the effectiveness of our district teams and senior leadership as well, including the Board of Education.

As I have shared, parents, loved ones and the community play a key role in the success of our district and as such must also be key partners in the accountability and progress of our school system. We must do everything in our power to make sure that both individual student progress is communicated in a timely and effective manner that allows families to celebrate their children as well as understand their struggles so that they can work with their teachers to support their efforts in educating their children. It also means that we must be honest with our community about where we are struggling and where we are succeeding by making academic, proficiency and growth data accessible and meaningful through transparency and disaggregation to highlight systemic inequities. We cannot rely on one single metric of success, rather we have to evaluate ourselves on a body of evidence that includes comparable data points but also takes into effect the unique strengths, weaknesses and needs of our unique communities. Lastly, we should never get to a point where we must close a school down due to poor performance. As a district we must intervene and provide support and resources long before that happens, but as the elected board of directors, it is our responsibility to live up to the promise of providing a high quality public education that allows each and every student the opportunity to live a life full of options regardless of the color of their skin or their zip code.