

Investing in Our Future

Maria Santos' K-12 Education Platform

Quality Public Education for Every Colorado Child

A Personal Commitment

Education isn't just policy for me—it's personal.

My husband David has taught social studies at Rangeview High School for 22 years. I've watched him spend evenings grading papers and weekends chaperoning events. I've seen his dedication to students—and I've seen his frustration when budget cuts force larger class sizes and fewer resources.

Our children—Sofia and Marco—both attended Aurora Public Schools. Sofia is now a sophomore at CU Boulder studying environmental science. Marco is a junior at Rangeview. I've sat in the same classrooms, attended the same parent-teacher conferences, and navigated the same challenges as every APS family.

I know what's working in our schools. I know what's broken. And I know we can do better.

The Challenge: Colorado's Education Funding Crisis

State Rankings Tell the Story

Colorado ranks **39th nationally** in per-pupil education funding. This isn't a new problem—it's the result of decades of underinvestment compounded by TABOR restrictions and competing budget priorities.

Per-Pupil Funding Comparison (2023-2024):

State	Per-Pupil Funding	National Rank
New York	\$26,571	1
Wyoming	\$17,394	10
National Average	\$14,347	—
Kansas	\$13,890	28
Colorado	\$11,763	39
Arizona	\$9,403	48

We're spending \$2,500 less per student than the national average. Over a K-12 career, that's **\$32,500 less invested in each Colorado child's education.**

Teacher Pay Crisis

Low funding translates directly to low teacher pay. Colorado teachers earn significantly less than their peers in comparable states—and far less than professionals with similar education levels in other fields.

Colorado Teacher Salary Data:

Metric	Amount
Average starting salary	\$38,500
Average salary (all teachers)	\$58,200
Salary gap vs. national average	-\$8,200
Teachers leaving profession (annual)	12%
Unfilled teaching positions (2024)	2,800+

The result? We're losing experienced teachers to other states and other professions. New graduates choose careers with better compensation. Our students pay the price.

Aurora Public Schools: By the Numbers

Metric	Figure
Total students	38,000
Schools	67
Student-teacher ratio	17:1
Students qualifying for free/reduced lunch	68%
English language learners	32%
Students with IEPs	12%

APS serves one of the most diverse student populations in Colorado. Our schools are doing remarkable work with limited resources—but they need a partner in the State House who will fight for adequate funding.

My Education Platform: Six Key Proposals

1. Support Full Funding of School Finance Act Amendments

The Problem: Colorado's school funding formula hasn't kept pace with actual costs. The "negative factor" has clawed back billions from schools over the past decade.

My Position: I will fight to fully fund the School Finance Act and eliminate the negative factor within three years.

Funding Mechanism: Sustainable revenue from closing corporate tax loopholes and updating the state tax code.

Impact: \$500M+ additional funding for Colorado public schools, translating to approximately \$500 more per student.

2. Increase Starting Teacher Salary to \$50,000 Statewide

The Problem: Colorado's starting teacher salaries are uncompetitive. We're losing talent to neighboring states and to other professions.

My Position: Establish a \$50,000 statewide minimum starting salary for licensed teachers.

Implementation:

- State supplements local salary schedules to reach \$50,000 floor
- Phased in over two years (Year 1: \$45,000; Year 2: \$50,000)
- Includes licensed teachers, counselors, librarians
- Paired with loan forgiveness for teachers in high-need areas

Impact: Attract and retain quality educators, particularly in underserved districts.

3. Expand Universal Pre-K Access to All 3-Year-Olds

The Problem: Colorado recently launched universal pre-K for 4-year-olds, but research shows earlier intervention produces better outcomes.

My Position: Extend universal pre-K to include all 3-year-olds, prioritizing high-need communities first.

Phased Implementation:

- Year 1: Expansion in Title I communities
- Year 2: Expansion to all communities below 150% poverty level
- Year 3-4: Universal access for all 3-year-olds

Research Support: Studies show quality pre-K delivers \$7-12 return on every \$1 invested through reduced special education costs, lower grade retention, and higher lifetime earnings.

Impact: 45,000 additional Colorado children served annually at full implementation.

4. Fund Mental Health Counselors at 1:250 Student Ratio

The Problem: Colorado's youth mental health crisis is real and worsening. Schools are the frontline, but most lack adequate counseling staff. Current ratios often exceed 1:500.

My Position: Fund school counselor positions to achieve 1:250 student ratio statewide.

Details:

- State funding for counselor positions, prioritizing highest-need schools
- Includes licensed clinical social workers and psychologists
- Training for all staff in trauma-informed practices
- Telehealth options for rural schools

Current vs. Goal:

Metric	Current	Goal
Counselor ratio	1:500+	1:250

Metric	Current	Goal
Counselors needed statewide	1,800	3,600
Additional positions required	—	1,800

Impact: Earlier intervention, crisis prevention, improved academic outcomes.

5. Oppose Voucher Programs That Divert Public School Funding

The Problem: Voucher and "education savings account" schemes divert public tax dollars to private schools with no accountability, no transparency, and no requirement to serve all students.

My Position: I will vote NO on any legislation that diverts public education funding to private schools.

Why I Oppose Vouchers:

- Private schools can discriminate in admissions
- No accountability for academic outcomes
- No transparency in spending
- Drains resources from public schools serving all students
- Evidence shows vouchers don't improve outcomes

What I Support Instead:

- Innovation within public system (magnet schools, career academies)
- Charter school accountability and transparency
- Parental choice among public options
- Investing in making every public school excellent

6. Invest in Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathways

The Problem: Not every student will pursue a four-year degree—nor should they. Quality CTE programs create pathways to good-paying careers, but funding has lagged.

My Position: Double state investment in CTE programs and expand access in underserved communities.

Focus Areas:

- **Healthcare:** CNAs, medical assistants, dental hygienists
- **Technology:** IT support, cybersecurity, web development
- **Skilled Trades:** Electrical, plumbing, HVAC, construction
- **Advanced Manufacturing:** CNC machining, welding, robotics

Program Elements:

- Industry partnerships for curriculum development
- Paid internship and apprenticeship connections
- Dual enrollment with community colleges
- Stackable credentials leading to industry certifications

Impact: Students graduate with marketable skills and clear career pathways, whether they pursue additional education or enter the workforce directly.

How We Pay For It

Education investment isn't free—but neither is underinvestment. Every dollar we don't spend on education today costs us more in remediation, incarceration, and lost economic productivity tomorrow.

Funding Approaches I Support:

Source	Annual Revenue	Allocation
Corporate tax loophole closure	\$180M	School Finance Act
Tobacco/nicotine tax modernization	\$80M	Pre-K expansion
Sports betting revenue allocation	\$30M	Mental health counselors
State Education Fund optimization	\$50M	Teacher salary supplements

I reject the false choice between funding education and other priorities. With smarter revenue policy and clear priorities, Colorado can invest in our children's future without burdening working families.

What Success Looks Like

By 2030, Colorado should achieve:

- ☐ Ranking in top 25 states for per-pupil funding
- ☐ Zero unfilled teaching positions
- ☐ Average starting teacher salary of \$50,000
- ☐ Universal pre-K for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- ☐ 1:250 counselor-to-student ratio
- ☐ CTE enrollment doubled
- ☐ Graduation rate above 90%

These aren't dreams—they're achievable goals with sustained investment and political will.

Endorsements on Education

Colorado Education Association:

"Maria Santos understands that investing in teachers means investing in students. Her education platform reflects the priorities we hear from educators across the state. CEA is proud to endorse her candidacy."

Dr. Patricia Chen, Former APS Superintendent:

"Having worked with Maria on education policy for over a decade, I know she has the knowledge, passion, and coalition-building skills to deliver results for Colorado students. She'll be a powerful advocate in the State House."

Conclusion

I'm the daughter of immigrants who believed education was the key to opportunity. They were right. My education—from Aurora public schools through Metropolitan State and CU Denver—opened doors my parents could only dream of.

Every child in District 42 deserves those same opportunities. Not just the children of privilege, but every child—regardless of ZIP code, family income, or background.

I'm running for State Representative to fight for the schools our children deserve. I'm asking for your vote.

Maria Elena Santos

Candidate, State Representative, House District 42

"Building Bridges, Not Barriers"

For more information, visit santos4colorado.com

Paid for by Santos for Colorado