

Andrea Parmenter
Restore the Balance's School Board Candidate Survey

What motivates you to run for school board?

I'm motivated by the students. My own children are successful fourth-generation graduates of Durango schools, so this work is personal - I want every student to have the opportunities they had and more. I can also see firsthand the impact of my work over the last six years on the Board of Education. Our board is among the highest-performing I've seen in Colorado or anywhere, with strict policy governance and accountability reflected in stronger student outcomes. During my time on the board we've expanded opportunities for every grade level and worked with our community to create a skills and competency roadmap called Portrait of a Graduate that is now fully engrained, successful, and shaping student learning. We've also seen favorable increases in family, staff, and student perception surveys, improved facilities, positive media coverage, and strong community support - such as two voter-approved bonds during my tenure. The momentum we've built for kids and community is real, and I want to keep it going.

What qualifications do you bring and how are you preparing to serve if elected?

I've served on the board since 2019 and held leadership roles in the District since 2008. I spearheaded the now nationally recognized student-board-member program that serves as a model for the State of Colorado. I helped navigate the district through the pandemic, hire our outstanding current superintendent, and I continue to build strong partnerships with students, families, staff and teachers. I stay prepared by engaging with educators, families, and policy experts, and by reading and following local, state, national (and even international) trends, innovations, ideas, and solutions to all matters education-related from a wide variety of reputable news sources.

Do you agree with the seven principles Restore the Balance feels should guide political conduct in Colorado? If you do not agree with one or more of these principles, please identify and explain why.

Yes, I agree. These principles reflect how I already strive to serve - leading with civility, transparency, and respect, and always keeping the focus on students and the broader community. At the school board level, modeling this kind of conduct matters because our community is holding us accountable and because how we lead and work together has a direct impact on outcomes for students.

Durango School District and its board members have been the target of misinformation campaigns and legal threats. How should the school board address controversy, misinformation, and public criticism?

To be completely honest, I find it can be really hard. It is challenging and draining to ward off and correct misinformation, but the Board has to respond with honesty, openness, and facts. That means correcting false claims, being transparent in our decision-making, and showing up in the community to listen. Meeting each controversy head on - or even getting out in front of a controversy whenever possible to be sure the facts are presented accurately is critical. We can't control every narrative, but we can model respectful dialogue and keep our focus where it belongs - on students and their success. In doing so, we are modeling "keeping trust in public institutions," which is central to our work as elected leaders. I find the path to staying resilient and not being distracted by lies, rhetoric, and attempts to inject partisan politics into our governance is to stay grounded in the mission of serving kids.

What does "common ground" mean to you in the context of board decision-making?

Common ground means starting from what we all support - safe, strong schools where every student can learn and succeed. When students are the focus, the noise falls away. And when every board member is committed to governing and upholding the mission of Durango School District, the common ground is plain to see.

If elected, how will you listen to and represent the concerns of constituents who don't agree with you?

I already do as a matter of best practices learned over my years working as a leader in this district. I listen to parents and community members formally in meetings and informally in daily life, and I take what I hear into account. Listening doesn't mean agreeing with every perspective, but it does mean engaging respectfully and making decisions guided always by what benefits students while being mindful of what does NOT benefit students (such as catering to partisan political agendas which have no place in my work in this role).

What are the top two to three issues facing Colorado and briefly how do you plan to address these issues if elected?

1. Funding. We all know Colorado ranks near the bottom nationally in per-pupil funding. I will keep pressing for stable, adequate funding and will engage our district's teachers and staff in this effort regionally and statewide. We have to make some serious noise to increase the budget so we can truly support and retain the phenomenal people who make our schools work.

2. Educational equity. This is a statewide challenge, especially in rural districts like ours where access to opportunities and resources can lag behind urban areas and where our state Board of Education is mostly made up of front range urban representation. I will keep pushing to close these gaps so that where a student lives does not determine what opportunities they have.
3. Student well-being and agency. Students have told us repeatedly that mental health is their top concern. I am working with 5 young leaders just starting their term on the school board for the 25-26 school year and every single one of them stated their biggest challenge was handling what is on their plates with all the mental and emotional stress they feel from all directions, all the time. Teaching these kids that they have agency - giving them a voice, and showing them how to use it to advocate for their needs will make us stronger as a state and help ensure their well-being and success.