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# Opinion: Resign, recall and the November election. Hold Denver school board members accountable

Parents have had enough of the dysfunctional management and utter disregard for transparency



Denver Public Schools Superintendent Alex Marrero, left, and Board of Education President Xochitl 'Sochi' Gaytan, podium, during a press conference after the board ended its executive meeting at DPS headquarters March 23, 2023. The school board went into executive session to discuss reinstating school resource officers into area schools and other concerns about Wednesday's shooting at Denver East High School. (Photo by Andy Cross/The Denver Post)

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In the aftermath of another school shooting, the Denver Public School Board has demonstrated that they do not possess the judgment necessary to keep our children in a safe learning environment.

Board members have yet to apologize for their decision to remove school resource officers from Denver schools without a backup plan, ultimately endangering students and staff.

What the board members have done since the East High School shooting, however, is evidence of their dysfunctional management and an utter disregard for transparency.

Steve Zansberg, a well-respected First Amendment attorney and president of the Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition, recently charged the Board with violating Colorado's open meeting laws, after the Board deliberated secretly in a closed executive session for more than five hours before emerging and reading aloud from portions of a new memo reversing course and placing school resource officers back in some schools. The Board voted unanimously to adopt the change of position without any public discussion.

Colorado law requires the DPS Board to discuss public business or to take formal action in meetings that are open to the public. Instead, it appears that the Board members hid their deliberations from the public. As a result, relevant portions of the executive session should now be made public.

Further exacerbating the public's distrust, is DPS's well-documented lack of transparency.

DPS doesn't notify parents when a weapon is confiscated in their children's school or if there is a lockdown, lockout, or other credible safety concern posed at or near the school. Parents have a right to be timely notified about these issues and the data should be widely available and published contemporaneously on their website too.

Remarkably, the District neither collects nor tracks the following critical information from its 207 schools: the number of students subject to pat-down protocols or the number of students on safety plans.

One would logically think DPS would actually want to obtain and track all of this data as it informs decision-making and is a critical measure to keep students safe. This is more than just a critique of their disingenuous management practice. In recent weeks, we have seen principals speak up as de facto whistleblowers about their safety concerns.

How much longer can we allow this to go on and think we can recruit and retain great principals, teachers, and staff?

If you want information from DPS, you will have to spend money and send them a formal request for information under the Colorado Open Records Act, fondly known as CORA.

Even then, DPS administration won't make it easy.

DPS refused to make public photographs of guns confiscated by the district. Stacy Wheeler, DPS open records coordinator, has decided for you that the photographs don't add "anything meaningful to the public discourse" and, "only serves to undermine confidence in Denver Public Schools." That last part is laughable, there is no confidence left to undermine.

I spoke to a DPS parent on the condition of anonymity, who submitted a CORA request asking how many students were on a safety plan or are in a pat-down safety protocol. Because DPS didn't collect that data, the parent was required to send CORA requests at his own expense, to 28 of the 207 Denver schools to obtain that information.

How much longer will we allow DPS administration and board members to be unaccountable and play hide the ball from parents, students, and taxpayers alike?

And, while all that was being hidden from you, the dysfunctional Board swatted away Board President Xochitl "Sochi" Gaytan's efforts to publicly censure Vice President Auon'tai Anderson for violating board policies after the East High School shooting. The Board was collectively heard saying, "nothing to see here move along" as they voted 6-1 to remove the item from their agenda. Anderson was previously publicly censured in 2021 after an investigation concluded he had flirted online with a 16-year-old student before knowing her age and made coercive and intimidating social media posts.

Parents have reached a tipping point.

A newly formed group of DPS parents created Parents-Safety Advocacy Group or P-SAG, which already has 950 members, is demanding that DPS provide more data and transparency to keep DPS students safe.

Meanwhile, Heather Lamm, along with a diverse group of parents from across the city, started a Resign DPS Board petition campaign, which [you can find online](#), that calls for the removal of all 7 DPS Board members. Lamm, the mother of a senior at East High, believes that the shooting, "could have been and should have been avoided if the Board was listening to its own leaders".

Only three of the seven Board seats are up this November and some interesting potential candidates, like Kwame Spearman, have begun to emerge. Spearman recently stepped down from his role as CEO of Tattered Cover.

However, winning these three seats would not give the new members a majority. To gain the majority, another member would need to resign. Otherwise, parents and the community could run recall elections to remove one or more of the remaining members.

As for me, I support an all-of-the-above campaign. For our children’s sake, it’s time to hold this board accountable.

*Doug Friednash grew up in Denver and is a partner with the law firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber and Schreck. He is the former chief of staff for Gov. John Hickenlooper.*

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