



Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

JSNE Fair Use Notice

JSNE is a non-commercial entity operating for the sole purpose of advancing democracy, justice and truth in our community.

JSNE makes content available for public educational and community informational purposes only.

JSNE offers content and commentaries to advance public understanding of issues impacting our community, local and national, typically by revealing connections ("connecting the dots") between local persons and organizations, and larger right-wing ideological movements across domains such as economics, politics, society, culture and media, among others. Often, these key connections may not be readily apparent to the public.

This site may offer copyrighted material owned by a third party, the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. Notwithstanding a copyright owners' rights under the Copyright Act, Section 107 allows limited use of copyrighted material, without permission from the rights holders, for purposes such as education criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. These so-called Fair uses are permitted even if the use of the work would otherwise be infringing.

When such material is offered, JSNE will acknowledge and reference the content's subject/title, author, date and source.

If you wish to use copyrighted material published on this site for your own purposes that go beyond fair use you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. We recommend that you seek the advice of legal counsel if you have any questions on this point. (6/8/2024)



Future of Colorado charter schools could be determined by Democratic primary for a State Board of Education seat

Nearly \$685,000 from [Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students](#), a pro-charter school state-level super PAC, has poured into a Democratic primary for a seat on the board

[Sandra Fish](#) and [Erica Breunlin](#) June 18, 2024



Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

<https://coloradosun.com/2024/06/18/colorado-state-board-of-education-election-charter-schools/>

Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent to affect the primary for a seat on the state Board of Education, a race that could determine the future of Colorado charter schools for years to come.

What's at stake is the panel's willingness to overturn local districts when they reject a charter school's application.

Nearly \$685,000 from Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students, a pro-charter school state-level super PAC, has poured into the contest in the 2nd Congressional District to support education consultant Marisol Lynda Rodriguez in her bid against former Boulder Valley School Board President Kathy Gebhardt.

Board members are elected to six-year terms in each of the state's eight congressional districts, with a ninth member elected statewide. The 2nd District — which is highly favorable to Democrats — is centered in Boulder, but also includes Fort Collins and Summit, Routt, Eagle and Grand counties.

Whoever wins the primary will almost surely win in November, too, replacing Democrat Angelika Schroeder, who is term-limited. There is no Republican on the ballot in the district.

Schroeder is part of the 5-4 majority on the Colorado Board of Education that is willing to overturn local school districts when they deny charter school applications. She has endorsed Rodriguez.

Should the board majority swing, new charter schools could face serious hurdles in getting approval, according to Van Schoales, a senior policy director at the Keystone Policy Center, which analyzes how well charter schools are performing.

"It's likely that any appeal to the state board, a charter versus a school district, the school districts will win," said Schoales, who is personally supporting Rodriguez. "So I think that that will force the charters to either not exist in those school districts or for them to make whatever deal that school districts offer."

The Colorado League of Charter Schools independent spending committee, which gets its money from an affiliated nonprofit that doesn't disclose its donors, gave \$450,000 to Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students in late May, the group's largest donor.

Are District 2 candidates clashing over charter schools? They say no.

While Rodriguez has drawn massive financial support from charter school proponents, she said she is "not charter for charter's sake."

"I don't believe in just every school should be charter," she told The Colorado Sun. "We need different things for different students. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach."

Communities should be driving the decisions about what kinds of schools they need, Rodriguez added.

“I really believe in community voice, that communities know what they need and communities know what they want,” she said, “and if you have community members that are coming and saying, ‘we want a charter’ ... I think that they should be given a fair shake if they have sound financial practices and a strong academic program and they have community behind them.”

Rodriguez’s career has included traveling the country to help state charter school associations with their strategic plans while working for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools during nine months from 2007 to 2008. She said she has also helped permanently close one Missouri charter school, [Carondelet Leadership Academy](#), through the education consulting company she owns, Insignia Partners, which she co-founded in 2012.

Rodriguez, who owns an education consulting company, has secured the endorsement of Gov. Jared Polis in the primary race as the future of charter school operations has become a key issue. Rodriguez told The Colorado Sun that charter schools should be an option for students so long as they are financially sound and have a quality academic program and community support. (Olivia Sun, The Colorado Sun via Report for America)

Through her company, Rodriguez said she helps “organizations and teams basically come to consensus on a shared path forward.” She said her largest client, in Missouri, is “an authorizer that closes bad schools.” Her own visits to schools help inform that process.

The nonprofit CLCS Action has thrown its support behind Rodriguez in hopes of preserving fair consideration for charter schools at the board level, said Dan Schaller, president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools.

“We want to make sure, much like has been the case for the last 20 years, that the state board of education gives a fair shake and a fair hearing to charter schools,” Schaller said. “It has just as often ruled in support of the charter school as it has the local school district, so it’s generally been a 50-50 proposition, and I think we are just very interested in ensuring the state board remains a fair and objective arbiter of these decisions impacting charter schools and making sure that there aren’t folks coming in who are predisposed to right out of the gate not uphold that fairness and that objectivity.”

Meanwhile, Gebhardt told The Sun that she believes charter schools are “an essential part of our choice system” and said they will not be in peril should she be elected in the way that some of her opponents are suggesting through advertisements and mailers.

“I support charter schools,” she said, “and I think that is a fear tactic that is being used that misrepresents my position on choice, misrepresents my position on charters and is used in a way that’s inappropriate.”

Gebhardt noted that she has advocated for charter schools in her 30 years of being involved in Colorado schools, including when she served on Boulder Valley School District's Board of Education after being first elected in 2016.

Gebhardt has entered a bid for a State Board of Education seat in District 2, the outcome of which has the potential to change the state board's pro-charter majority. Gebhardt called the idea of her opposing charter schools "a fear tactic" and said that while she has concerns about charter schools, she has advocated for them throughout her career and sees them as a necessary part of the state's choice system. (Olivia Sun, The Colorado Sun)

She cited an effort in the past few years she helped lead to fund improvements to the facility housing Justice High School, a Lafayette high school that educates many students who have struggled in other schools, including those who have been truant or close to dropping out.

But Gebhardt has also voiced concerns about charter schools that she said have been discriminatory in their enrollment processes for particular groups of students, including students with disabilities, those living in poverty and kids learning English.

"There were some charter schools who have admissions policies that I believe discriminate against populations that they want to serve, such as free and reduced lunch or second language learners," Gebhardt said. "And by their admissions policies, they exclude families from being able to even apply. So there are places where I think we should take a hard look just to make sure that these schools are open and accessible to all students. And I think because I've raised those concerns in the past, somehow that's been conflated to say that I'm against charter schools, and I can tell you I am not."

She still has some concerns about charter schools, including that many charter schools still don't serve the same percentages of students with special needs as district-run schools.

During the 2023-24 school year, about 89% of Colorado students with disabilities were enrolled in a district-run public school while about 10% of kids with disabilities were in a charter school, according to data from the Colorado Department of Education.

Despite those concerns, Gebhardt said she wants most decisions about charter schools to remain at the local level, saying "it would be really dangerous on either side" to have a state board member weigh in on a charter school outside reviewing appeals from school districts.

"Can I say 100% of (charter schools) don't cause me concern? No," she said. "But do 100% of traditional public schools not cause me concern? No. It would be so awesome if I could say 100% of all of our schools, charter or non-charter, are doing exactly what I hope they would be doing, but we aren't there yet."

Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

The money and the messaging

Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students spent nearly \$685,000 on the race through Saturday, including \$150,000 on TV ads that will run through the June 25 primary election. The other money has been spent on digital and newspaper ads, as well as mailers.

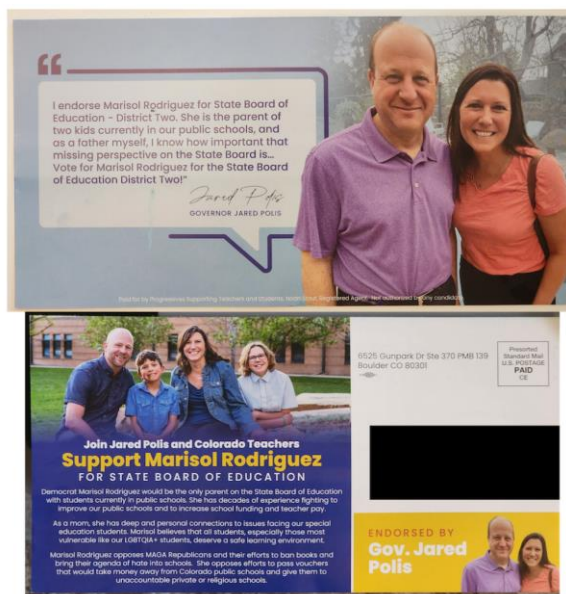
The group is backing Rodriguez because of her ability to “serve as a really excellent advocate for our kids,” said Noah Stout, registered agent of the group, who previously taught at a charter school and was senior counsel for public policy and external affairs for DSST Public Schools, a charter school network in Denver and Aurora.

“I don’t come to this from a charter schools perspective,” said Stout, now managing attorney at Stout Law Colorado in Denver.

Kyle Debeer, another group organizer and vice president of civic affairs for CLCS Action — an affiliate nonprofit of the Colorado League of Charter Schools — did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

One mailer sent by the group says Rodriguez “will never stop fighting MAGA Republicans to protect our kids’ education and safety.” Another says “Extreme MAGA Republicans want to ban books and weaken our schools. ... Marisol Rodriguez will stop them.” They also note that Rodriguez opposes vouchers.

The messaging appears to be aimed at shifting the framing of the race away from charter schools. All but one of the mailers sent by Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students and seen by The Colorado Sun emphasize Rodriguez’s endorsement by Democratic Gov. Jared Polis, who lives in the 2nd District [and founded two charter schools](#).



Gebhardt, on the other hand, boasts endorsements from U.S. Rep. Joe Neguse, who represents the 2nd District in Congress, as well as state Treasurer Dave Young, Senate President Steve Fenberg and the Colorado Education Association.

Progressives Supporting Teachers and Students has spent \$108,000 on two mailers opposing Gebhardt, a former Boulder Valley School Board member. The first claims she “supported [putting a school 500 feet from a gas well](#).” While the [school was approved near a potential drilling site](#), no wells are located near the school.

“It’s really sad the misrepresentations and the use of dark money to try to smear me,” Gebhardt told The Sun. “I’ve worked really hard to always put kids and families at the forefront and I did in this situation as well. If people would take the time to find the facts, they would understand the misrepresentations and falsehoods in this mailer.”

She has criticized the super PAC spending.

“If it wasn’t even my race, I am always troubled by outside money trying to influence what should be a local election,” Gebhardt told The Sun.

The level of outside spending in support of Rodriguez alarms Lisa Sweeney-Miran, who previously served on the Boulder Valley School District Board of Education alongside Gebhardt.

“When you’re spending \$600,000 on a candidate in a race, you’re not doing it hoping they’ll vote your way,” said Sweeney-Miran, who is supporting Gebhardt in the District 2 race. “You’re doing it because you’re very confident that they’re a candidate who has your best interest at heart.”

State school board members serve six-year, unpaid terms.

The 2024 race will have yearslong impacts on charter schools

The last time such money poured into a State Board of Education contest was in 2000, when Polis spent more than \$1.2 million of his own money and won an at-large seat by 90 votes.

CEA, the state’s largest teachers union and one of the loudest voices challenging the spread of charter schools, wants to keep the election’s focus on students and teachers rather than agendas, President Amie Baca-Oehlert said.

“There may be people who believe that there are certain ideological views that may be at stake on the state board,” Baca-Oehlert said. “We want to ensure a candidate who will represent students, parents, educators and public education and not a certain ideology or view.”

On Monday, Colorado Labor Action reported spending \$42,000 on mailers opposing Rodriguez in the contest. The CEA is among the funders of that super PAC. No state-level super PAC spending is happening in the three other Colorado Board of Education races on the November ballot.

Of the three other state education board races on the ballot, only the one in the 8th Congressional District could also sway the charter-sympathetic majority on the board if Democrat Rhonda Solis — who is in the charter-skeptical minority — doesn't win reelection.

Because the state education board seats that will be on the ballot in 2026 aren't expected to shift the charter-view dynamic on the panel, the outcome of the races this year will have a yearslong effect on how the board operates as it pertains to charter schools.

That concerns the teachers union.

"For us, it's curious why outside money and big corporate money would come into play in a State Board of Education race," Baca-Oehlert said.

The association is supporting Gebhardt, Baca-Oehlert said, because members believe she will be "a voice for students, educators and public education on the state board."

COLORADO NEWSLINE

The 'dark money' behind the lobbyists opposing a Colorado charter school accountability bill

Billionaire-funded groups line up to defeat legislation that would ensure increased local control

MIKE DEGUIRE March 25, 2024

Mike McGuire's Medium Site <https://medium.com/@jfiske80>

<https://coloradonewsline.com/2024/03/25/dark-money-lobbyists-colorado-charter-school/>

On March 7, three Colorado legislators introduced a [charter school accountability bill](#) to establish improved guidelines for authorizing and renewing charter schools by local school districts. The bill would strengthen the authority that elected school boards have regarding their governance of charter schools, and it also provides citizens with expanded information about the operations of charter schools in their districts.

According to its backers and public education advocacy groups, this is the [first major legislation](#) to prescribe more charter school accountability since the first Charter Schools Act was passed in 1993. Current state legislation often limits local control over the charter school approval process, funding requirements, and waivers from state legislation. Given that nearly two-thirds of the state's 64 counties experienced an "[absolute decline in the under-18 population over the last decade](#)," the charter school accountability bill would empower local

Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

school boards to address the overall enrollment needs of the district. While charter schools primarily utilize taxpayer dollars for their funding, many charter schools allow private interests to invest in their growth and development, which can [create potential conflicts of interest](#).

Pro-charter school organizations don't agree with this legislative effort to increase accountability as they believe this bill would "kill" charter schools. [Republicans have been especially vocal](#) in their opposition to this bill, even though the bill promotes increased local control over charter schools. The pro-charter [organizations hired over 30 lobbyists to oppose the bill](#). Lobbying can be expensive, but the organizations opposing the bill have connections to several billionaire-funded foundations.

The largest lobbying team hired to oppose the bill works for [Americans for Prosperity](#), a conservative organization funded by the [Koch network](#), whose goal is to "[destabilize and abolish public education](#)." American for Prosperity has been active in Colorado for years [promoting vouchers](#) and [education savings accounts](#) for families to use for any school of their choice. Last January, [AFP joined with the American Legislative Exchange Council](#) and the Heritage Foundation to form the [Education Freedom Alliance](#), an organization that [ALEC initiated to promote parents' rights](#) to use public money to attend a private, charter, home or public school of their choice. Funded with nearly [\\$80 million primarily from the Koch Industries](#), the Americans for Prosperity political action group has also [supported far-right candidates for decades](#).

American for Prosperity and [Advance Colorado](#) issued a press release on X stating the bill would "mark the beginning of the end of charter schools in Colorado," and together, the two groups "would work overtime to make sure the bill was soundly defeated." According to the Colorado Times Recorder, Advance Colorado is a [conservative dark money group said to be funded by billionaire Phil Anschutz](#). Formerly known as Unite Colorado, Advance Colorado has "[given over \\$17 million](#) to support major Republican political groups and efforts in Colorado." [Colorado Dawn, another dark money group](#) headed by State Board of Education member Steve Durham and Colorado state Sen. Paul Lundeen, gave millions to [Ready Colorado](#), which also has lobbyists opposing this bill.

Besides Americans for Prosperity and Ready Colorado, these organizations have *enlisted their lobbyists to defeat the bill*: [Colorado Succeeds](#), the [Colorado Children's Campaign](#), [Transform Education Now](#), [Colorado League of Charter Schools Action](#), [Education Alliance of Colorado](#), and [Education Reform Now Advocacy](#). Several of these organizations have access to deep pockets of money, and often the donors are not known.

Colorado Succeeds, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and Transform Education Now have received [over \\$20 million from the Walton Family Foundation](#), which has given [over \\$400 million](#)



Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources
Published 6/21/2024

[to charter schools for decades](#). [Education Reform Now Advocacy](#) is closely connected to Democrats for Education Reform, “[which was started by Wall Street hedge fund managers](#),” according to Ballotpedia. Colorado Politics stated that “various reports say [Education Reform Now has taken in millions](#) from [Rupert Murdoch](#) and the [Walton Family Foundation](#).” The Education Reform Now money also benefited the campaign coffers of 14 Democratic legislators, which may create a hurdle for the charter bill’s passage unless these legislators decide the bill’s merits warrant their support.

The upcoming lobbying effort in Colorado’s legislature is not unique, as similar high-paid lobbying efforts occur wherever there is significant charter school legislation. In Nashville, a [local news reporter exposed who 67 pro-charter lobbyists](#) worked for during legislative hearings on several charter bills in 2022. In the [video](#) that accompanied his report, Phil Williams highlighted the direct connections that the pro-charter lobbyists have with billionaires. His investigative report documented that “Americans for Prosperity is linked to billionaire Charles Koch,” and they also “received funding from billionaire Bill Gates and the Walton family of Walmart fame.”

As in Tennessee, the Colorado lobbyists will meet frequently with legislators to convince them this bill is not necessary. The legislators will need to weigh the benefits of the bill with the concerns of those who participate in a [massive letter-writing campaign initiated by the lobbying organizations](#) to oppose the legislation. The bill’s backers hope this will be the legislators’ opportunity to update 30-year-old legislation and begin to ensure increased local control and accountability for the millions of taxpayer dollars that fund the charter schools educating 15% of the state’s K-12 student population.



Going Dark - Tracking corporate PAC money in Colorado's 2024 primary

By [Shay Castle](#) June 17, 2024

<https://boulderweekly.com/news/colorado-primary-dark-money/>

So-called “dark money” has entered the Colorado primary, with more than \$1 million being funneled to local candidates from groups with undisclosed donors, including a charter school



Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

organization that has dropped hundreds of thousands into the race for the state board of education.

The bulk of spending has gone to support Marisol Rodriguez, a candidate for a seat on the state school board; District 2 encompasses Boulder County. Rodriguez, a consultant and mother of two school-aged children, is running against Kathy Gebhardt, a member of the Boulder Valley school board as well as state and national associations of school board directors.

‘No one is buying me’

As of June 17, a group calling themselves Progressives for Students and Teachers has spent \$972,012 on phone calls, web and newspaper ads and direct mailers in support of Rodriguez and opposing Gebhardt, according to [campaign finance reports](#) filed with the Colorado Secretary of State.

Progressives is an independent expenditure committee (IEC), which operates essentially like a federal super-PAC (political action committee). Unlike candidate committees, IECs can accept an unlimited amount of money from corporations and political organizations. Whereas candidate committees list the names of individual donors, groups who contribute to IECs or super-PACs do not have to disclose the source of their funds.

One of Progressives [registered agents](#) is Kyle DeBeer, [vice president of civic affairs](#) for the [Colorado League of Charter Schools](#). The organizations stated mission is to “shape public policy and opinion that favors charter school quality, growth, funding equity and facilities access.”

Rodriguez also worked for the Walton Family Foundation, a [major funder of charter schools](#), from 2008 to 2012.

Charter schools are independent of the established state school system but do receive government funding. Critics argue that they take away students and funding from public schools while not being subject to the same regulations and standards.

DeBeer and Noah Stout, Progressives’ other registered agent, did not respond to requests for comment. The IEC has spent more than \$162,000 to oppose Gebhardt using direct mailers, according to state records.

[Colorado Labor Action](#), a political group seeking to elect pro-union candidates, spent \$42,632 on a mailer attacking Rodriguez and highlighting her connection to the Walton Foundation as well as the IEC spending supporting her.

In two interviews with *Boulder Weekly*, Rodriguez defended her candidacy and labeled the recent attention to her campaign — [Colorado Sun](#), [Colorado Times-Recorder](#) and [Forbes](#) have all covered the spending — as “an orchestrated attack” from supporters of “establishment candidate” Gebhardt. Rodriguez says she was not recruited by anyone connected with the

Progressives' IEC, Colorado League of Charter Schools or the Walton Family Foundation, which she worked for "years ago."

"I'm not fighting for charter schools, so no one is buying me in this election," Rodriguez says. "I'm not charter for charter's sake; I don't want to turn the whole system into charters. I didn't choose a charter school for my own children."

"I do have a long history of working in the education space. I also have a history of holding charter schools accountable," including through Insignia Partners, the contracting firm she owns. "My largest contract is with an authorizer that holds schools accountable and shuts down under-performing schools."

Known and unknown

The influx of cash has made the board of education race [the spendiest on Boulder County ballots](#) and dwarfed what each candidate raised through their own respective committees. Jovita Schiffer is challenging longtime representative Judy Amabile for a seat in the Colorado Senate.

Other candidates have received IEC money as well. [Colorado Working Families Party](#), a chapter of the [national progressive political party](#), spent \$35,305 to support Junie Joseph's re-election to House District 10 and Jovita Schiffer's bid for Senate District 18, split evenly between the candidates. Two groups have spent a combined \$243,095 since May to back Schiffer's opponent, Judy Amabile.

One group is called Better Schools for a Stronger Colorado, which is tied to [Stand for Children](#), which advocates for "education equity and racial justice." Its registered agents, [Ryan Brown](#) and [Kara Dahl](#), both work for the organization. Neither Brown nor Dahl responded to requests for comment. The IEC is also supporting candidates Lindsey Daugherty (SD24), Mike Weissman (SD28), Michael Carter (HD36) and Yara Zokaie (HD52).

After three years as a state representative, Judy Amabile is running for a seat in the Colorado Senate.

Aside from its TRACER profile, no information was available about [A Whole Lot of People for Change](#), the second group supporting Amabile's campaign. The group's stated mission is "to support pragmatic candidates ... that believe in rebuilding Colorado's middle class and strengthening our local economy." They also supporting candidates in many of the same races as Better Schools: Carter (HD36), Ronda Fields (SD28) and Ethnie Treick (HD52).

A Whole Lot of People's registered agent, Stephanie Smith, did not respond to requests for comment.

IECs cannot coordinate with candidates, but are allowed to spend on their behalf even without the candidate's knowledge. Amabile says she was not aware of the groups supporting her until being contacted by *Boulder Weekly* and wasn't familiar with either group.

"I'm new to this, because I haven't had a real primary" challenge, Amabile says. "I was like, 'Who is running these digital ads?'"

Amabile also has received contributions through her [leadership fund](#), which can receive up to \$725 donations from corporations. In the past, companies like Anheuser Busch, Comcast and Pfizer have donated to Amabile. This year, J.P. Morgan is so far the only company who has contributed, a gift Amabile says she was also unaware of.

"Honestly, I don't even remember," she says. She believed the spending was related to a bill she sponsored last year that would have allowed credit unions to buy banks. Although that provision was stripped from the legislation, Amabile says she intends to run it again.

"What they want is to know that you will talk to them, that you will listen to their concerns," she says. "And I do. If I'm running an alcohol bill — which I did two this year that the industry opposed — I go out and have a meeting with them."

Credit Unions for Colorado Communities spent \$21,120 supporting Amabile's candidacy. The IEC is affiliated with [Go West](#), a credit union lobbying group.

CoverveJunie Joseph is running for re-election to her HD10 seat.

Leadership funds, the colloquial name for political committees, are common among elected officials, although candidates do not have to have held elected office to establish one. They are frequently used to contribute to fellow candidates.

HD10's [Joseph](#) also has a leadership fund, as does CU Regent candidate [Elliott Hood](#) and HD11 incumbent [Karen McCormick](#). Pfizer, J.P. Morgan and Weed Man Lawn Care have contributed to McCormick's fund in 2024. Joseph and Hood have not received any corporate donations this year.

Higher power

In Colorado, local public school districts must authorize new charter schools, but the state board of education can overrule these decisions. That may explain the interest of pro-charter groups in the race.

Education writer Peter Greene [speculated in Forbes](#) that Gebhardt's election to the board would tip it in a more anti-charter direction. Gov. Jared Polis, a charter supporter, [opposed a bill to increase transparency](#) at charter schools; many of the ads paid for by Progressives' IEC tout his endorsement of Rodriguez.

Rodriguez characterizes her views on charter schools as "pretty similar" to Gebhardt.



Outside Dark Money Flowing into School-Related November Elections

Three Local Published Articles Clarify the \$\$ Sources

Published 6/21/2024

“I think the charter vs. traditional schools argument doesn’t do any good,” she says. “Charters have existed in Colorado for over 30 years. I believe in what communities want.”

Gebhardt told *Boulder Weekly* she [supports](#) and has [secured funding for](#) charter schools. She was part of the BVSD board that [declined to review an application](#) for a proposed charter school, but says that was because at the time, they “didn’t comply with the Colorado anti-discrimination act” which includes things like protections for LGBTQ+ students.

The state board later [denied that school’s appeal of BVSD’s decision](#).

Rodriguez says she would also deny a charter school if it did not meet state standards. She feels it’s important for the state board to have ultimate authority over charters to fend off conservative attempts to influence what students are taught.

“We have MAGA [and] Moms for Liberty infiltrating our school boards,” she says. “Our local school boards are the front line, I think, of our culture wars.”

Rodriguez lamented the focus on IEC spending which “I have no control over.”

“I feel like who I am and why I’m running is getting lost,” she says. “It’s been really disheartening to feel like having children in the system is no longer important, having a child with special needs is no longer important, having spent 20 years working in education doesn’t seem to be important, having a minority voice doesn’t seem to be important anymore.”