



EDUCATION ALLIANCE  
OF COLORADO

# Questionnaire Results

## District Academy School District 20 School Board 2021 Candidates

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**Do you agree or disagree with the idea that parents, not systems or institutions, are best positioned to select the school or educational services that best meet the needs of their children? Why or why not?**

**Nathan Johnson:** I do agree! Parents should be able to decide which school is the best fit for their student and their tax dollars should follow their student to that school, regardless of whether it is public, charter, or private. Parents have the largest influence on how successful their students will be in school, so they need more say in where their student goes to school and what services their student receives. When I was a teacher in D20, the more involved the parent was (within reason of course) correlated with how engaged their student was.

**Nicole Konz:** Parents are the primary educators & caregivers of their children and should always have the rights, and harness the responsibility, to raise their children autonomously and choose what's best for their families. Anything that gives parents more choice makes them necessarily more involved, and thus more informed and capable, in making wise and educated decisions for the upbringing of their children. Parents know their children best and the more they advocate for and involve themselves in school and educational services selections, the more successful their students will be.

**Thomas LaValley:** Strongly agree. Parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children. It is the job of the school system to support parents in their crucial role of educating their children.

**Michael Riffle:** Yes, this is why we vote for Board of Education members. It is the parents/communities way of keeping checks and balance to the systems, government, and institutions.

**Aaron Salt:** I believe that parents are the ultimate authority in their students' education. I also believe in local control, and it doesn't get more local than the family. Parents know their children in ways the district or state government never could. It's important to allow families the opportunity to make a choice for their student that best reflects the family's values, the student's personality, and the student's needs.

**Brian Coram:** Parents are of course the best ones to decide what choices they make regarding their own child's education. Fortunately, District 20 is a choice district which allows for such choices. As a D20 parent myself, I utilized the CHOICE program to have my children start in their school from Kindergarten. Parents can and should be involved in their child's education.

**Jackie Lesh:** I would invite parents to be partners in their child's education by selecting the school or educational services they feel is best for their child. Deepening relationships with families is vital. I feel that the key to positive and productive parent engagement is a good flow of communication between schools and home. Keeping parents in the loop on an ongoing basis sets the tone for an open exchange with students' parents and caregivers. Schools should develop and communicate a process for regular, ongoing communication throughout the year so parents know what to expect. Teachers should focus on building relationships with parents to establish trust and foster those relationships throughout the year. Schools should also ensure that parents have opportunities to build rapport with their child's support network such as involving families in learning activities. Studies of successful schools indicate that a high rate of parental involvement is a major factor in their success and can even help close the achievement gaps. A strong school culture of parental involvement leads to a thriving school community where every teacher, parent, and student has the opportunity to connect and be actively engaged.

**Lindsay Moore:** Parents, As parents are the primary educators of every child, they should have the ultimate authority on what children learn, they also know best how their children learn. It is imperative to each child's education that parents are the authority here.

**Tiana Clark:** Response coming soon

**Jason Silva:** No response



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## Should students in your school district have the unrestricted ability to attend a charter school or other public school of choice if their families so choose? Why or why not?

**Nathan Johnson:** I think they should be able to choose whatever school they want to go to within the city, not just the district. Colorado Springs is a school of choice city, so students can apply to get into any school they would like. But, they are not guaranteed acceptance. The school will have to approve their 'transfer.' I think allowing parents and students to select their school will help hold schools accountable. The better performing the school is, the more students they will theoretically have and the more money the school will receive. It gives the school added incentive to higher better teachers and to do a better job instructing their students.

**Nicole Konz:** The school 'choice' which allows families across the city to opt-in to D20 schools affords a great opportunity for all, and the ability to attend any charter or public school should be completely unrestricted. I believe in offering our students choices for their schooling where their interests and goals can be met, and I appreciate the many different foci that specific charter and public schools offer, as well as the programs and courses offered in high schools to facilitate job readiness.

**Thomas LaValley:** Absolutely. Thankfully that is the case currently with open enrollment in Colorado and it needs to stay that way. Districts need to insure that they offer different educational options for parents.

**Michael Riffle:** Yes. Parent and student choice should be a right. The only restriction would be that students that live in the school boundaries have first choice for that school. Any remaining seats would be filled on a first come first serve basis.

**Aaron Salt:** Absolutely, yes. No place in history has a one-size-fits-all solution worked for 100% of people. Education is no different. Any barrier in access to a school of choice should be knocked down. In fact, I fully support a voucher system that would open up additional options to parents at a reduced cost.

**Brian Coram:** Education isn't a one size fits all model, so families can and do have this choice to attend schools throughout the city. You'd have to define unrestricted however, as, for example, I don't think it would be appropriate for a choice student to expect transportation. It would be unreasonable and unsustainable to need to transport a single student who made a choice to not attend their home school. This is a far reach, of course, but overall I think the choice model works well.

**Jackie Lesh:** I agree that families should have the right to choose the school that best fits their child's needs. Colorado is an open enrollment state, meaning that students can choose to attend their assigned neighborhood school or "choice in" to another public school within their district or even outside their district. Students can choice in to any public school, which includes magnet schools, innovation schools, public charter schools, online schools, or homeschool. Commencing with the 1994-95 school year when the Public Schools of Choice law took effect, residents have been able to enroll their children at schools in Colorado districts for which they are not zoned. Public school choice means that families are provided a variety of options for their children's education, and are empowered to make the best decision for their children's needs. In Colorado, school choice has often provided children, especially underserved students, with greater access to high-performing schools. School choice also allows families to select schools that most closely align with their educational values and priorities, whether that is a focus on STEM subject areas, classical education, experiential learning, etc.

**Lindsay Moore:** Yes. Parents know best how each one of their children learns and not every child learns the same. School choice and Charter Schools are a boon to a district. It allows parents to select the school that best fits their child's educational needs.

**Tiana Clark:** Response coming soon

**Jason Silva:** No response



## Do you believe that public charter schools or other choice schools should have the flexibility to operate autonomously within the bounds of state law, including through waivers of certain local district or board policies? Why or why not?

**Nathan Johnson:** I think charter schools and other choice schools (private schools I suppose) should be able to act independently. Tax dollars do follow students to charter schools, but not to private schools. If tax dollars followed students to private schools (voucher system) I think private schools would be more popular in Colorado. Currently, charter schools are able to act independently. D20 enacted mask mandates for all students and staff as of 9/27 - but the charter schools do not have to follow suit. I think what makes charter schools special is that they can make their own decisions and act independently.

**Nicole Konz:** I believe charter and choice schools should have flexibility in their policies. Maintaining control and funding of schools at the lowest, most local level affords the best possible outcomes for all students. Charter schools continually demonstrate their success through increased scores and standards met over traditional public schools, and their liberty with policies and governance should be upheld when it's apparent they have a viable model of education.

**Thomas LaValley:** Absolutely. The less the authorizing agency needs to deal with a charter school the better. The charter needs to perform and parents need to be pleased with the school. Assuming they abide by state law, they should be able to operate with minimal to no interference from their authorizing agency. Charters have their own boards and should make their own decisions.

**Michael Riffle:** No. Charter schools should operate under the Board of Education for the district. Public tax dollars should always be looked after and ensure they are used properly. Also, as representatives of the community, parents and teachers, the Board of Education should have oversight of the Staff and curriculum.

**Aaron Salt:** I fully support schools of choice, charter schools, and private schools operating independently. I was a founding board member for New Summit Charter Academy, located in District 20. I sat as the chair for 3.5 years, including through COVID. I have seen firsthand how schools can accommodate students and families when given autonomy.

These local bodies, like charter schools, are one step more local than district boards. This brings decision making and governance to a more localized level.

**Brian Coram:** I think that all schools should be required to maintain set standards in education and quality of environment. There are many variable situations when it comes to education and as noted, there is no one size fits all, however a minimum standard should be set and it likely shouldn't just be "state law." Our children deserve more than a baseline.

**Jackie Lesh:** Colorado charter schools typically have greater flexibility and autonomy than traditional public schools. This helps them provide different learning environments and choice to students and parents. However, public charter schools are still held accountable to the same state accountability standards as every other public school. Charter schools must administer the same annual statewide assessments and are held accountable for their results. In addition to the state, Colorado charter schools are also held accountable by their authorizing entity Academy District 20, as well as an independent board of directors. I believe charter school should follow the rules set forth above.

**Lindsay Moore:** Yes. we want every child to have the greatest access to the best education, As Charter schools have already developed a mostly autonomous school board and policy, they only operate under the district umbrella.

**Tiana Clark:** Response coming soon

**Jason Silva:** No response



## If elected, how do you plan to support both new and existing public-school options—charter, magnet, online, specialty, etc.—in your school district?

**Nathan Johnson:** I think students and parents need options because education is not a ‘one size fits all’ scenario. Every student has their own set of needs and wants, and their ‘local’ school may not be a good fit, so a student may need to explore other educational options. And, the system we currently have does allow for that. I would support keeping the different educational options we have and be open to other options as they are presented.

**Nicole Konz:** My goal is for students to complete core studies with competency and a positive work ethic, ready to meet adulthood with confidence and the skills to be successful. I support all types of schools that will facilitate this goal, and the parental choice for selecting what is best for their student’s needs. Per-pupil funding should be fair and consistent to all D20 students no matter what school they choose to attend. I believe in offering our students choices for their schooling where their interests and goals can be met. As we find with increased competition in the marketplace (i.e., many school options in the district), the level of success and excellence is raised. In my support for all school options, I believe in holding every student and teacher to high standards while they have the flexibility to utilize classical approaches to writing, reading, civics, and government as well as traditional and creative approaches to math, science, entrepreneurship, critical problem-solving, job preparedness, budgeting, introduction to trades, and more.

**Thomas LaValley:** I want D-20 to be such an excellent district with so many options for parents that more charters would not be needed. That said, I look for 2 requirements for a new charter to win approval to open in our district. First, those starting the school must demonstrate that they have the skill sets, work ethic, and ability to start and run a school; no easy task. Second, do they have enough parents who are willing to send their children to the school. If those two conditions are met, I see no reason why I would not approve the school. Our district currently has an excellent relationship with our 2 charter schools. We let them run their schools, they come to us if they need help. I will continue to support those relationships.

**Michael Riffle:** Educating students is the ultimate goal. We can’t lose sight of this no matter how much politics gets involved. As we look to new and innovated teaching practices and curriculum, assurances for the community, parents and students that tax dollars will be used for the ultimate goal of producing the best educational opportunities for the future. This is why elected Board of Education members are so crucial to this process. They are accountable to the voters.

**Aaron Salt:** Through COVID, we’ve seen technology used in some pretty clever ways. We’ve seen an appetite for students to have remote learning options, and increasing those are a necessary step for districts to take.

Outside of that, I would love to see specialized programs opened in D20. It doesn’t matter to me whether that’s through district-run schools or through charter schools. Providing career and technical education (CTE) to students can really engage many students who normally would be disinterested in education.

I would also look for ways to offload some of the district’s growth projections with additional charter schools. This is a less expensive way for District 20 to redirect additional students than having to build new schools/expansions.

**Brian Coram:** We want every child to have the greatest access to education to maximize each child’s potential. School choice, charter schools and traditional schools as well as options like homeschool academy and other allow parents the opportunity to help their child succeed. Supporting the continuation of charter school contracts as well as providing parents with as many options as we can is a boon to our district and should be continued.

MORE CANDIDATE RESPONSES ON NEXT PAGE



**Jackie Lesh:** District 20 offers so many options to parents, through charter schools, project based learning methods, IB schools, language immersion programs, career and technical training, AP classes, special education programs, dyslexia based schools and so much more, giving our parents a choice in their students education and helping them chose the learning style the best fits their child's needs. I plan to support all 39 of our D20 schools by providing them the tools they need to help each child reach their learning potential.

**Lindsay Moore:** We want every child to have the greatest access to education to maximize each child's potential. School choice, charter schools and traditional schools as well as options like homeschool academy and other allow parents the opportunity to help their child succeed. Supporting the continuation of charter school contracts as well as providing parents with as many options as we can is a boon to our district and should be continued.

**Tiana Clark:** Response coming soon

**Jason Silva:** No response



## As a school board member, how will you balance the needs and priorities of the district itself against the needs and priorities of families, students, and communities?

**Nathan Johnson:** I think students and parents need options because education is not a 'one size fits all' scenario. Every student has their own set of needs and wants, and their 'local' school may not be a good fit, so a student may need to explore other educational options. And, the system we currently have does allow for that. I would support keeping the different educational options we have and be open to other options as they are presented.

**Nicole Konz:** I will be diligent in reviewing and researching the district's budget and will strive to allocate funds to areas that directly impact our student's engagement, interest, and academic success. I believe there are always ways to be more frugal in some areas of the budget, while cultivating a rich and robust education for D20 students. Every entity, especially public schools, should maintain laser-like focus on their sole function, and only on that. That is the only way they can operate with true integrity and maximum efficiency. That means always prioritizing academic excellence for D20. Social and cultural beliefs are solely the parents responsibility and prerogative to teach, and when left to individual families' wisdom, our district can return focus to their sole mission of reaching the highest standards of educational achievement.

**Thomas LaValley:** The district IS families, students, and the community. We exist to assist parents in the education of their children and are accountable to the community. As long as those priorities are maintained, our district should remain healthy.

**Michael Riffle:** I have spent 23 years in Special Forces and am currently a Special Forces warrant officer. I understand the requirements of operational and strategic planning. These skills allow me to view priorities and rank them in precedence in order to accomplish the mission with the by evaluating risk to district, staff, institutions and communities. All priorities come with risk, but what is the acceptable risk to reach the ultimate goal of producing well rounded educated students and putting education first.

**Aaron Salt:** The job of the district is to educate students. The way we prioritize our budget should be focused on strengthening academic performance. Now, with that said, the district should listen to community feedback and address concerns from students, families, and the community, but that shouldn't lead into the creation of community programs.

**Brian Coram:** As an elected director to the school board, one of duties is an assignment to 7-8 district schools This becomes that greatest opportunity not only to support our community at things like band concerts, but allows a board member to interact with the parents, students and communities, to hear comments and concerns and take them back to the board so that I can address them at the board. This is not just a duty of the job but a responsibility to listen and hear what our community is saying.

**Jackie Lesh:** Students should always be the number one priority. The district is a partner to parents, assisting them in providing the best education for their students by meeting students' individual needs and helping them reach academic success. We should support students in expressing themselves and accept them for who they are, as well as embrace the differences of others, ensuring equal opportunity and access to, and excellence in, education for all.

**Lindsay Moore:** NAs an elected director to the school board, one of duties is an assignment to 7-8 district schools This becomes that greatest opportunity not only to support our community at things like band concerts, but allows a board member to interact with the parents, students and communities, to hear comments and concerns and take them back to the board so that I can address them at the board. This is not just a duty of the job but a responsibility to listen and hear what our community is saying.

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