



A Union of Professionals

801 S. Perry Street, Suite 140
Castle Rock, CO 80104
303-688-3381 Fax: 303-688-1039

AFL/CIO #2265
DCFT.net

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To Whom It May Concern:

The Douglas County Federation is alarmed at the misinformation being disseminated in newspapers, letters to the editor, editorial boards, and from Douglas County Republican Party Chair John Ransom concerning this year's school board election. We would like to take this opportunity to share a little about our organization, to explain the rationale behind our endorsements, and to explain some misconceptions.

The Douglas County Federation is made up of 3,200 teachers, educational assistants, nutrition service providers, secretaries, custodians, grounds workers, industrial tradesmen, and security guards. We are the real people working for the taxpayers of Douglas County, providing our students with a quality education and a safe learning environment.

Politically, our membership is made up of almost equal numbers of registered Republicans and Democrats with the remaining portion of our membership being unaffiliated. Due to the composition of our membership, the Douglas County Federation has intentionally chosen not to participate in partisan politics. However, we have long taken an active role in supporting school board candidates we feel have the best intentions for the students of our district, and who are willing to engage school employees in decisions directly affecting us.

The Douglas County Federation invited all candidates to participate in a forum on August 31. Seven of the eight school board candidates were in attendance. At this forum, it became overwhelmingly obvious to the educators and other staff in attendance which candidates were most knowledgeable about and committed to our school district. The DCF Executive Boards made their final endorsements on September 7th based on member responses to this forum. The DCF Executive Boards, consisting of registered Republicans, Democrats and unaffiliated voters, voted unanimously to endorse and support these four candidates.

The severe budget constraints facing our state and district right now should be the focus of all of the candidates running for school board. The students of this district deserve to be represented by board members who are knowledgeable about and concerned with the increased class sizes; reduced spending on Special Education, Gifted and Talented programs, elementary band and orchestra, and literacy and math support for classroom teachers; and other changes resulting from \$53 million in cuts over the last two years. The candidates we have endorsed are extremely knowledgeable about the current state of the budget, what cuts have been made already, and the impacts of these cuts. They are Sue Catterall, Kevin Leung, Kristine Turner and Emily Hansen.

In July of this year, John Ransom, as the Douglas County Republican Party Chair, endorsed four candidates even though school board races are nonpartisan. These candidates currently refer to themselves as the "reform" candidates. These reform candidates have repeatedly made statements indicating a complete lack of knowledge about our district and its current situation. We would like to take this opportunity to address some of these statements:

Site-based budgeting: Two of the reform candidates have called for site-based budgeting to be instituted in the district. However, this is a system that has already been in place since the end of last year. Moving to site-based budgeting was in reaction to the budget problems and may have helped save money. However, our concern comes from the fact that these two candidates apparently are unaware this change has already been made.

Pay for Performance (PFP): The reform candidates have repeatedly mentioned the need for Pay for Performance in the district. However, PFP has been in place in our district since the mid 1990's. We are nationally recognized as having one of the most successful, long-running PFP plans in the country. Our plan has taken funding hits over the last two years due to budget constraints, but is still in existence and still very successful.

Transportation cuts and budget projections: Two of the candidates at the Legend High School Forum on October 14th, mentioned their intention to immediately reinstate the cuts that have been made to transportation due to the budget shortfall, if elected. This concerns us, as it shows a complete lack of understanding of the current Douglas County School District budget. The \$18 million transportation budget for the district was cut by \$2.2 million at the end of last year, as a portion of the \$53 million in cuts over the last two years. It is expected that in January the state will take back 1.93%, which is \$7.7 million. Additionally, DCSD will "own" 8% of any additional reductions the state has to make to K-12 funding to balance its own budget. Can we afford to face these types of massive budget cuts with board members who are already making promises they cannot keep?

The "teacher's union" wants to raise taxes only to benefit its members: The reform candidates have gone on two radio talk shows where the radio show hosts, one of them being 850 KOA's Mike Rosen, stated that the teachers' union wants to raise taxes in order to benefit its members. Our members are teachers, secretaries, building engineers, and educational assistants who work every day with the students of Douglas County because they want to, not because of their high salaries. No educator goes into this line of work with any illusions of making a lot of money. Our members want to see a Bond and Budget Election proposed and passed because they know how important it is for the long-term success of our district and the future of our students. Our teachers and staff have been presented with a salary freeze this year because of the budget constraints. They accepted a change in their health care plan at the end of last year because of budget constraints. They have done these things with the understanding that if the staff doesn't take the hit - the students will!

We believe the candidates we have endorsed are to be commended for their exceptional commitment to the students of DCSD and will hold themselves, and the district, accountable to taxpayers while making sure Douglas County School District will remain successful and globally competitive.

Thank you,
The Douglas County Federation
303-688-3381