

Why our group endorsed these candidates for school board

By Clarence Burton Jr.

Guest Commentary

For too long, debate about Denver Public Schools (DPS) has been framed in a false binary: you're either "for reform" or "against reform," "pro-charter" or "anti-charter," "for the union" or "against the union." These tired labels are not only inaccurate, they obscure what actually matters: whether our children have safe, welcoming, high-quality schools that meet their needs.

This is why Denver Families for Public Schools and Denver Families Action exist: to listen to DPS parents, students, alumni, and educators; to build a plan rooted in community priorities for public education; and to create opportunity for every child in our city.

Are our children safe and supported? Are they learning at high levels? Do they have access to schools that match their potential? These are the real, urgent questions that should be at the center of this year's critical DPS school board election.

For over two years, we at Denver Families for Public Schools carried out the largest listening campaign for public education in our city's history. We knocked on the doors of more than 100,000 residents to engage with DPS parents, educators, alumni, and community members. At doorsteps across the city they told us what they need:

- A renewed focus on academics, with higher expectations for what's possible, great teachers who are paid what they deserve, and fully funded

classrooms that deliver results for all kids.

- Safe and welcoming schools, where threats are taken seriously, bullying and violence are addressed, and every child feels a sense of belonging.

- Mental health resources that meet the moment, with more counselors and community partnerships so students and educators can thrive.

- A clear, equitable public school choice system, with excellent options in every neighborhood and an enrollment process families can navigate with ease.

- Transparency and accountability, with a school board that makes decisions in the open, values every type of public school, and keeps its focus on students — not personal agendas.

We didn't just collect surveys, we acted on them. The conversations we had throughout the city became the foundation of our policy platform, one that calls for schools of every model to be held to high standards. In 2024, we hosted an Issues Assembly to share what we heard with the broader community. Parents, students, and educators came together to talk about how these issues show up in their daily lives — and through those conversations, we deepened our understanding of what families need most.

What we heard is now the foundation of how we're showing up in this year's election. In partnership with a 37-member panel of parents, teachers, school leaders, and DPS alumni, our political arm, Denver Families Action, evaluated candidates on their alignment with

the community's priorities.

This community-centered process drove our endorsements for this year's election: Alex Magaña, Mariana del Hierro, Caron Blanke, and Timiya Jackson. Through in-depth candidate surveys and face-to-face interviews with our community panel, these candidates showed they'll put DPS families ahead of politics.

For too long, families have watched dysfunction on the school board drown out their voices and stall progress. Denver can't afford another cycle of infighting and gridlock. Families deserve leaders who will do the hard work of governing — not just scoring political points. These candidates represent a break from the politics of the past and a chance to build the future families have been demanding: a school system that is transparent, accountable, equitable, and relentlessly focused on student success.

This brings us back to the choice facing Denver voters: will we remain trapped in old divisions and insider fights that leave students, families and educators behind? Or will we elect leaders who put students and families at the center of every decision?

The future of Denver's schools will be written this November. Let's make sure it's a future defined not by division, but by students thriving. That's why we're standing with Alex, Mariana, Caron, and Timiya — and we hope Denver will too.

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