



**Stand for Children Colorado, Denver Chapter
2011 DPS Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire**

Candidate Name: Frank Deserino

Board of Education - District 1

Section I

- 1) What are your qualifications to become a school board member? Please give specific examples.
- Along with my Masters degrees in American History, Political Science, and Constitutional History I hold a Doctorate in American History with emphasis in race, gender, and labor studies. This educational backdrop has been essential in providing both a visual representation for students of how they can achieve academically, but also assists me in providing students with the skills necessary for a collegiate environment. My background in secondary education began fifteen years ago with this coming year my eleventh for DPS. Additionally thirteen years have been in academia with for the past nine at Metropolitan State College. This combination of both secondary and collegiate experience has afforded me the unique position, and perspective to know, understand, and address the needs of our college bound youth as with college writing for example, I am able to assist students with what will be necessary for college success. Understandably I cannot reach all of the students at South, but with the use of data and the collegial environment enshrined there we as a team are able to share ideas and strategies for the benefit of all our kids. As a board member I can target both these needs for academic success with proven classroom strategies on a much broader scale.

As a DPS curriculum team designer I have been able to gain knowledge and skills in creating realistic and sustainable student targeted activities that are inclusive of both state standards, and UbD, Understanding by Design, strategies. Here too as a board member this experience will be invaluable in instilling a team approach for shared knowledge thus building towards attainable academic accomplishment and standing for the students we serve.

Finally, I am a parent, which places me as a stakeholder in that I share a personal obligation to see that not only the future educational prospects of my own child, but all children are equally protected and enriched. These work an parental ideals extent to my community, living and working within the shadow of South High School I understand more than most of the true nature of the pivotal relationship of the neighborhood school in assisting our students to be nurtured and encouraged in their development to adulthood. Of the school's obligations, its responsibility, to its community, its students, and beyond, but also the commitment of the community as a whole to its schools, and as a board member I want to extend these beliefs.

- 2) What are the top three challenges facing public schools in your region? If elected, how would you address them?

* The top three challenges are funding, student achievement, and staffing. Of course these ideals will be addressed in more detail throughout parts of this questionnaire, but in general a targeted approach for specific classroom funding measures, and the attentive management of sustainable resources will do much to assist with our student populations. Budgetary accountability, careful resource management, and guardianship are key if we are to be successful as a district, and with this in place student achievement and accountable appropriate staffing necessary to fulfill these goals can occur.

- 3) Hypothetically, you have a chronically low-performing school in your region; please identify three strategies you would use to improve the school. What role would the community play in your plan?

* From the very beginning the community must play an essential part in addressing the needs of the school, after all it is their school that is in need of help, so to start they would take a key role in the development of an over site committee committed to address these concerns. Granted you are not going to get all the residents of a neighborhood involved, but the line of communication cannot be ignored as every effort must be made to keep all parties, parents, and students especially, informed. This committee would be made up of community members, parents, teachers, administrators, and students to name but a few of the representative groups / organizations. Their role would be to make recommendations for change, and if necessary through grass roots efforts ensure their implementation based on fact and reason, not supposition and faulty data. My strategies would be: first, collect data for evaluation to assist in understanding of what is contributing to the schools status as low performer. Second, increased staff and school level administrative support whether that is in the context of professional development, communication enrichment, or strategic teaching and implementation, it would be the job of the board to ensure that resources are brought to bear to address the problem at the start. Third, examination of school culture from all those involved with the school, and not just from teachers and administrators but, from students, custodians, and all participants of the school. Here information can be gathered to help in understanding the needs of the school. Although three were asked for an essential fourth, would be the development of a cultural restructuring of the school based on parent involvement, academic achievement, student needs for academic accomplishment, and student responsibility.

- 4) At what point do you think a school turnaround plan must be considered? If elected, what criteria will you use to review, approve, and implement a turnaround plan?

* A school turnaround plan should be the last consideration, and it is one that cannot be made after the problem was allowed to get out of hand. Turnaround is nothing short of a demoralizing action that in the long run hurts all involved in the vain hope a few more points on a test score and I would be loathed to take on any such extreme measure as this. Aside from being counterproductive to what was stated in question three, turnaround policies are largely based in fear, and misinformation by those who use it not only in the falsehood of assisting students, but in the final analysis for personal reasons as well. There are many road signs and data formats to be taken into consideration for analysis for example the needs of the community the special relationship and culture of the school itself between its students and teachers that once integrated do hold the seeds for student and school success. In considering turnaround we have decided to give up on that school, it means that we have not listened to a single thing that was said by the community, parents, and teachers that would in essence have helped the school. It means that we have allowed other forces to divide the school and its student population. It means that we have ignored the financial and intellectual needs of the school. It means we have decided to put

human beings through the emotional upheaval of separation, and job application. It means that we have refused to talk to the CDE, and / or state legislature to request a deferment before taking such a drastic step. It means that we have not allowed the teachers and administrators to implement their own ideas to help the school. All of this and more must have been done first with a lengthy documented history of verifiable efforts taken before any talk of turnaround can be entertained. The past record of turnaround in this district has shown that this has not been the case, and as such I refuse to consider the practice until it can be proven that a sustainable and verifiable policy has been established to assist low performing schools.

- 5) What do you expect the district superintendent to do to increase student achievement across the district and at individual schools? How would you evaluate his/her progress?

* First the superintendent would have to have a proven record of unquestionable integrity and honesty, how are they to be an example to our students otherwise. Of course the current trend has been to have superintendents with business and / or financial expertise, but in order to increase achievement one would need to be an active participant in the classroom / school building, and not just as a visitor set to catch headlines. To lead by example they would have to have at least two weeks per year actually teaching in a hard to serve school. How can you lead a district's students to higher levels of success when you have no real idea of what it takes to teach today's thinkers? This person would have to really listen to people on the ground as to what is needed to help said school and not simply throw money at the problem, but be a leader an implementer for real sustainable change. They would have to be involved in real staff / administrative development and support so as to get the best people for the job, and not just throw someone in the deep end of the problem to see if they can swim. They must take a shared responsibility for both a schools success and failure not just play the blame game when something goes wrong.

- 6) The school board has the responsibility of approving the district budget. How would you propose holding the district administration accountable for strategic resource management?

* Before approval of any district budget, accountability and transparency would have to be a hallmark, as the public must see how their tax dollars are being used. An independent state-auditing agency must take charge of the districts budgetary review process, and not a private accounting and consulting firm, which can be subject to accusations of conflicts of interest. The term grant funded must be addressed for sustainability and relevance, as at times it has been used as a catch phrase, meaning that eventually when the grant money runs out the general fund may be called upon to make up the difference regardless of if the grant worked or not. Funding for new academic programs must come with proven documentation as to their success in the classroom prior to purchase. These are but a few of the things that must happen first, all leading to improved board input and responsibility for what the budget actually covers, and what its goals and objectives are.

- 7) Considering the current fiscal climate, in which three areas of the district's budget would you support substantial reductions or reallocations? What creative alternatives would you propose to minimize direct cuts to classrooms?

* The three areas of substantial reductions would be support services, technology implementation, and in non-school essential administration. Class room teachers and resources have been cut enough with the result of larger class sizes which research has shown to be a critical factor in low performing schools and student intellectual development. A lot of what is done in the district from cutting the grass to technology support can be subcontracted out at substantial savings, let alone from the bidding that would ensue to obtain the districts business. By simply utilizing the evidence garnered from a cost benefit analysis would be instrumental as

another example in adding more money at the school level. Still other means to achieve this would be discovering means to deal with old textbook reclaim, selling out our warehouses of old furniture and equipment, increasing use of online learning programs and school / student laptop assignment would cut down on copying costs. Reassessment and streamlining of our ordering and purchasing procedures would do much to help as well in cutting costs and putting money back into our classrooms. On administration, there are roughly fifteen thousand employees in DPS, and about five thousand are teaching staff, with another five as support service personal, and with that the question must be voiced, what does the other third specifically do? In other words currently there is one administrator for every teacher in DPS, now why is that, and what savings can be garnered from addressing this?

- 8) Would you support a bond and mill levy increase in 2012? If yes, what would you include in the bond/mill levy request? If no, why not?

* Yes I would support a mill levy, but the voters would have to have substantial guarantees that said monies would go directly to the schools for specifically technology purchases, on line learning / teacher web based development, and too really relieve classroom size issues.

- 9) ProComp, Denver's pay for performance system, was designed to be modified and improved over time. If elected, would you support opening up ProComp for renegotiation between the district and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association?

* Absolutely, but for any other reason than the inequities that are still endemic within the system as currently not all teachers are able to gain financial rewards from all aspects of the program, hard to serve schools and state sanctioned testing for example, let alone for the matter of how the LEAP educator evaluation program will play into Pro Comp.

- 10) Please give an example of a situation in which you were not familiar with a concept and had to gain the necessary knowledge to make the best decision. How would you apply similar strategies if elected to the school board?

* LEAP, Leading Effective Academic Practice, is just such an example of a situation where I utilized my own academic skills to obtain necessary knowledge. By participating in discussion groups, communicating with LEAP authors and peers, using on line resources, asking questions, reading the LEAP pilot document, for example I was able to make a clear decision based on facts and data. These academic strategies will be instrumental once elected as they will ground me to make decisions logically and thoughtfully, and not ones made on false presumptions.

- 11) In recent years, DPS has been building a portfolio of diverse public school options. As a school board member, what role do you think diverse public school models play within the district? How will you support the unique learning needs of students?

* By "building a portfolio" you mean will I support the unspoken policy of corporatization through the development of charter schools in this district, a process that shows no clear success for our kids the answer is no. As these schools do not exhibit a unique learning experience rather they show an inequitable determination against neighborhood schools in that they have been proven for example to ignore both the needs of the whole community and the teachers they are supposed to involve. Within the context of our current public schools is where we already have the basis that the unique needs of our students can and should be addressed.

- 12) If elected, how will you attract and retain students in the district?

* As a board member, the true establishment of the neighborhood school will be the basis from which students will be attracted and retained. Making certain that those schools are properly funded and staffed to do the job of educating our students will be its cornerstone.

13) Do you support the concept of social promotion? Why or why not? What action should be taken if a student has not demonstrated the skills necessary to move to the next grade level?

* Yes, but with that we will have to examine how do we assess a child. Retention is not the solution for students who have not demonstrated skills as the evidence bears out that this is not the answer. However, the development of a school-based culture of student responsibility is a means to ensure that any real change to how they are assessed will create inroads to buy in for the student. Thinking outside of the box can create means by which a student can be successful in skill acquisition. Through the use of real world performance tasks, portfolios, unmeasured learning, promotion based on individual growth, and authentic assessment may very well be the means by which an effective learning environment for our students can grow as well as attract new learners.

14) What is your philosophy on board governance? What strategies will you use to be a productive member of the board?

* My place will be as an active participant by using the strategies of an academic, a parent, and as a professional to ensure a quality education for all.

15) What are your top three ideas to recruit, retain, develop, and reward excellent teachers and principals?

* First it is not about the money, although money is important in our current economic situation. I believe that teacher empowerment through their best judgments and support is equally viable. For example, class size relief could do more to bolster teacher effectiveness now than any other incentive. The culture of a revolving door for principals needs to be changed and they should be given enough time for effective school based change.

16) DPS continues to see a high level of principal turnover in low-performing schools. How would you work with the superintendent and school staff to address the school leadership challenge?

* First we must stop the policy of internal promotion as the only means for acquisition. We need to continue development of the principal academy, and institute a policy for national searches. Second, provide real staff buy into the decision making process as they are in the unique position to know what exactly goes on, and what will be the best fit for the school. Third, provided sustainable supports for the new principal once hired instead of throwing them in the deep end. Yes, LEAP will be critical here, but there must be more support than this as this is the person that sets the tone and environment for the entire school.

17) DPS is a pilot district for the implementation of Senate Bill 191. What is your position on the law? If elected, what role will you play to ensure successful implementation in DPS?

* Senate Bill 191 is here for now and is overall a positive good as it provides safeguards against political reassignment, and sole teacher blame. However, to implement the LEAP educator evaluation framework without addressing the role of students and their own responsibility for their education is not providing an equitable playing field. In any learning environment there are basically two participants, the educator and the learner, and place all the responsibility on the educator in a hope that the learner will just simply comply is not being realistic. As a board

member my strategic position will not only be to ensure the successful implementation of Senate Bill 191, but also to oversee that the means by which it is applied is done fairly and with oversight.

18) If elected, what are 3-4 measurable goals you hope to accomplish in your four-year term?

* First, budgetary accountability and transparency inclusive of an independent state audit. Second, developments of a culture of school-based student responsibility with clear expectations and assurances for student success. Third, a halt to, and reassessment of the current practices of privatization and charter school development through a return of our neighborhood schools. Fourth, addressing the problem of inadvertent, unintentional, and chronic racism that is prevalent within DPS by first following the Federally court ordered mandate for ELA education established in 1972.

19) What else could you tell us about yourself or your experience that can help us make an endorsement recommendation?

* I am a passionate educator that believes in the potential in all the students we serve. Why shouldn't a school board have a teacher on it? Largely people who have not taught in the classroom have administered the history of this district's board, and so it is about time to bring real life classroom experience so as to implement the Denver Plan and real reform.