

On September 14, the Platte Canyon Education Association sent this letter (via e-mail) to all of our school board candidates. We would like to share their responses with the public.

Platte Canyon Education Association

Co-Presidents

Debra Orecchio [REDACTED]

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To: Platte Canyon School Board Candidates

Dear Candidate,

Platte Canyon Education Association is the local unit of the Colorado Education Association, which is the state unit of the National Education Association. We are very interested in our candidates for the Platte Canyon School Board. We are hoping that you might be willing to answer five questions that we would then compile with the other candidate's responses, and share with the employees of Platte Canyon School District, offer to the local newspapers, and to the local information websites.

If you are willing to participate in this sharing process, please answer these questions and send them back to one or both of us.

1. Why do you want to run for the Platte Canyon School Board?

Joe Burgett: I am running for the school board because I support Platte Canyon School District. I have lived and served in this community for over twenty years. All three of my children started preschool and graduated from PCSD. During that time, I have volunteered and served in many capacities throughout the district. Platte Canyon School District is a great place and I want to see it continue to grow and improve. The school district is the heart of the Bailey community and I want to make sure that it continues to function in a strong, healthy way.

Cyndie Sherriff: I want to run for the school board to bring the best opportunities, direction and educational excellence I can for the students of Platte Canyon. That is what a politician would say, but I am not a politician, so I am going to answer from my heart. I am tired of seeing teachers and classified employees being treated poorly by the board. I am tired of watching ill thought out ideas, which create a negative impact on students, being passed as well researched policy. It is past time to have a board that does its work in PUBLIC and is not a rubber stamp for every half informed idea presented by administration. Our kids deserve better and our staff deserves better!

Heather Prewitt: I am running for the PCSD #1 board because I believe that I have knowledge, skills and experience that will benefit the district. I have been a CPA for 20 years. I can bring financial and business knowledge that the district does not currently possess in either its board, administration or management. This includes significant experience developing budgets, analyzing financial results and estimating the impact of changes on an entity's resource availability. Through my experience, I have become familiar with governmental fund accounting as well as successfully executing business turnaround plans. In addition to my career experience, over the last year, I have spent countless hours researching and learning about education. I utilized the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Association of School Boards, EdX, encounters with educators, conversations with administrators and other resources to familiarize myself with education. I have researched trends and best practices in education, leadership roles and styles, policy procedure and implementation, and analyzing and interpreting education data. Over the last two summers, I have spent significant time in the community at events and going door to door familiarizing myself with concerns of the citizens, employees, parents and students. I have heard first-hand concerns, anecdotes and desires from lifelong residents, new neighbors and everything in between.

Frank VanDeHey: I have lived in Park County for 38 years. I love this community. My wife and I raised our two children here. In recent years there has been a great deal of divisiveness including an attempted recall of the board. These constant disputes make it difficult to deal with the serious problems facing our small school district. I feel that I can help the various groups get past their disagreements and work together for the good of our children.

Rockie Lozensky: We moved to Bailey 14 years ago because we wanted to raise our kids in a rural setting where they would have the opportunity to experience the natural wonders right outside their doorstep. We specifically chose Bailey because we also wanted our daughters to attend schools where they would get a quality education at a smaller school.

In recent years I have noticed a drastic perception shift from the Bailey community regarding Platte Canyon School District that is starting impact enrollment and overall PCSD employee morale. I want to help ensure PCSD continues to provide students with excellent education opportunities via a well-supported staff and regain community support for local, community-focused schools.

Katie Spodyak: I have a passion for helping people. I have always had a passion for education and always have appreciated the education I received at Platte Canyon. I care a great deal for the Bailey community and want to give back in a way that I am able. I have two sons who attend Deer Creek Elementary and I am so thankful they get to go to the same school I attended and benefit from that exceptional education. We have a great district with amazing teachers and staff focused on what is best for children. I have enjoyed my last four-year term on the board and I have learned a great deal. The district has accomplished a lot during that time. There have also been some significant changes and challenges. I look forward to another term as a board member working with the other board members to continually improve Platte Canyon School District.

2. What do you see as the biggest issue facing the Platte Canyon School Board?

Joe Burgett: The biggest issue facing the district is funding. Due to lack of funding, the district is not able to provide all of the services that nearby districts provide, which then leads to students leaving our district, which then continues the cycle of not having enough money. We have excellent teachers and staff members who provide a top notch education for our students, but without adequate funding we cannot provide the staff the compensation needed to retain them. We have students who leave our district to explore the options that districts with more money are able to provide. In order to retain teachers and students, we need to have more money.

Cyndie Sherriff: The biggest issue facing the Platte Canyon School Board is a two pronged response, the first answer is declining enrollment. We are coming to a critical point in our enrollment, right now our enrollment sits at 855 (BOE meeting 9/11/2017). Right now you could fit all of our students in the district in the high school. Our district shrinks by the year (by the way it has been shrinking for the past 20 years) and the board has done nothing. The second part of the response is the public perception of the school board; this perception feeds into the first response as parents feel ignored or not represented by the board. The majority of parents, instead of complaining or trying to affect change, just remove their children from the district. We need to take an active part in stopping the flood of students leaving the district.

Heather Prewitt: There are a multitude of issues facing the board. The issue requiring priority attention immediately is enrollment. We are losing too many of our students to other districts and home schooling. We need to identify the root causes of these decisions made by families. The district attempted to do this by sending a survey near the end of the last school year to families whose students have left out district. The superintendent concluded based on a small response that the district should consider two options: 1) "researching a comprehensive social-emotional curriculum to include social-emotional bullying and digital citizenship" and 2) "researching a 'customer service' staff development program". I do not think that either of these responses is accurately addressing the issue. There was not enough response to draw any meaningful conclusion. I think district resources for curriculum are better spent expanding and deepening current classroom instruction options. In my experience, at these schools, where my children have attended since Kindergarten, the teaching, support and classified staff are second to none; they will go far beyond their duties to help further any of their students' education including staying late, putting in overtime and communicating with guardians.

Frank VanDeHey: The biggest issue facing our district is declining enrollment. In school year 2000-2001, the Platte Canyon School District had 1,545 students. This school year we have about 940 students. The school district has lost approximately 40% of its students in these last 16 years. Some of this loss has been because we are an aging community. Fewer young families means fewer students. However, an increasing number of students are leaving the school district because of the lack of opportunities and class offerings when compared with the Jefferson County mountain schools. Decreased student count means less money from the state and from property taxes to fund our schools. Less money means fewer class offerings, fewer opportunities, and less money to hire and retain highly qualified teachers and other staff. All students are used to living in a world of choice. Every smart phone offers 100s of thousands of choices. Our students expect more choices and opportunities from their schools.

Rockie Lozensky: I believe the most immediate issue is balancing student needs with available funding while attracting and keeping students and quality staff.

Katie Spodyak: Platte Canyon School District's Board faces several challenges. The size of our district and decreasing enrollment poses a great challenge. I believe we need to continue to focus on the students we have and how we can best serve them. At the same time, the district should continue to investigate more creative solutions to help draw more students to our district. The district has been able to implement creative solutions to help with finance and funding and continue to maintain excellent programs for our students in an unstable and challenging financial time. I believe that those conversations and plans need to continue over the next several years in order to be certain our district is most efficiently and effectively using our limited resources

3. Why are you uniquely qualified to serve on the Platte Canyon School Board?

Joe Burgett: The main reason I am qualified to serve on the board of education is I understand the limitations put on the district by fiscal acts such as Tabor and Gallagher. Through my job with the Platte Canyon Fire Protection District, I have conducted research into the devastating impacts of these amendments and have worked closely with state officials to help rural areas overcome this threat. Additionally, I work for a five member board, thus I know what is expected of a board member and how a functioning board operates.

Cyndie Sherriff: I am uniquely qualified to serve on the PCSD board because, well, I don't think I am unique. I think many parents, grandparents, residents of the district are qualified to serve on the board many of those very people do not possess the ability to serve. I have the ability to: make a 6 pm board meeting, spend my days researching and educating myself on topics concerning public education and to attend multiple other events concerning the district and CASB commitments. If I have to enumerate my uniqueness I would say I have a skill set that includes 5 years on three different nonprofit, tax-exempt boards in three different positions. I have experience in the areas of bookkeeping and accounting. I also have a propensity to be a rule follower and holding those subject to the rules accountable.

Heather Prewitt: As stated in response to number 1, I believe I do have skills that can benefit the district because of my career experience. Skills that have not been exhibited by any of the board members, administration or management. That said, I also think the best solutions, plans and ideas emerge when there is a diverse group of people working together towards a common goal. The benefit of different perspectives, viewpoints, opinions and beliefs that materialize in a dynamic group of diverse individuals typically yields the best solutions. As Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the world wide web, said, "We need diversity of thought in the world to face the new challenges."

Frank VanDeHey: Of the six candidates running for the school board. I have the most knowledge of the school district and community. I taught for 42 years at Deer Creek Elementary School before retiring in 2014. I have lived in the community for 38 years.

Rockie Lozensky: My first educational experience was via my father, a high school business and technology educator, who spent over 30 years helping high school students in nontraditional ways via highly successful distributive education (DECA) programs. The impact of his work with his 'kids' was quite inspiring.

This led to my own interest in education and continued the family tradition at the University of South Florida where I earned two Bachelor degrees in Music (Bassoon Performance) and Education (K-12). I moved to Colorado immediately after college and worked to find a music education position. It was the early 90's and unfortunately, many music/art programs were being cut from the curriculum leaving little opportunity for fresh music educators. I was unable to find a teaching position in the Denver Metro school districts and pivoted out of education and into media, specifically radio and digital audio.

For the past 20 years, I lead the implementation of digital advertising technologies within large media companies, as well as the development of cutting-edge digital audio technologies with Silicon Valley start-ups. I know how to succeed within large well-funded legacy media companies who don't want to change how they do business to bootstrapped start-ups who want change the business but have little funding.

Finally, and most importantly, both of our daughters, Sadie (9th-grade PCHS) and Tess (7th-grade FMS), are recipients of the excellent education provided by Platte Canyon educators since pre-school. We hear about their school experiences nightly at

the dinner table which offers me a student perspective on how the district is doing. I believe my combination of educational foundation, technology savvy, and business acumen would provide a fresh perspective to the Platte Canyon School Board.

Katie Spodyak: I am the only candidate running who already has experience on the board. As the current board President, I have the unique and valuable situation to continue as a board member. While there is always more learning to be done, my past four-year term has prepared me for an additional term on the Board.

I am a Bailey native and Platte Canyon graduate. I know and love this community. My husband, Steve, is also a Platte Canyon graduate and we have two boys in the school district (Kindergarten and Third grade). Our parents also have a long history in the Bailey and Conifer communities. We loved growing up here and are blessed to be able to raise our sons here as well. I have a great deal of respect for our teachers and staff and so appreciate all they do. I want to continue the focus in the district on what is best for our students and also what is best for our staff while remaining fiscally responsible

4. If elected, what do you hope to focus on, or what do you hope to accomplish?

Joe Burgett: If elected to the board, I want to continue the reputation of excellence that PCSD has had for many years. I will positively promote the district, as I have for the past 20 years, in the community and in the state. I will work as a team with other board members to adopt policies that are needed to advance this district. I will be a voice for the people. Because of my role in the community, every day I have the unique pleasure of coming into contact with people throughout Bailey who have different interests in how the school district functions. I will be a communication tool for them. And as I have focused on already, I will work to make sure that the district is financially stable and that state policy makers recognize the needs of rural districts.

Cyndie Sherriff: If I am elected to the board I am committed to solving the issue of declining enrollment, to provide the parents and students of the district a board approved strategic plan that paves the way to 2025 and to provide a fair and safe environment for employees and students. To accomplish this I think we need to ask the same three questions another district is asking and those questions are: What should we keep doing, what should we stop doing and what should we start doing? First we must have a board strong enough to ask those questions and THEN that same board must be willing to HEAR the answers to those questions. Then we as a board can take intentional action. I intend to be that strong, willing and intentional board member.

Heather Prewitt: Initially, I would like to focus on the development and board approval of a strategic plan. Much work was done towards this during 2015 but, according to Dr. Krage, the board never approved a plan. This plan should provide a framework under which individual decisions can be made, decisions by principals, administration and the board. The plan should be a road map that allows the district to accomplish its stated goals:

- Safe schools with positive educational environments.
- High student achievement with continued growth.
- Positive school-community relationships
- Effective and efficient school and district management
- Highly qualified and motivated staff In addition, the strategic plan needs to identify the data that will be used to measure the progress towards the goals and benchmarks that should be achieved each year. The goals above will need to be quantified.

Frank VanDeHey: If elected to the school board, my first task would be to bring the superintendent, school board, employees, and community together so we can work to do what is best for our children. This would involve restoring trust between all the different groups. We can only succeed in providing high quality schools if our community pulls together. In addition, more transparency in the operations of the school district needs to occur. People need to feel like they are listened to and that decisions are openly debated and discussed with as much input of ideas as possible.

Rockie Lozensky: 1) Minimize Student and Staff Attrition: We are a "Bedroom Community" which means most residents commute outside of Platte Canyon area for employment; this also provides parents the opportunity to transport their children to non-PCSD schools. We are seeing the highest attrition rate between FMS and incoming PCHS freshman. The present PCHS freshman class lost approximately 40% of former FMS students to other area high schools, mostly Conifer High School. One consequence of enrollment declination is larger class sizes for certain subjects placing even more workload on teachers who

were already stretched. PCSD receives most of its funding via per-pupil allocation from the State of Colorado, so when we lose students, we also lose valuable funding.

2) Community Involvement: I would like to explore how PCSD could encourage more support from the Platte Canyon community. The support could manifest in many ways. It could be anything from volunteering an hour a week to lead students in a robotics club to hiring students via the ACE program to work part-time to earn while learning to costume items donations for the upcoming Drama production. What made the Platte Canyon area special was its support of their local school district. We have seemed to have lost a bit of that Platte Canyon community school spirit. I want to find out why and how we can help get that sparkle back.

3) Curriculum Innovation: We live a world of exponential change. How are we preparing students for a workforce where industry disruption is commonplace? With high-speed internet access improving along the 285 corridor (Thanks, Commissioner Brazell!!) how can we use online learning to create unique curriculum programs in technology fields that will attract students and teachers?

Katie Spodyak: Platte Canyon School District has seen a great deal of change over the last few years. There have been a significant number of retirements from long-time staff members and teachers. I am excited about the current team in the district and looking forward to some stability years moving forward. Some change is always normal and growing pains are also normal with significant changes. However, I feel that the changes have happened and so have the growing pains and the district is in an optimal situation to move forward and continue to excel and improve. Some significant improvements have recently been made to help close the pay gap between our district and neighboring districts we compete with (for both students and staff). I would like to continue to work to improving that as well as making sure that the work environment is one that is rewarding and enjoyable. That goes a long way to helping decrease turnover. As mentioned before, I believe that the main focus at all times should be what is best for our students. The Board has a very specific role in the district. It is there for a purpose. I believe it is of paramount importance to maintain that role.

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with the community?

Joe Burgett: It is important to have positive people who value our district and community serve on the board of education. The board needs to be able to work together for the good of the all involved. There is no place for hostility or negativity on the board. Instead, we need open minded people who are supportive of the district's mission, yet are willing to challenge each other constructively. I take pride in Platte Canyon School District. Over the years I have created strong working relationships with people who serve in various capacities throughout the district. Team work is important from the preschool to the high school and from the community to the staff. We all have to put our differences aside and focus on our #1 goal: KIDS!

Cyndie Sherriff: I am a wife and a mom to 4 kids, a self-employed virtual assistant, and a resident of Platte Canyon School District for nearly 5 years. My husband of 24 years, Chris Sherriff, is a product delivery driver for a local propane company here in Bailey—the town we call home. I grew up in Evergreen, CO, moved to Lakewood and for 10 years prior to moving to Bailey we lived in Wiggins, CO (a school district smaller than Platte Canyon). I understand mountain living, rural living and small town schools. I have been self-employed in various forms since 1997; first as a Colorado-licensed Cosmetologist for 10 years and then as a virtual assistant, which I have been doing since 2005. In my current work I manage funds in excess of \$100,000 per month. My responsibilities include accounts payable and receivable, budgeting, data entry and customer service. I serve several other customers in the areas of event planning and project management. I have recently finished a two year term as the Platte Canyon High School (PCHS) School Accountability Committee (SAC) Chair and represented the PCHS SAC on the District Accountability Committee (DAC). I am looking forward to the next four years serving our community.

Heather Prewitt: We have been blessed with a unique opportunity- one district and three schools. This is a chance to create an educational ideal. We have been performing well on state standardized tests but I do not believe we should be content with that level of performance. I imagine a district where we have raised the expectations, we are graduating college and career ready students and we are providing them not only with the skills they need to succeed but also provide support and guidance for the first steps of the journey before them. We should set our own standards, above those of the state, and work diligently to provide our kids with the education that we all believe they deserve.

Frank VanDeHey: I will be a positive agent for change. I am open minded, thoughtful, and truly care about our students and the quality of education that they receive. Furthermore, of the last five superintendents only one has actually lived in the community. There is nothing wrong with this, but the superintendents' decisions can affect the schools and community long

after they are gone. For this reason, the school board needs to lead. Its members live in the community and are the representatives of the community.

Rockie Lozensky: I love our funky community and being a Baileian! I believe anything is possible when we encourage and respect different opinions while focusing on common goals. I talk excessively, laugh loudly, and play well with others. I do not have all the answers; I am just a hard worker with an insatiably curious mind who wants to enable the creation of more forever happy learners like me.

Katie Spodyak: This is an extremely important election for our school district as well as our community as a whole. I encourage everyone to take time to educate themselves on the candidates and be sure to vote! Think about what makes a good board member and what makes a good board. If you aren't sure, reach out and ask around. Get different opinions and perspectives and decide for yourself.

I know and love this community and I would be honored to serve another four-year term for Platte Canyon School District's Board of Education. I have run multiple successful businesses and have been active in the community in other leadership roles and committees. These roles have continued to help me reflect and improve myself to better serve my community. I appreciate the opportunity and welcome any conversations if you would like to know more or have any specific questions. Feel free to email me at kspodyak@pcsdk12.org and I will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you so much for your help in this project, and good luck on November 7th

Debra Orecchio and Cathy Lynskey
Co-Presidents, Platte Canyon Education Association