



EDUCATION ALLIANCE
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Questionnaire Results

Jefferson County School District School Board 2021 Candidates

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?

David Johnson: Yes. No big explanation. Parents, for the most part, are best to choose for their children.

Paula Reed: I believe that children benefit most when parents and their child's educational institution work as a team, with the parent's knowledge of the child paired with the expertise of professional educators.

Theresa Shelton: As the mom of three children attending Jeffco schools a decade apart, I absolutely agree that parents are best positioned to select the programs and schools that best meet their children's needs. We are fortunate school choice is an option Colorado embraces. Families in many states spend significant effort trying to find a home in a community they believe will secure the best learning option for their children. Here in Colorado, we are fortunate to have more flexibility, and in Jefferson County, 45% of our student community "choice in" to something other than their Neighborhood School. This is clear evidence parents appreciate being able to choose from the various learning models available. In my family our children attended our neighborhood school and our son continued in neighborhood schools graduating from Golden High School. For our daughters, we believed they would be better served by a different option and they are now attending a school of choice in Jeffco. We were lucky to "win the lottery" as the school our girls attend has had a waitlist for many years and uses a lottery system to determine which students can attend. I support all parents having the right to choose.

Kathy Miks: Agree. Parents are in the best position to know their child's needs, and parents have the greatest stake in their child's wellbeing. I support parents' ability to make the best choices for their students.

Mary Parker: I agree that parents are best positioned to select the school or educational services that best meet the needs of their children. I believe this because it is the responsibility of all parents to advocate for their children. Because there are some parents are unable or unwilling to research the options available to them, the school district has the responsibility to insure that all schools provide a high quality education for every student.

Danielle Varda: No response

Jeffrey Wilhite: 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?

David Johnson: Yes. Choice exists and should remain intact. Assuming schools do have size limit.

Paula Reed: Yes, they should. These schools are funded with public dollars and should be open to all students.

Theresa Shelton: I definitely support a family's ability to choose the school that best meets the needs of their children. However unrestricted is a broad word; while a family knows the needs of their children, I also believe a school's leadership knows their ability to meet the needs of all students. If a school believes it is unable to meet the needs of a child that wants to attend, there should be a collaborative process to determine possible solutions.

Another concern I have with unrestricted access is how to handle the many situations where more students want to attend than the capacity allowed by the school building. I know many Jeffco charter and option schools have wait lists because the number of families that want to attend far exceeds the capacity of the school. While I wish there was a way to expand the capacity of a building or hire the appropriate staff, those options are not always possible in the short term. So while I support a family's ability to choose the school that meets the needs of their child, processes must also be in place to ensure students' needs will be met.

Kathy Miks: Agree. In my family, my three children had different learning needs. They attended our neighborhood elementary and middle schools, but when it came to high school, we were fortunate to be able to make a choice that was not our neighborhood school for one of our children. Every parent should have that opportunity. We are fortunate that Colorado passed The Public Schools of Choice law taking effect in 1994, allowing students to attend any public school regardless of their address.

Mary Parker: Yes. In the Jeffco school district, parents are able to choice in to any public school in the district, including charter schools.

Danielle Varda: No response

Jeffrey Wilhite: 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?

David Johnson: Yes. That is the whole point of a charter school....

Paula Reed: Within reason, yes. I would need to see waiver requests to decide whether or not they should be granted.

Theresa Shelton: Schools of choice should have the ability to operate autonomously within state law and to be able to obtain waivers from both district and board policies. This flexibility is what allows schools of choice to both better meet the needs of their students and provide a different experience than district run schools.

Kathy Miks: It depends. This would have to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis as there are too many possible factors to answer this definitively. There is a process in place for waivers that I would honor.

Mary Parker: It would depend on what policies they are seeking a waiver from.

Danielle Varda: No response

Jeffrey Wilhite: No response



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

David Johnson: I support all schools regardless of focus. If they are in best interest of students and families, they have my support. I have owned and operated a private school....

Paula Reed: I fully support all existing public schools. At such time as the district receives adequate funding for all of its current schools, I would be open to other options. To do otherwise is to shortchange all schools.

Theresa Shelton: As a board member I will support the existing public schools of choice by regular visits, advocating for specific resources and helping shift the paradigm from “choice schools take students away from neighborhood schools” to “choice schools offer more favorable learning environments for many students.” Additionally, understanding that there are wait lists at many schools of choice, I would support financially sound expansions to allow families greater access to the education model that best meets the needs of their children. And when there is enough community demand to bring new applications to the board, I support expanding public choice options to the extent they are financially viable and show a demonstrated ability to more effectively meet the needs of the expected student population.

Kathy Miks: I will thoughtfully and transparently consider applications for new public school options. If the new school meets the application criteria, and fills a need for children, I will support. For existing schools, there is a review process, and I would work to help the school succeed.

Mary Parker: I would listen to the superintendent, school staff, and community members to hear what the specific needs of each school. Because all our schools have different demographics, they have different needs and require different resources.

Danielle Varda: No response

Jeffrey Wilhite: 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?

David Johnson: I do not see them as competing needs. I see them as parallel.

Paula Reed: One assumes the needs and priorities of the district exist, ultimately, to serve the needs and priorities of families, students, and communities. If these two things are not inherently connected then the disconnect needs to be remedied.

Theresa Shelton: My years of governance experience tells me that as a member of the school board I must keep the priorities of our students first. School boards are trusted to guide the District in providing opportunities students need to prepare for success beyond high school. Jeffco's academic scores show we aren't meeting this student need. Over the last several years academic achievement has steadily declined, and in fact the majority of Jeffco students are not learning as much as their peers around the state. In 2017, of the 22 subgroups for whom academic growth scores were measured, 16 of those groups of students learned more than their peers around the state. By 2019, only students who identified as Asian or Gifted learned more than their peers statewide – that means 20 subgroups in Jeffco in 2019 learned less than their peers around the state. Jeffco must return to a focus that prioritizes meeting the learning, social, and emotional needs of students.

Spending in Jeffco has also increased over 30% the last six years while enrollment has declined by about 6000 students. Spending more money to serve fewer students while academic achievement continues to decline needs to change. With 35 years of financial, operational and governance experience, I know what it takes to collaboratively work with a variety of individuals to guide them in setting specific and measurable goals, and how to assess whether the financial, personnel and other resources recommended to achieve those goals are reasonable and effective. I have the skills needed to reverse the trends and ensure resources are used wisely.

Kathy Miks: In my job now, I have a strategic multi-year plan that my team is methodically executing to meet the needs of the business. We use a quantitative cost/benefit tool to help prioritize projects. I would use a similar tool to prioritize how resources are used in order to have the biggest impact on outcomes and objectives, especially those that directly affect students, families, and communities.

Mary Parker: The district should focus on the needs of the students. Because students have different needs depending on their abilities and circumstances, the district will have to allocate the appropriate resources to each school as appropriate.

Danielle Varda: No response

Jeffrey Wilhite: No response