

JCEA School Board Candidate Questionnaire

General Questions

- 1) Tell us about your involvement with the Jeffco Public Schools and your background with public education. Please include any family attending schools in this district.**

I have four children who have navigated Jeffco Schools from Kyffin Elementary, to Creighton and Evergreen Middle Schools to Lakewood and Wheat Ridge High Schools. I've served on PTA's, for over seven years, most recently as Wheat Ridge High School's PTSA President for school year 2018-19. I also served on accountability committees at my children's schools. I was president of Jefferson Association for Gifted Children for more than six years and served on the district Diversity Council as well as the Choice Committee.

- 2) Do you support the idea of a statewide funding fix such as adjustments to or elimination of TABOR or the "de-Brucing" of education spending? If not, what is your plan for ensuring that our district receives adequate funding?**

A number of years back I worked on SB2013-231, which focused on changing the methodology for financing education in Colorado. Since that time, a number of statewide funding measures have come before Colorado voters and failed to pass. Two of the fundamental reasons why these measures fail are voters' belief that the additional money will not be spent wisely, and the lack accountability when funding goes up but achievement results don't. For example there were no provisions that if certain targets are not met, then funding would revert back to its former level. That's not even considered in these proposals. I believe that the majority of voters want to see that they are getting good value for the taxes they pay. In the last six years Jeffco voters have voted to increase funding to Jeffco Schools, combined this has increased local funding by over \$70 million a year and state funding has increased. It is time to show Jeffco residents that their increased investments are improving results.

- 3) Do you support or oppose vouchers, education savings accounts, and private school tax credits? If support, please explain.**

I support our current laws.

- 4) Do you support or oppose the local school board having the final say in approval or denial of charter school contracts (including renewals)? Please explain.**

I am a huge supporter of local control over public education, as we have in Colorado, giving local school boards control of local systems. I also support the foundational belief that there should always be system of checks and balances. So I support the current

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process that gives control to local school boards and allows parents and teachers to ask the State Board of Education to review any decisions they feel need a second look.

5) Should charter schools be required to follow the same state laws and district policies as other district schools? Please explain.

The whole purpose of a charter school is to serve as a platform for innovation and experimentation. While charter schools should and do have to take the same tests and are measured to the same target they should be able to opt out of local policies and laws which inhibit their innovative ideas. I also believe all schools should be able to seek the same waivers as charter schools which is why I support local communities being able to seek innovation status which provide the same flexibility to neighborhood schools.

6) What do you believe is the role of a school board member in relationship to the:

- a) Superintendent
- b) Administrators
- c) Educators & School Support Personnel
- d) Parents & Students

The role of the school board is governance, not management. Governance involves a limited number of activities, including establishing critical goals and approving management's strategy to achieve them, allocating resources in alignment with that strategy, hiring and evaluating a CEO/Superintendent to manage the organization, monitoring risks critical to the success of the strategy and survival of the organization, and evaluating and accurately reporting the organization's results to its stakeholders, who include parents and students, staff, as well as voters, employers, regulators and other groups. School board members bring the priorities and voices of the community to the governance of the district.

Educator Issue Questions

7) What is your opinion on educators' current salaries and what are your ideas for addressing issues related to such?

Teachers should make a competitive salary and especially in Jeffco new teachers' salaries are not competitive with other local districts. We also have to recognize that take home pay is only one part of total compensation, which also includes district-paid healthcare and retirement pension costs, which have sharply increased in recent years. So if we are going to be able to increase take home pay, we need to have a much clearer understanding of how effectively and efficiently Jeffco is spending the billion dollars in tax revenue it receives every year.

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- 8) What is your opinion of PERA, the Public Employees Retirement Association, and how much both districts and employees should pay in? Do you support employees receiving a defined benefit over a defined contribution for retirement savings? If no, please explain.**

While employees are required to make an 8.75% contribution to PERA, the employer (in the case of the school districts – the taxpayers) are making over a 20% match. For a new teacher making \$40,000 that means \$8000 is going to PERA; teachers should have some options to decide if they would like some of those dollars as take home pay so they can rent or buy a home locally. Additionally, according to the US Federal Reserve, PERA is one of the most underfunded public pension plans in the nation. And that underfunding is only going to get worse if the economy turns down, stock prices fall, and interest rates decline. As a result, to keep PERA solvent we will inevitably be faced with a hard choice between further raising employee contributions, raising employer contributions (which will require either higher taxes or spending cuts in other parts of the district budget), and/or more cuts in retiree benefits, like cost of living adjustments.

My goal is for Jeffco to substantially improve student achievement results, which will make it much easier to ask voters to increase their investment in the district, which in turn will make it much easier for us to meet these future PERA challenges. I've seen this work elsewhere, and I believe it can also work in Colorado.

- 9) What is your opinion on how often educators should be evaluated and on what criteria? Should high stakes testing play a role in educator and school evaluations? Please explain.**

Like all professional service employees, educators should have their performance evaluated every year, based on a variety of inputs. I believe these should include standardized assessments, because these enable performance to be compared across schools, districts, and states. As is the case in other professions, there are a lot of nuances when it comes to teacher performance evaluation. For example, I believe the district, which has control over far more decisions than schools, should be evaluated on the percent of students who meet or exceed proficiency standards on CMAS, the PSAT, and SAT. In contrast, schools have control over far fewer decisions, and should therefore be primarily evaluated on achievement growth. I am also well aware that a school's achievement growth reflects the efforts of a team, so our primary unit of comparison across the district and the state should be the school. I'm very open to looking at ways we can improve how we evaluate the performance of school team members. That said, experience also tells me that no performance evaluation system is ever perfect.

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- 10) What is your position on collective bargaining and whether or not educators have the right to strike? Please explain.**

I believe that educators should have the right to collectively bargain. I also believe that collective bargaining agreements should not take away fundamental management rights and constrain the ability of a school system to adapt and improve over time. As I believe in public education and the special trust that involves with the community, there are very few times I think striking is the appropriate response to differences of opinion. If teachers strike, children rarely get the opportunity to make up those learning hours.

- 11) Do you oppose the outsourcing of work done by Food Services, Transportation, Custodial, School Psychologists, Social Workers, School Nurses, etc.? If no, please explain.**

If Jeffco is to improve management of its costs, then all options including outsourcing and automation must be considered as possible management options. However, the final decision about which option to choose must weigh a range of factors, including the reliability and ability of potential vendors to provide the same high quality impact that employees provide. We must also weigh the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of the vendors to the district's needed activities.

Local Issue Questions

- 12) What are three examples of what is working well in the district? What are three examples of what is *not* working well in the district or three concerns you have for the district?**

What's working well? There are examples of successful innovation at the school level (e.g., CareerExplore at Wheat Ridge High School, The PEAK program at Pennington elementary and the Pomona Arts and Humanities program at Pomona High School). The Innovation Fund is a worthwhile initiative to further support this process. John McDonald and his team have made Jeffco a national leader in school safety and security. The school accountability process, and unified improvement plans, are a worthwhile attempt to systematically diagnose the root causes of achievement problems, identify initiatives to address them, and align spending with them.

What's not working well? Jeffco does a poor job of systematically evaluating and comparing the results of new initiatives that it undertakes. In the absence of systematic feedback, it is impossible to identify and scale up the most promising initiatives, and too many ineffective initiatives continue to waste scarce resources. This often results in staff members feeling there is a new program of the year and feeling overwhelmed with all of the new initiatives.

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While Jeffco has done an admirable job of expanding social emotional supports , there is still a lot of room to improve the way we identify and provide supports to students who are struggling. I think that addressing district shortages of psychologists and social workers is important to address these critical needs.

Finally, too many of the root causes schools have identified as needing to change have been the same for over a decade. We need schools and the district to focus on changing the root causes of achievement not improving.

13) What role, if any, should charters and innovation play in this district?

As noted above, I am a strong supporter of giving parents a wide range of choices, so that they can find a school that is the best fit for their child. This includes both charters and innovation schools, as well as district-run schools that use different approaches. All schools should have access to the best practices that are identified so that all children have access to a high quality Jeffco education.

14) In your opinion, is Site Based Budgeting (SBB) working for students and school communities? Would you be open to changes or eliminating SBB?

I am a strong supporter of site-based budgeting. Since its implementation site-based budgeting has allowed local schools to invest in the programs that best meet the needs of their students and staff. Jeffco is an incredibly diverse district and what works in one school might or might not be what parents and staff in other schools desire. Site-based budgeting has allowed for the flexibility really required to meet community needs. I am always open to changes that improve how we serve students.

15) What is your stance on combining or closing schools?

If district enrollment shrinks, we have to consider a range of facilities and other options to ensure there is sufficient funding available to deliver improving student achievement results and other programs that parents, employers, and other stakeholders highly value. Combining or closing schools should never be a surprise to communities. While there has been a two year time out on school closings, Dr. Glass has said he will again be looking at closing schools. My belief is there needs to be a very transparent and open process so that being on a closing list is never a surprise.

The district must also honor what it tells the community. For example closing Pleasant View and then moving a non-neighborhood schools into that building broke the trust of many in the Pleasant View Community. The board must constantly work to build and keep the trust of the community.

16) In the past, BOE members have met regularly with JCEA members. Are you open to and interested in hearing directly from JCEA and JESPA members? If so, what ideas do you have to ensure this happens?

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I am absolutely interested in hearing directly from JCEA and JESPA members. In addition to having members speak at public comment I would hope to have on-going conversations at the board table with all groups that have an interest in improving public education in Jeffco.

17) Do you support passing an updated policy and guideline document around ensuring safe working conditions for our LGBTQ+ employees as well as employees of color?

Jeffco needs to have policies that ensure safe working conditions for all employees. If changes are necessary I would certainly expect to hear the changes necessary and to be able to review those changes to support all employees.

18) Would you support negotiations in which JCEA members propose a stronger grievance process with binding arbitration?

As I mentioned before I believe in the principle of local control of public schools by the elected board members. Giving control of decisions over to an arbitrator seems to relinquish the responsibility of the elected board. I believe decisions should be made by the elected officials so that they can be held accountable by the community.

Campaign Questions

19) Describe your campaign plan and how you will win. Please include your plans for fundraising, how much you plan to raise, and how much you've raised so far.

I plan to reach out to all community members and seek their support for adding an Independent Voice to the Jeffco School Board. My campaign finance reports are available on-line as are those for every candidate. I encourage everyone to review the donors for each campaign.

<http://tracer.sos.colorado.gov/PublicSite/Search.aspx>

If you would like to donate to help me reach out to the community here is a link – I would appreciate your support

<https://secure.anedot.com/miller-for-jeffco-students/donate>

20) Are you seeking JCEA's recommendation? If so, how do you envision JCEA helping your campaign be successful?

I hope everyone in the community sees me as the best person for this school board position. In the spirit of transparency, I hope other candidates will share their answers to these questions.

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I look forward to folks contributing their time and treasure to help spread the word about my campaign.

Please like my Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Miller4Students/> - follow me on twitter: [@Miller4Students](#) or again please donate to help me reach out to the community. To learn more about my priorities please visit my website <https://www.millerforjeffcostudents.com/>

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