

Theresa Shelton
Jefferson County School Board Candidate, District 2
September 17, 2021

1. What has been your role(s) in supporting our JeffCo Public Schools in the past 5 years?

My husband and I have three children, one of whom graduated from Golden High School in 2016, and twin daughters who just started 6th grade at a Jeffco Middle School. Given the age range of our children, my role supporting Jeffco schools the last five years has ranged from volunteering at High School After Prom parties to planning classroom Halloween and Valentine's Day parties. I have also been integrally involved in our Elementary School PTSA the last five years, served as PTSA Treasurer raising a record amount of money that funded our school's technology budget, and chaired our School Accountability Committee the last two years. I have become intimately familiar with how a school's budget is prepared and have worked my way up the "financial ladder," most recently spending a significant amount of time analyzing District financial information in order to provide reasonable and effective feedback as part of the District's process this past year to engage the community more broadly in the 2021-2022 budgeting process.

2. How will you know you are successful at the end of your term? What is your top goal?

My top goal as a board member in four years would be to have significantly increased community engagement while simultaneously providing more transparency in the District's financial reporting and overall governance. Because of this huge increase in community engagement, I also see a future where District staff are presenting academic achievement results at the September 2025 board meeting with a graph showing the percentage of learners meeting or exceeding grade level expectations in both English Language Arts and Math trending meaningfully upward. I also see a billion-dollar budget reallocated to focus more spending on the classrooms. And I see a level of trust between school staff, parents and community members that demonstrates we are once again united in the mission of making Jeffco a top-performing District. Our children deserve to learn the basics. We all know it is possible. Jeffco has been there before.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous challenges for our schools. What can we do to meet the educational, emotional and social needs of our students during the pandemic?

First and foremost, as a mom of two 6th graders, I know what is most important for children is having the option of being in-school, in-person, 100% of the time and participating in extracurricular activities. I also appreciate Jeffco adapting to parent-choice by offering the Jeffco Remote Learning Program for those families who believe the remote learning model is what works best for their individual child. We, all of us, are so much more educated and informed on what COVID means since our schools first closed in March 2020. We now have routine cleaning and even more often deep cleaning, frequent hand washing and hand sanitizer on every table you see, and updated air filtration systems. We also live in a community where over 75% of Jeffco residents are vaccinated against COVID. We need

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to continue these practices to ensure we have a low risk of transmission for staff and students.

It is also now apparent through recently released testing data that students learned less last year than in previous years. In fact, 55% of Jeffco's 3rd graders are testing below grade level expectations in English Language Arts. Research shows the best strategy to improve achievement is to provide small group instruction and to offer more hours of instruction. We must invest some of the millions of dollars in new Federal ESSER funds received into programs that are proven to work.

We also must not forget that Children's Hospital declared a Mental Health State of Emergency in Colorado in May 2021 because of the skyrocketing number of youth requiring hospitalization for mental health concerns. While the morning routine for many parents now includes asking our children if they have their masks as they walk out the door, we also silently wonder if the rash under that mask will ever clear up. Or if they will ever look adults in the eyes again. Or how our youngest learners will learn how to form their mouth to make the proper phonetic sounds. I am a CPA, not a medical or mental health professional. But we have to ask ourselves what level of negative social and emotional impacts can be tolerated, and we should clearly understand from both mental health and medical professionals what incremental protections are being realized as a result of additional mandates. I commit as a Jeffco School Board member to fight for our children's social and emotional needs as well as educational needs.

4. Our history is a dramatic story. How would you ensure a more accurate and dynamic teaching of our history?

As mentioned in the opening, I have three children who attended or are still attending Jeffco schools, and each have experienced some very thoughtful and engaging history and social studies lessons taught by amazing teachers. One example that still stands out is the elementary school Colorado History unit, which both our daughters and son truly enjoyed, even a decade apart. Touring the Denver Mint and State Capitol gave them new insights on this state they call home. And creating a "wax museum" with their classmates and teachers for parents to visit at night was an engaging way of learning more about an historical Colorado figure of their choice and retelling that story while dressed in full costume.

Other parents may have different experiences and may believe that history as being taught currently in the schools is not accurate or dynamic enough. If there was a community consensus that indicated a "more accurate and dynamic teaching of our history" was necessary, I am supportive of policies and procedures to ensure robust community conversations, a solid vetting of curriculum and a process of approving new resources. Meaningful changes in any curriculum must follow the District approved process (District policies IJ), and the robustness and transparency of that process is what should reveal what changes should be made. That policy ensures that students, parents, teachers and staff are engaged in the process. If a board listened only to parents and families, they would be missing out on the subject matter expertise found in our amazing team of educators. But if they listen only to staff or administrators, they run the risk of overriding the voices of students, parents and families in the community. My years of governance experience have taught me to strive to hear what so many say in silence, be thoughtful and not overreact to what a few might scream so loudly, and to do what I can to ensure collaborative and constructive conversations surround any curriculum changes under the Board's purview, with an emphasis on transparency and a focus on doing what is best for students.

5. In your view, does “school choice” (including choice enrollment, magnet schools and charter schools) contribute to segregating our schools and make it more difficult to meet the needs of all of our students? How would you address this issue?

I know from raising three children that the needs of every child differ; our son certainly had a different learning style from our twin daughters, and even the girls have different needs. We are lucky that Jeffco offers public charters, options, and neighborhood schools. The data tells us that these choices are helping to desegregate our schools. If students were required to attend the schools within their district boundaries the student populations across schools would be more segregated than it is today. What is important is that neighborhood, option and charter schools are all respected as alternatives for Jeffco students. Parents know what learning models work best for their kids, and the variety of options available in Jeffco can further enhance a student’s experience. As a Board member, I will continue to support great choices for Jeffco families and to implement processes to mitigate actual or perceived biases for one learning option over another.

6. What is your position on Tax Credits, ESAs, and Vouchers/Choice Scholarships. Would you support legislation to implement any of these policies in Colorado?

I am the product of public schools and an avid public-school advocate. I grew up bunching radishes on a vegetable farm just outside of Denver, and it is my public education that helped me exchange the radish fields for a college degree and pursue a career of my dreams. I will continue to support public education, but have learned from my career in finance and through board service that further responses to broad questions such as the above would be at best incomplete as the context of any specific proposal would need to be included to evaluate a thoughtful position and response.

7. In 2017 five schools were suddenly put on the chopping block for closure, traumatizing those school communities that had primarily more diverse, lower income and higher need students. This past year a school was suddenly closed with no forewarning. In the future, how would you ensure the community is treated with respect in these decisions?

Our family lived through the 2017 school closures and experienced first-hand what happens when a school is closed without complete and timely communications to impacted families. Our daughters’ school, Shelton Elementary (named after my father-in-law who sat on the Jeffco School Board) was one of the schools that welcomed children from the closed school. Parents and families from both schools felt lost and unheard when this neighborhood school was closed. We experienced what happens when combining schools is viewed by the decision makers as an exercise on paper instead of a melding of separate school cultures and climates, the combination of which affects students, staff and the community. Parents who previously walked their child to school now had to drive and for far too many that presented a huge hardship. We also know that students who came to Shelton no longer had the same supports they received in their prior school as it was designated Title I. The Shelton community welcomed our new

students and families but the loss of supports for many students was devastating. And you can imagine how the community felt when just a few short years after the school was closed the same Jeffco School Board approved moving a new school into the same building. The end result – a split neighborhood community with students losing critical educational and social supports and zero of the long-term savings the School Board had promised. Watching the Allendale community go through a similarly “broken” closure was incredibly disheartening. Why didn’t the School Board respect the community enough to vote on the closure? And will proposed alternative uses for Allendale cost the voters any more or less money than it would have cost to keep the neighborhood school open?

I commit to ensuring transparency and timeliness in any school closure process, and no further schools should be closed or engaged in discussion for closure until the Jeffco School Board sets clear guidelines for the reasons schools should be considered for closure. Jeffco families deserve better.

8. Reliance on test scores to evaluate schools and teachers seemingly punishes teachers who teach in schools with special centers serving high need students. It also causes enrollment drops in schools serving diverse students. How would you mitigate the over emphasis on test results to evaluate teacher and school performance?

Test scores are important touch points, especially when viewed as trends vs. isolated points in time. And even more especially when test scores are viewed at the school and District level. As the mom of three children, I know there can be days when students just don’t test well. With over thirty-five years evaluating the performance of organizations and individuals, I also know that having tangible goals and measuring performance with many touch points is important, especially with the urgent need to ensure all Jeffco students are learning the basics. Testing is just a benchmark, and as of now it is the only universal benchmark we have to measure whether our students are learning as much as other students across the state and country. As a result we need to focus on why **55% of our 3rd graders** tested below grade level expectations in ELA in 2021, and **65.6% of our 4th graders** tested below standards in Math. We need to get to the root causes of the lack of performance and come together to make the changes necessary for our students to succeed.

9. JeffCo Schools has a visible funding equity issue between newer wealthier schools and older lower income schools? How would you address this issue?

We certainly know that parents and community members of some Jeffco Schools are better able to raise funds to support their school than others. We also know that Jeffco’s student-based budgeting model provides more funds to smaller schools, and more funds to schools that have higher populations of at-risk students. It is time to start to focus on how the funds are being spent and ensure that money is invested in the classroom and on programs that work. With thirty-five years of experience evaluating and reporting on

spending in large organizations, I have the skills necessary to lead improvement efforts and increase transparency.

10. K-8 science seems to be overly focused on content, engineering and skills and less about curiosity and method. How will you look at science curriculum in your policy making decisions?

As I mentioned above, Jeffco has policies that were developed with teachers, staff, students, family, and community input (District policies IJ). These policies require that all of these stakeholders come together to review current curriculum, research proposed new curriculum and bring recommendations to the School Board. I would require that any curriculum changes that come to the Board go through this process before I would be comfortable making any changes. My years of governance experience have taught me the best decisions are made when all those who will be impacted by the change have a voice in the process. I will work to ensure that the policies in place are followed and if the current policies don't work. I will work to ensure everyone has a voice in revising those policies.

11. What are your views on the school safety needs that JeffCo faces?

Jeffco's safety and security is an amazing bright spot in our community. With John McDonald's leadership, Jeffco has been recognized nationally and internationally for the processes Mr. McDonald and his team have implemented to keep our students and staff safe. With the ever-increasing divisiveness in our communities, we need to continue to invest in physical safety of our students as well as in their mental and emotional safety. Some of the additional funds generated by passing the additional taxes in 2018 were allocated to both facilities updates to improve safety and to social emotional learning specialists to support the mental health and emotional needs of students. We must continue to evaluate the needs in our schools and be sure our spending is appropriately meeting the needs of our students.

12. How will you address the issue that JeffCo staffing does not reflect the diversity of the student body?

From my experience, I have learned there are only three things that impact the diversity of your work force – either qualified diverse candidates do not apply, qualified diverse candidates apply and are not hired, or qualified diverse candidates are hired but the organization is unable to retain them. The first step to addressing the issue is to determine the reasons Jeffco's workforce does not more closely match our students' demographics. If candidates do not apply, what strategies are being used to expand the applicant pool; how and where do we search for the best candidates; and how do we encourage Jeffco students to apply to work in the District? If Jeffco has sufficient applicants and they are not hired or decline offers, then we need to ask what incentives, if any, might be needed to appeal to a broad range of candidates? What supports might Jeffco need to put in place to become a more appealing employer? To which employers are we losing candidates and how can we become more competitive? And if retention is the issue, and turnover is

meaningfully higher for certain employee groups than others, we need to ask whether we are learning anything from all those exiting employees that is being used to change practices going forward. Ultimately, the District is responsible for attracting, hiring and retaining the most qualified individuals to educate our children and processes must be in place to ensure this is happening.

13. What will you do to address the low salaries for teachers and support staff as well as other factors effecting teacher and support staff retention?

Everyone I know can identify a specific teacher that has made a positive impact on their life. And virtually every adult I know also exclaims how much they value the teaching profession. Compensating professionals appropriately is something every organization must do, otherwise they do not retain their professionals. Jeffco is no different. We must continually evaluate if we are providing competitive compensation to attract and retain the best staff. Funds from the 2018 mill levy increase were intended to put teachers in a much more competitive position with local districts, as some of those funds were directed specifically to compensation increases. It is the Board's responsibility to ensure funds are spent wisely and that there is transparency. I look forward to bringing my financial experience to the board to ensure Jeffco is making investments that support its mission and return overall learning to the high-quality educational experience my son received, and that all students deserve.