

# Susana Cordova

October 1, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my interest in the position of Superintendent of the Denver Public Schools. There are many reasons why I am interested in this role; overwhelmingly, I believe that I am the right person for our district at this time and that I have been preparing for such a position my entire career.

I am a life-long resident of Denver and a graduate of the Denver Public Schools. As a first generation college-graduate, I deeply understand the importance of education and the essential role that our schools play in creating opportunities for all students. Both of my parents spoke Spanish as their first language; my father did not graduate from high school; my mother did not attend college. When I look back on my life, I know that several important educators in DPS made the difference for me. My school experiences prepared me for a world that my family had never stepped foot in and that I had only read about in books. I am committed to ensuring that all students in DPS have caring, knowledgeable adults who will support them as I was supported and who will create the systems and structures to prepare them for their future.

I have worked at all levels of our educational system: as a bilingual secondary teacher in both middle school and high school; as an elementary school principal; in the central office supporting teachers, leaders and academic support teams; and in the cabinet for many years as well as in the role of acting superintendent. This diversity of experience has afforded me the opportunity to learn in-depth where we have strengths, challenges and how I would go about the work of accelerating the achievement of our students. I will bring this wealth of information with me into the superintendent position.

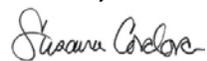
Throughout my career, I have dedicated myself to closing the achievement gap; the body of work that I am proudest of is the work I led to redesign English language acquisition services in DPS. This work resulted in a redesigned federal consent decree, but even more importantly, it was how I led the team to establish the vision of embracing bilingualism and bi-literacy districtwide. Prior to this time, DPS had sought to limit the ELA program as an “intrusion” into the services we offer to our students who are learning English. Instead, I seized the opportunity to overhaul all aspects of our program. We revised how teachers are trained and inducted into DPS; changed the way we provided data on the progress of English learners to schools; revised training requirements for school leaders and teachers; and built inclusive systems throughout DPS, including teacher evaluation, professional learning, student data tracking, HR monitoring of teacher qualifications. I worked to include our charter schools into the redesigned program so that all teachers, both in district schools and charters, now must be fully qualified to work with English learners. This vision—that we all must embrace the responsibility for the way English learners are taught and for their outcomes—is now part of our district culture. All teachers now complete training in language acquisition and all departments include supports for English learners in the design of their work. As a result, the academic outcomes for English learners have dramatically improved. Prior to 2010, when we started the redesign of services, English learners in DPS were below the state average (5% below the state in both Reading and Math on the state TCAP assessment); in the most recent year, English Learners have outperformed their peers in Colorado by an average of 6.5% points on CMAS in both ELA and Math. Furthermore, we have reduced the number of families waiving English Language Acquisition services, which is critically important, as our own data shows that students receiving English Language Acquisition services are more likely to be on track to acquire English. Prior to 2010, over 20% of families waived services. This number is now around 3%. Of great pride for me is that for our ELA-S and Dual Language students, 68% are considered on track to learn English. I know that we still need to accelerate improvements but I am very proud of the work that has resulted in these gains.

I have also worked to establish support systems for our lowest performing school. Starting in 2015, we began working with the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education School Turnaround Program. Through the development of a new approach to supporting the most struggling schools, we have been able to invest in the leadership at these sites, provide more targeted supports from all district central support teams and create a space where each school's needed improvements have the opportunity to take root and accelerate student performance. We have seen that the schools in our Intensive and Strategic tiers of turnaround are more than doubling the gains of the district average improvement, both in increases in status and improvements to the schools' growth scores. This is critically important, given that the schools engaged in turnaround are starting at a significantly lower level and must rapidly improve to help their students catch up. This is hard work and must be supported over time and we continue to work closely with the teachers, leaders and community members in these schools to ensure that their improvement continues to grow at an accelerated pace.

Furthermore, I am well positioned to be the superintendent of DPS because of my commitment to working with the community in an authentic manner. Parents and families are essential in our quest for increased student achievement and I believe that we must work as allies to support all students in their learning. At this time in our city, there are polarized beliefs that have made the work more complicated, not less. As a leader of color, I share the urgency to improve that motivates our critics and I believe that I can help bring people together both inside the district and in the community to help us achieve our ambitious goals. We need to be able to set a new tone for our engagement and provide opportunities for diverse perspectives to be heard. I know that large institutions are hard to change and that when we hear push back, rather than seeking to stifle it, it is an indication that we need to listen for both the common goals that connect us as well as the criticisms that are rooted in truth. When I first became an elementary school principal, my school was one of the lowest performing schools in Denver. Parents were unhappy and students were not being served well. I knew it would be critical for me to be able to work closely with my teachers and the community to create a new environment for learning to occur. I worked to listen and hear both what people were saying as well as what they meant, so that I could create a new context for real engagement to happen. I sought out the most vocal critics of our school to hear their concerns and begin to address them as we worked on our school improvement plan. Over the four years that I was principal, I was able to create a large and active parent group with an average of 50-60 parents participating on a monthly basis, representing close to 20% of the school. I was able to create an active and functioning Collaborative School Committee to help make critical decisions for the school improvement plan. And I was able to lead improvement to the academic program that resulted in a 20 point increase on the Colorado Student Assessment Program in both reading and writing. Bringing people together doesn't mean that everyone will always agree, but I believe that we need to be able to find our common goals and propose third way solutions that will bring our community together. My deep roots in the community, my relationships with our teachers and leaders and my willingness to listen are hallmarks of who I am as a leader and I will strive to create a culture where we all engage with authenticity and where collaboration is the common expectation.

Thank you for your consideration of my application to be the Superintendent of the Denver Public Schools. I am deeply committed to the success of our students and their schools and I look forward to engaging in this process.

Sincerely,



Susana Cordova

## **EDUCATION**

- **Future Chief**, Chiefs for Change 2017
- **Cohort V Member**, Superintendent Leadership Academy, Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, 2015-2017
- **Master of Education**, University of Colorado-Denver, 2000
- **Spanish Studies**, La Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara and Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura Oaxaca S.C.
- **Bachelor of Arts, English/French**, University of Denver, 1988

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Deputy Superintendent**

Denver Public Schools

July 2016-Present

Provide executive level leadership for Colorado's largest school district, serving over 92,000 students, 207 schools, over 15,000 employees and direct supervision of 165 schools, all central academic departments and a budget of over \$89,000,000

- Increased the K-3 reading outcomes of on Read Act from 39% to 45% on the aimline from 2016-2018 and by 6% on Grade 3 Colorado Measures of Academic Success English Language Arts and the Colorado Spanish Language Assessment
- Increased the number of graduates from 2016-3,633 into approximately 2018-4,800 (final results pending verification); 2017 verified 4 year graduation rate of 66.6%, (2018 results pending)
- Increased the number of students passing Advanced Placement from 7,233 in 2016 to 9,121 in 2018 while increasing the pass rate to 49.3% (scores at 3-4-5)
- Increased the Concurrent Enrollment courses passed from 2016- 8,004 courses to 2018- 9,942 courses while maintaining a pass rate of over 85%
- Increased the number of IB exams from 194 in 2016 to 283 in 2018 while maintaining a pass rate over 70%
- Decreased the students needing remediation to from 50% in 2016 to 41% in 2018
- Increased CMAS Meets/Exceeds Expectations scores between 2016-2018: English Language Arts-5%; Colorado Spanish Language Arts Assessment- 6%; Math-3.4%
- Increased Black/Latino CMAS Meets/Exceeds from 2016-2018 by 5% in Literacy and 2% in Math
- Decreased suspensions/expulsions year over year, from 4,871 (5.3%) in 2015-16 to 3,990 (4.3%) in 2017-18
- Developed a strong principal pipeline; reduced principal turnover; and increased recruitment of diverse leaders; in 2018, 20/21 principal hires are internal candidates and 33% are diverse
- Increased Teacher Leadership and Collaboration from 8 schools to 165 district managed schools with over 500 Teacher Leaders and Senior Team Leads supporting and evaluating small teams of teachers
- 9/10 direct report team rated me "Overall is an effective leader" on 2016 Collaborate 360 Feedback Survey

## **Acting Superintendent**

Denver Public Schools

January 2016-July 2016

Executive leader of Colorado's largest district for 7 months during superintendent sabbatical

- Developed an approved budget of \$929,000,000
- Supported the design of the first district approved Innovation Zone through collaborative process with the Luminary Learning Network
- Sponsored the publication of Dr. Sharon Bailey's report on the experiences of African American Educators and Students, which led to the creation of the African American Equity Taskforce
- Hired 27 principals, 88% from internal pipelines and 44% of whom were diverse candidate
- Led a collaborative goal setting process for all district teams

## **Chief Schools Officer**

Denver Public Schools

July 2014-December 2015

Provided executive leadership for 165 district managed and innovation schools, Instructional Superintendents, and Tiered Supports team

- Increased graduation rates from 62.8% in 2013-14 to 67.2% in 2015-16
- Decreased drop-out rate from 4.5% in 2013-14 to 4.0% in 2015-16
- Decreased out of school suspensions from 6,328 (7.2%) in 2013-14 to 5,356 (5.9%) in 2014-15
- Secured state grant funding for Intensive Tier schools, resulting in 6 schools increasing 2 or more colors on the School Performance Framework (Red to Yellow, Red to Green, Orange to Green)
- Designed strategy to intervene in struggling schools sooner, including using a Year Zero approach to support greater community engagement in school turnaround design for 5 schools
- Led school and community sessions to support the School Performance Compact and school improvement efforts
- Designed tracking system to support schools in monitoring student achievement during the school year
- Led school implementation of flexibilities, including supporting the selection of curriculum, assessments and professional development aligning school plans and identified student needs

## **Chief Academic Officer**

Denver Public Schools

July 2010-June 2014

Led the creation of academic strategies for all central departments, including Curriculum and Instruction; English Language Acquisition; Accountability, Research and Evaluation; Teacher Leadership and Learning; Principal Effectiveness; and Interdisciplinary Learning

- Successfully launched LEAP and LEAD, the systems of educator effectiveness with supports for over 4,800 teachers and specialized service providers as well as 350 school leaders.
- Revised and updated the federally approved English Language Acquisition Consent Decree, outlining district and charter services to English learners
- Secured \$3,000,000 in grant funding to launch the ELA Summer Academy, serving 3,000 students and providing new teachers to DPS training in English language acquisition strategies

- Secured a federal i3 Validation Grant of \$30,000,000 to implement Collaborative Strategic Reading in all middle school classrooms
- Led the creation of the Teacher Leadership Academy with a focus on implementing the Common Core State Standards for culturally and linguistically diverse learners; recruited over 400 teacher leaders to support school-based, job embedded professional learning

### **Director and Executive Director, Teaching and Learning**

Denver Public Schools

July 2002-June 2010

Directed the teams of Literacy, Mathematics, English Language Acquisition, Early Education, Social Studies and World Languages

- Created CORE Matters Literacy, a 2 year initiative for 25 school teams of principals and teacher leaders focused on intensive strategies and school-wide implementation of best practices in literacy instruction and data analysis; and CORE Matters Mathematics, targeting all teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> grade algebra
- Designed and developed Literacy Planning Guides for grades ECE-9<sup>th</sup> grade, consisting of 150 daily lessons for each grade for whole group, small group and individualized instruction
- Initiated first district-wide literacy program using the readers'-writers' workshop model, hiring and training over 200 literacy coaches at all grade levels
- Supported the adoption and redesign of all content areas and grade level resources aligned to the new state standards
- Led the adoption of 2010 Graduation Requirements Policy
- Worked on the creation of Denver Public Schools Benchmark Assessments
- Participated in many district level committees, including the Denver Plan Committee, the ELA Advisory Workgroup, Culturally Competency Advisory Workgroup, ProComp Operations Team, and Teacher and Principal Portal Working Group

### **Principal, Remington Elementary School**

Denver Public Schools

1998-2002

Leader of an inner-city elementary school with 350 students, 90% diverse learners and 95% Free/Reduced Lunch rate

- Increased student performance on the state assessment by an average of 20 percentage points over three years
- Led the staff through an internal transformation by participating in a school-wide Title I initiative, The Collaborative Literacy Project, focused on rigorous literacy instruction in English and Spanish
- Instituted school wide approach to discipline and character education, resulting in decreased discipline referrals and more time on task for students and teachers
- Created numerous systems for increased distributed leadership and participation, including parent education, parent council, teacher committees, student conflict managers and an active student council
- Worked on data analysis with teams of educators resulting in student achievement increases and increased staff retention.
- Secured grant funding to secure teacher and student computers

## **ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Assistant Principal, Bryant Webster Elementary School**  
Denver Public Schools 1997-1998

**Adjunct Faculty**  
School of Education, University of Denver, University of Colorado, Denver 2006-2010

**Teacher: Bilingual Language Arts (English/Spanish), Drama, Social Studies, grades 6-11**  
Denver Public Schools 1989-1997

## **AWARDS AND HONORS**

- EdWeek *Leader to Learn From*, 2018
- Honorary Doctorate, University of Denver, 2017
- Inaugural inductee, Latino Leadership Initiative Hall of Fame 2016
- Top 25 Most Powerful Women Award Winner, Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce, 2016
- Latino Educator Champion of Change Award Winner, White House Initiative 2014
- Latina's First Inaugural Trailblazer Award Winner, 2012
- Colorado Association of Bilingual Educators Board President's Award recipient, 2011
- Thanks to Teachers Awardee, 1994

## **BOARDS AND COMMUNITY AFFILIATIONS**

- Illuminate Education Advisory Board
- Center for Applied Linguistics Board of Trustees
- City Year Denver Board of Directors
- Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents National Board Director
- The Children's Museum of Denver
- The Harmony Project
- The Denver Public Library Commission