

BVSDwatch Questionnaire for School Board Candidates

Please answer all of the following questions regarding important issues currently facing the BVSD School Board:

What changes would you advocate to

- a) Make the Board of Education a more responsive and accountable body, and
- b) to improve community participation in school board meetings?

I plan to listen and respond to community input, which I think is very important. While I think that community participation in school board meetings is important, I would also work to increase community impact in other areas such as School Improvement Teams, school PTAs or PTOs and on District Wide Committees such as Parent Council and the District Accountability Committee. There is always a need for public participation on such committees. I would also recommend having translators available at public meetings. I think that the new practice of making videos of board meetings on line is a big improvement and should be continued.

Tell us your views on the pros and cons of small, neighborhood schools vs. larger schools with more grade levels.

I think the District should work operate schools at an optimal size which allows the schools to offer a variety of programs to students but can still maintain a personal touch. If a school is too small, the student may not be able to find a niche; if it is too large and the student might get lost in the crowd.

What measures do you favor the board using to hold the Superintendent and his or her staff accountable?

The school board should create goals for the Superintendent and it should review those goals at least on a yearly basis, if not more often.

Tell us your opinion on the state of teachers' salaries. Do you think raising teachers' salaries should be a priority for BVSD?

BVSD should make it a priority to keep teacher salaries competitive with other, comparable Colorado school districts. But it takes more than just salaries to attract and keep high quality teachers. BVSD should also pay attention to such things as mentoring programs for young teachers, and ongoing professional development opportunities for all teachers. I would also support the adoption of a professional pay scale which would encourage teachers to improve their skills. I would however, oppose any merit pay system which compensated teachers solely on the basis of student test scores.

It is the considered opinion of many, including BVSDWatch, that the Information/Technology department suffers from poor management, bloated budgets, and a complete lack of oversight. How would you address this problem?

We are fortunate to have an abundance of talent and knowledge about technology in our community. I would encourage the district to draw on that expertise and would certainly be willing to take input from the community in this area.

Jennie Belval Response to BVSDwatch Questions

The following questions are optional, and listed by category. They reflect other issues facing our school district, and the board. Feel free to answer any or all of them, especially if they touch on issues that are of particular importance to you in your campaign:

General:

What do you think are the most important issues facing the BVSD board at this time? Why?

BVSD needs to address the learning needs of all students. The district needs to address the achievement gap, while at the same time making sure that our higher end students also experience academic growth and challenge. The district can do this by looking carefully at available data to determine its strengths and weaknesses. It should expand programs that are working and be willing to adopt ideas from outside our district when those ideas have shown success.

BVSD should work collaboratively with educators and the community to make scarce educational dollars go as far as possible, so that any future budget shortfalls have minimal impact on the quality of education available in the district. This means settling the teacher contract impasse. It also means continuing to find meaningful ways to use community input and to take advantage of community resources where they are available.

BVSD must develop cutting edge uses for technology in the classroom. Through the generosity of the voters, BVSD has updated technology in the schools; now it's time to put that technology to work.

BVSD needs to improve relations with its teachers. Once the current contract impasse is settled teachers and administration must find ways to work together for the good of students.

What do you see as your greatest strengths, and what positive additions can you bring to this board?

My greatest strengths are my years of experience in the district as parent, educator and volunteer. Education Advisor at Aspen Creek since 2001. I am a good listener and hear all sides of an issue before I make a decision. I keep informed about education and finance issues which would affect our schools and children.

Have you done volunteer work in BVSD schools? Please describe that work.

I have sixteen years of experience as a parent, educator and volunteer in the district. I have been the Talented and Gifted Coordinator at Aspen Creek K-8 since 2001 and am currently the chair of the Citizens Bond Oversight Committee. Over the years my volunteer work with the district has also included PTO President, School Improvement team chair, and classroom volunteer. Additionally, I have worked at the district level as District Accountability Representative, New Century Graduate Steering Committee member, Capitol Improvements Planning Committee member and current Citizen's Bond Oversight Committee Chair. I am very proud to have received the Heart of Broomfield Award in Education in 2004.

Student Achievement:

Please describe how you would recommend affecting positive changes in student achievement, and in closing the achievement gap.

Jennie Belval Response to BVSDwatch Questions

What is the most appropriate way to meet the needs of the increasing number of English language learners in our schools?

This answer is directed to both of the preceding questions..The district should meet those needs using research based strategies which build on successful programs both within and outside of our district. It should expect all of its students to be able to achieve at high levels. I would also support programs that encourage parental involvement: studies have shown that parental involvement is key to student success.

Superintendent:

What do you think are the primary responsibilities of school board members, and how do they differ from those of the Superintendent

The School Board sets policy for the district. That policy should reflect community values and should be oriented towards providing and excellent education for all students. It is the job of the Superintendent and his staff to carry out that policy.

Responsiveness to the Community:

How would you approach your relationship with BVSDwatch? Describe what you see as the role of BVSDwatch with respect to the board and the district?

The members of BVSDwatch can provide valuable insights which I would welcome.

Teachers:

What policies and programs would you advocate to assure teachers a wide enough range of gainful employment, post secondary education and training or both?

The proposed professional pay scale, if implemented, would encourage continuing professional development for teachers. The district should also continue to work with teachers to provide mentoring for new teachers and ongoing quality professional development during school in-service days. The district recently partnered with the University of Denver to provide reduced tuition for teachers who wanted to pursue and endorsement in Gifted Education; I would support expanding such partnerships.

Bond Accountability:

Would you recommend substantial changes in the School Facilities Master Plan? If so, what would those changes be?

I am very proud of the Facilities Master Plan, which as a member of the Capital Improvements Planning Committee I helped to create. However, it is now several years old and should be updated once the current bond projects are completed.

How would you deal with bond overruns, especially when it comes to cutting a school's budget and/or transferring funds to another school, as well as how to manage any bond proceeds surpluses?

As chair of the Citizen's Bond Oversight Committee I am happy to report that district staff currently anticipates that all bond work will be completed within budget, and indeed that there will probably be some funds left to address unfunded items in the current School Facilities Master Plan.

CSAPS:

Jennie Belval Response to BVSDwatch Questions

12. A vocal group of citizens has come out strongly opposed to CSAPS. Do you believe that problems with CSAP are only perceptual, or are there substantive changes with the tests and their implementation that you would support?

Schools need to be accountable and they need to offer some kind of assessment of their students' progress. CSAP tests can provide helpful information for schools as they work with students and assess their areas of strength and weakness. However, CSAP data should not be the only measure of student achievement or of school performance, and I am opposed to the use of CSAP to punish low performing schools. I am cautiously optimistic that the new growth model will offer better information about student growth.

Even with the new growth model there are improvements that could be made to the current system of administering CSAP. First, is the issue of timing. Administering the test in March, while there are still more than 2 months of school ahead is highly disruptive, and doesn't take into account what students may learn in the remaining portion of the school year. I would prefer to see the tests administered closer to the end of the school year. Second, I would like to see more flexibility in which tests get administered. I know from my work with very high ability students that the grade level CSAPs are not a good measure of student achievement or growth for many of these students-a better measure would be an above grade level test. It is possible that administering a below grade level test might provide valuable information for students at the other end of the spectrum: the grade level CSAP tells us where they aren't; perhaps another test would tell us where they are. Finally, and with respect to low performing schools with high student turnover, it is grossly unfair to hold schools accountable for student performance on the CSAP when many of those students have only been at the testing school for a very short while.
