



Denver Public Schools

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

TEL 720-423-3200

FAX 720-423-3318

TTY 720-423-3741

WEB www.dpsk12.org

April 22, 2025

Dear Dr. Olson,

I am writing to formally raise grave and ongoing concerns about Board Member John Youngquist's behavior, which I believe has crossed a threshold of acceptable conduct and now constitutes a serious threat to the health, functionality, and integrity of our school district.

Over the past year, Mr. Youngquist has consistently demonstrated a pattern of hostility, policy violations, racial insensitivity, and unethical conduct that has created a toxic working environment, undermined district leadership, and distracted from our core mission of serving all students equitably. Most troubling, it is increasingly clear that Mr. Youngquist is not invested in the success of Denver Public Schools. Instead, his behavior signals an intent to cause harm—in pursuit of personal ambition.

1. Hostile and Demeaning Behavior Toward Staff, Particularly Staff of Color

- a. Mr. Youngquist has repeatedly engaged in belittling, dismissive, and condescending behavior toward district staff, especially employees of color. His conduct has been noted in both public and private forums and has caused distress and discouragement among highly capable leaders.
- b. Despite direct interventions and feedback, including private conversations and public comments from fellow Board members, his behavior has not changed.
- c. During my last meeting with him, he described our district's progress as "insignificant," disregarding substantial data and insulting the staff who have dedicated themselves to advancing equity and student achievement.

2. Racist and Oppressive Undertones

- It is my strong belief—based on his repeated targeting of staff of color, his consistent dismissal of equity-focused progress, and his undermining of diverse leadership—that Mr. Youngquist's actions reflect deeply rooted oppressive tendencies. His behavior aligns with that of someone who is threatened by diverse leadership and equity-centered progress.
- These patterns are not accidental—they are deliberate. And they are harmful. His oppressive rhetoric and tactics are incompatible with our district's values of equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.

3. Inappropriate and False Accusations

- I have been recently informed that Mr. Youngquist accused me of conspiring with educators to ensure students are not failed, implying that our graduation data is manipulated and dishonest. This accusation is not only baseless and defamatory—it is an insult to the integrity of our educators and students.
- These claims undermine trust in our systems, cast unwarranted doubt on our progress, and ignore the rigorous efforts underway to improve outcomes across the district. He simply refuses to accept the success we are beginning to realize, and instead, chooses to attack it.

4. Violation of Governance Policies (BSR2 & BSR3)

- He has habitually ignored governance norms by directly contacting and directing district staff without Board authorization. This behavior places staff in uncomfortable positions, undermines the Superintendent's role, and violates established policies.
- Even after being reminded of these boundaries in writing and verbally, Mr. Youngquist has persisted in bypassing Board channels and disregarding protocol.

5. Breaches of Confidentiality and Ethical Violations

- He has disclosed confidential information, including privileged legal communications, to outside individuals, including media and bloggers. Such breaches of trust have exposed the district to legal and reputational risk, further evidence of his disregard for his fiduciary responsibilities.

6. Public Undermining of District Leadership and Strategy

- Mr. Youngquist has worked actively—both publicly and behind the scenes—to discredit the district's leadership and strategic vision, including by challenging the validity of state-mandated student data and assessment outcomes (READ Act).
- He has met privately with individuals and groups to undermine district initiatives, all without transparency or accountability to the Board or community.

7. Personal Political Agenda

- He has suggested the possibility of a buyout of my contract to raise this as a strategic option—not out of concern for the district, but as a tactic of intimidation. His obsession with my removal, coupled with his private aspirations to assume district leadership, strongly suggests a conflict of interest. It is becoming increasingly clear that his actions are driven by a personal ambition to become superintendent himself as he had previously pursued repeatedly, unsuccessfully.

I cannot, in good faith, engage professionally with someone whose conduct suggests he actively wants me—and this district—to fail.

This is not simply a personality conflict or a matter of difference in opinion. I have tried to work beyond this behavior and even tried coaching members of my team who have been on the receiving end of his attacks – all for the betterment of the district. Despite my attempts, it is clear that Mr. Youngquist's behavior is destructive. It is undermining district governance, creating a hostile climate for staff, and threatening the forward momentum of our equity work.

I respectfully urge the Board to take action, including:

1. A censure for repeated violations of Board policy, inappropriate conduct, and unethical behavior.
2. A clear prohibition on his direct engagement with district staff outside of official channels.
3. A reaffirmation of Board governance protocols to ensure all members adhere to appropriate boundaries.
4. A requirement for immediate governance and anti-bias training, specifically related to policy governance and equity-centered leadership.
5. A review of potential conflicts of interest if his intent is to seek leadership within the district.

If we are to maintain any sense of integrity, trust, and professionalism as a leadership team, we must address this now. The time for tolerance has passed. It is imperative that we preserve the dignity of our district and protect the people who serve it with honor.

I remain committed to the success of our district and to working in good faith with the Board. However, I cannot continue to do so under continued assault by a member whose aim appears to be sabotage rather than service.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alex Marrero

Proud Superintendent