

Hello,

I thought you might be interested in this open letter to Nate Easley, the East Denver school board representative by Lisa M. Calderon. A well-written letter that more people from Nate Easley's school board district should read, and one that parents from every quadrant of city should be aware of before tonight's school board meeting 11/30/09.

In the end, our concern is centered on the fact that we want our children to get the very best education they can. We also want to encourage parental involvement, and not just when parents agree with our ideas, proposals, and philosophies.

Too bad the present school board does not adhere to this ideal. When parents stand up and demand to be heard, when they want to address questions and comments to the school board on the reasons their input is not wanted, when they want to question the recommended proposals to change and redesign the schools their children attend, this board chooses to put the most controversial proposals on the consent agenda.

This way there is no debate, no discussion, no opportunity for parental input, and the proposals are just jammed down our throats. That is not democracy, that is not why we voted for change. Too bad not all those we voted in understand that very basic premise for justice and fairness.

When political candidates for public office promise one thing, and the moment they are elected do other, we should not question why the public has so very little confidence in those public servants.

Blessings,
Butch Montoya

November 29, 2009

An Open Letter to Nate Easley: The Top 10 Reasons Why You're Not Ready to be DPS Board President

"Whether arrogant or naive, his decision to run does not reflect mature judgment..."
Susan Barnes-Gelt, OpEd-The Denver Post on Nate Easley's decision to run for DPS Board President
11/29/09

Nate, say it ain't so! I am among your original base of supporters who helped to launch your campaign started in my living room, yet who is disappointed and disillusioned by your abandonment of your own campaign principles of transparency, communication and community engagement in light of your current back-door dealings to catapult yourself as president of the Denver Public Schools (DPS) Board of Education. In case you have forgotten why we grassroots organizers pushed for a power-shift on the DPS

board, let me remind you: we need leaders who understand that high performing schools and community engagement are not mutually exclusive concepts; and that we need visionary leaders who could create alternative educational models that don't rely on paternalistic, top-down educational frameworks that blame teachers, isolate parents, while red-lining children of color into militaristic & regimented cloning academies.

As a product of DPS myself, a mother with a child still in DPS, and a son who graduated in spite of, not because of the dysfunctional DPS system, I/we don't need to be reminded by you that this fight is fundamentally about the children, and that our school system is in desperate need of transformational reform. However, reform that is implemented recklessly will only be remembered as the War on Education, just like we lament the War on Drugs, and the War on Poverty, where good intentions and one-size-fits-all mass produced strategies led communities of color down a more entrenched path of increased destabilization, from which we have yet to recover. Now is the time for strong, knowledgeable, experienced, and yes, even humble leaders who actually know how to respectfully engage with neighborhood families through community-driven and evidence-based initiatives, while rejecting autocratic & corporate-like decision-making structures. This is the time to build-up our neighborhood schools as the hearts of our communities, rather than building political careers. The power is with the people, and not in self-styled saviors.

Nate, this is not your time to lead the school board, and sadly perhaps you've even blown your future opportunities due to your missteps that are either due to naïveté or arrogance, or both; because if your base can no longer trust you with upholding the principles you campaigned on, do you think the establishment will? If what I have said is not enough to convince you to see the error of your ways, perhaps I need to be more explicit in this **Top 10 list of reasons why you are not qualified to be DPS Board President when the vote is cast on November 30th:**

1) **You do not have the experience.**

- It is unprecedented that a newcomer, PhD or no PhD, would walk onto the job day-one to steer the massive ship of a public governing body, know what needs to be done, and how to do it. Yet, you demanded that veteran school board member Jeannie Kaplan demonstrate to you that she could lead before you would even consider voting for her as president; however, you didn't apply the same litmus test to yourself. Arrogant or sexist? Take your pick.

2) **You do not have the time.**

- You frequently lamented on the campaign trail how you had two young children at home, and that your campaign schedule caused frequent tension in your household due to the time you were away. Newsflash: if you think the campaign trail was grueling, do you really think you're going to have more family time as the school board president, in addition to learning and representing the constituents in your district? Oh, and let's not forget, you also have a full-time job at the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

3) **You have an appearance of impropriety issue.**

- Speaking of the Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF) where you work, it's pretty curious that you publicly never make the connection that Theresa Peña, the current president of the Denver Public School Board, is also your boss at DSF since she serves on its board too. We do not know exactly if a quid pro quo arrangement has been made to allow you to continue to work at the DSF while simultaneously serving as DPS board president (in essence, 2 full-time jobs for the price of one), but the appearance of impropriety is certainly raised when one of the reasons you give for running for president is to keep Ms. Pena from quitting the DPS board.

4) You are not a bridge builder.

- Let me get this straight, Northeast Nate who won his election through grassroots community support, is now not beholden to anyone? You not only turned your back on your base, but also on those school board members Arturo Jimenez and Jeannie Kaplan who encouraged you to run, as well as board member elect Andrea Merida who supported you while running her own district race. You repay them by telling them that you would make a better leader than any of them, and there's essentially nothing they can do about it because you have the votes lined up. Did I also mention that you pulled a fast-one on the Denver Classroom Teachers Association by letting them know that their door-knocking, phone-calling, literature-dropping efforts were all for nothing? Is this the evidence of a bridge builder? Your only response to accusations of your being disloyal is, "I'll have four years to build those bridges." I think the only bridge you should concentrate on building is the one out of the deep hole you have dug for yourself.

5) You haven't even learned the issues within your own district.

- In case you haven't noticed, the communities and challenges of Stapleton, Montbello, Whittier, etc are all going to compete for your attention and all deserve neighborhood-based responsiveness. How on earth can you even reasonably conceive of knowing the intricacies of these communities, while also learning how to be DPS board president? I guess Northeast Nate has morphed into Super Nate! But really, we don't need a caricature; Northeast Denver and the surrounding communities have been neglected for far too long to be subjected to half-ass leadership. Our children deserve more than a bi-furcated leader.

6) You look disloyal.

- Already stated in #4 – enough said.

7) You cut deals that you can't deliver.

- On the one-hand, there was a deal for you to vote for Mary Seawell as Vice President, so long as you were at the top of the ticket as President. You then tried to cut another deal with Arturo Jimenez as Vice President, so long as you were kept in the President slot. So my question is, who died and made you President? Wake up Nate, people have gotten hip to the fact that you were cutting deals by swearing allegiance to whomever side you were talking to at the time, so long as you ended-up as President either way. Not cool.

8) You didn't communicate with your base.

- Your base of supporters who worked tirelessly to get you elected didn't find out about your I'm-the-sole-bridge builder-savior-plan for president directly from you. In fact, you avoided many of us, leaving us to find out about your wacky scheme through third-parties. If you had talked to us, or even sought out independent wise-counsel before embarking on back-door-pedaling vote-chasing antics, we might have understood, and even strategized to help you with the end goal of moving the board forward in a positive direction. That opportunity was lost.

9) You haven't built bridges with the Latino community.

- Latinos now make up the majority of the DPS student population, and are a growing segment of your district. Yet, by leaping over the more experienced Latino bi-lingual board member, Arturo Jimenez, for board leadership coupled with the fact that you have not reached out in a meaningful way to Latino families, means that your relevance will be short-lived. If you cannot forge meaningful Black-Brown coalitions, you will not only be an impotent board member, you can kiss re-election good-bye.

10) You haven't operated in a transparent way.

- We, grassroots community organizers who made change happen through the election by shaking up the DPS corporatized establishment are tired of having decisions made behind closed doors with the liberal and conservative elite, then appearing to ask for community input after the fact. As our Northeast candidate, we thought you got that message and would carry it for us, but apparently not, based upon your back-door dealings, and you haven't even been sworn in yet! So let me be crystal clear: Northwest, Northeast, West, and Southwest activists are aligning to ensure that you and the other DPS board members work in partnership with their respective neighborhoods in a transparent and accountable way.

We might have voted for you, but we have no problem admitting, correcting or recalling a mistake and setting a new course to create transformational change in our communities. That is what makes us different from arrogant leadership. The power is in the people.

Lisa M. Calderón

Community Organizer-Cole Neighborhood, DPS Graduate & Parent