Colorado Early College Network
10 Candidate Qualification Responses
July 22, 2024

1) *What are your professional goals in becoming the Chief Executive Officer ("CEO") of Colorado Early Colleges ("CEC")? What do you hope to achieve or learn in this role?*

As CEO of Colorado Early Colleges (CEC), my primary professional goal is to apply my experience in educational leadership to further develop a learning environment where every student can achieve academic excellence and personal growth. My career has been dedicated to driving student achievement, fostering innovative educational practices, and ensuring organizational efficiency and fiscal responsibility. At CEC, I aim to further these objectives by implementing strategic initiatives that enhance academic outcomes, promote equity, and build strong community partnerships in a charter network environment - growing and scaling initiatives to support the students across Colorado.

I hope to achieve several <u>key objectives</u> in this role:

1. **Enhance Academic Excellence**: Building on CEC's mission, I will focus on refining and expanding rigorous academic programs where possible to ensure all students, regardless of their background or skill level, have the opportunity to pursue their goals with a growth mindset. This includes integrating personalized learning approaches, expanding dual enrollment opportunities, and leveraging data analytics to monitor and improve student performance.

2. **Promote Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring equitable outcomes for all students is our mission - no exceptions, no excuses. I will work to identify and eliminate barriers to success, promote diversity in both staff and student populations, and implement targeted support programs to assist underrepresented groups.

3. **Strengthen Community Partnerships:** I will prioritize building partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations. These collaborations will provide students with real-world learning opportunities, internships, and mentorship programs, aligning with CEC's mission of preparing students for college and career success.

4. **Foster a Positive School Culture:** I will help to cultivate a supportive and inclusive network culture that emphasizes character development and wellness programming for

our students. By promoting a positive climate, students will be better equipped to thrive academically and personally.

5. **Operational Efficiency and Financial Stability:** Leveraging my experience in managing large budgets and complex organizations, I will ensure CEC operates efficiently and sustainably. This includes optimizing resource allocation, pursuing grant opportunities, and maintaining fiscal responsibility working as a team when developing budget parameters annually.

In this role, I hope to learn more about the unique challenges and opportunities within the Colorado Early Colleges network. Engaging with diverse stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, and community partners, will provide valuable insights into their needs and aspirations. I am also eager to explore innovative educational practices and technologies that can further enhance the learning experience at CEC.

In summary, my professional goals as CEO of CEC are to advance academic excellence, promote equity and inclusion, strengthen community partnerships, foster a positive school culture, and ensure operational efficiency. By achieving these objectives, I am confident that CEC will continue to be a leader in providing exceptional educational opportunities for all students. (453 words)

2) *Describe how you view the respective roles of parents/guardians ('Parents") and CEC in a student's education. Can you share an example from your experience where the roles of Parents and the school conflicted, and how you addressed that situation?*

I view the roles of parents/guardians and CEC as complementary and collaborative, each contributing uniquely to a student's educational journey. Parents provide foundational support, guidance, and values that shape a student's character and motivation. They are integral partners in reinforcing the importance of education and supporting learning beyond the classroom. CEC, on the other hand, offers structured academic programs, skilled educators, and a learning environment designed to challenge and nurture students intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

A successful partnership between parents and the school requires open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the student's success. CEC must actively engage parents through regular updates, involvement opportunities,

and responsive support systems, ensuring that parents feel valued and informed about their child's education.

An example from my experience where the roles of parents and the school conflicted involved a disagreement over a new personalized learning initiative. Some parents were concerned that the self-paced learning model might not provide enough structure for their children, potentially affecting their academic performance.

To address this situation, I took the following steps:

1. **Facilitated Open Dialogue:** I organized a series of informational sessions and town hall meetings to explain the personalized learning model in detail. These sessions included presentations from educators, testimonies from other schools with successful implementations, and a Q&A segment to address parents' concerns directly.

2. **Created Feedback Channels:** We established multiple channels for ongoing parent feedback, including surveys, focus groups, and a dedicated email address through a "Let's Talk" forms system. This ensured that parents could voice their concerns and suggestions.

3. **Piloted the Program:** We implemented a pilot program in a few classrooms to demonstrate the effectiveness of personalized learning. This allowed parents to observe the model in action and see the positive impact on student engagement and achievement. The program grew in acceptance at a more rapid pace than we envisioned.

4. **Provided Support Resources:** We offered workshops and resources to help parents understand how to support their children in a personalized learning environment. This included training on new technologies and strategies for fostering independent learning at home, visits to classrooms with students providing tours and demonstrating agency in their learning preferences at different stations within the classroom.

5. **Monitored and Reported Progress:** Throughout the pilot phase, we closely monitored student progress and regularly communicated updates to parents. This transparency helped build trust and demonstrated our commitment to addressing any challenges proactively.

As a result of these efforts, we were able to alleviate parents' concerns and gain their support for the personalized learning initiative. The program was subsequently

expanded, leading to improved student outcomes and greater satisfaction among both students and parents.

In summary, the respective roles of parents and CEC in a student's education are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. By fostering a collaborative relationship based on open communication and shared goals, we can effectively address conflicts and ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed. (488 words)

3) *How do you define diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)? Please provide specific examples of how you have implemented DEI initiatives with both staff and students in your previous roles.*

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are foundational principles that ensure all individuals have access to the same opportunities and are treated with respect and fairness.

- **Diversity** refers to the representation of different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within an organization. This includes but is not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.
- **Equity** involves creating fair and just opportunities for all individuals by addressing systemic inequalities and providing the necessary resources and support to overcome barriers.
- **Inclusion** Is the practice of creating environments where all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported, enabling them to fully participate and contribute to the community.

In my previous roles, I have implemented several DEI initiatives to support both staff and students. And, I've taught DEI coursework at the graduate level. Here are specific examples:

For Students:

1. **Equitable Access Programs**: In Park City Schools, I endorse the "Dream Big & Bright Futures" program, aimed at ensuring equitable access to advanced placement (AP) courses. By providing additional support, such as tutoring and mentorship, we increased the participation and success rates of underrepresented students in AP courses. The program has achieved a Silver Magna Award at the National School Board Association in 2022.

2. **Cultural Competence Curriculum:** At Greenwich Public Schools, we integrated a cultural competence curriculum across all grade levels. This curriculum included diverse perspectives and histories, promoting understanding and respect among students from different backgrounds. It also included professional development for teachers to equip them with the skills to handle sensitive topics and foster inclusive classrooms.

3. **Universal Preschool Access:** In Fremont School District 79 and at Park City Schools, I led the expansion of universal preschool programs, ensuring that children from all socioeconomic backgrounds had access to early childhood education. This initiative helped to close the achievement gap by providing a strong foundation for all students.

For Staff:

1. **Inclusive Hiring Practices:** Throughout my career, I have championed inclusive hiring practices to build a diverse workforce. This included implementing bias training for hiring committees, actively recruiting from diverse candidate pools, and setting diversity goals for new hires.

2. **Professional Development on DEI:** I have organized and facilitated numerous professional development sessions focused on DEI for staff. In Park City Schools, we launched a series of workshops on cultural competence, unconscious bias, and inclusive teaching strategies. These sessions helped staff to better understand and address the diverse needs of our student population.

3. **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** At Greenwich Public Schools, I supported the establishment of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for underrepresented staff. These groups provided a platform for employees to share experiences, advocate for change, and support one another in a safe and inclusive environment.

Impact and Outcomes:

- Increased representation of underrepresented groups in advanced academic programs.
- Improved cultural competence among students and staff.
- Enhanced engagement and retention of diverse staff members.
- Positive feedback from the community on the inclusive and supportive school environment.

In summary, DEI is about recognizing and valuing diversity, ensuring equitable opportunities, and creating inclusive environments. (500 words)

4) *What is your view on educators utilizing personal opinions with students inside or outside of the classroom? Provide an example of how you have addressed this in the past.*

Educators have a significant influence on their students, and it is so important that we maintain a professional and neutral stance, especially when discussing contentious or sensitive topics. While it is important for educators to foster critical thinking and open dialogue, they must be careful not to impose their personal opinions on students. Instead, our educators will create an environment where diverse perspectives are explored, and students are encouraged to form their own informed opinions. It is a badge of honor when a student looks back and thinks, "I wonder what Mrs. G's views were politically. I never knew when I was her student." This is a principle that takes professional development re: maintaining professional tone and demeanor with students no matter the topic.

In my view, educators should:

1. **Facilitate Balanced Discussions:** Educators should present multiple viewpoints on a topic, encouraging students to critically evaluate different perspectives and develop their own reasoned conclusions.
2. **Promote Respectful Dialogue:** Classrooms should be safe spaces where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or retribution. Educators should model and enforce respectful dialogue.
3. **Separate Personal Beliefs from Professional Role:** Educators should separate personal beliefs from their professional roles to avoid influencing students unduly and to uphold the integrity of the educational process. This approach helps maintain an unbiased learning environment and respects the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of all students.

Example from Experience:

During my tenure as Superintendent at Park City Schools, an incident occurred where a teacher expressed strong personal political views during a classroom discussion, leading to discomfort among students and complaints from parents. To address this situation, I took the following steps:

1. **Immediate Response:** HR met with the teacher to discuss the incident, emphasizing the importance of maintaining neutrality and creating an inclusive environment for all students. We reviewed the district's policy on discussing sensitive topics and the need to present balanced perspectives.

2. **Professional Development:** The school leadership team organized a series of workshops for staff on handling sensitive topics in the classroom. These sessions focused on techniques for facilitating balanced discussions, promoting critical thinking, and respecting diverse viewpoints.

3. **Policy Reinforcement:** We updated and reinforced our guidelines on professional conduct, ensuring that all staff were aware of the expectations regarding the discussion of personal beliefs and opinions in the classroom.

4. **Open Communication:** Our school leadership team facilitated meetings with concerned parents to address their concerns and explain the steps being taken to prevent similar incidents. This helped rebuild trust and demonstrate our commitment to maintaining a neutral and respectful learning environment.

By taking these actions, we were able to ensure that educators remained professional and impartial, fostering a classroom atmosphere conducive to open and respectful dialogue. (456 words)

5) *How do you interpret and connect with the CEC mission? If appointed CEO, how would you ensure its implementation at both strategic and classroom levels?*

CEC's mission to prepare a diverse population of students for life through rigorous academic studies and character development resonates deeply with my educational philosophy. This mission emphasizes the importance of academic excellence, holistic development, and inclusivity—principles that align with my professional values and experiences as a first generation college student and graduate. I attended university having earned 13 semester hours of college credit while in high school, secured a Pell Grant, and participated in work-study while graduating a semester early and paying for school on my own.

Interpretation and Connection:

- **Holistic Education:** The mission's focus on developing mind, body, and character aligns with my belief in a well-rounded education that prepares students not just academically, but also socially and emotionally.
- **Growth Mindset:** The commitment to a growth mindset and mastery for all students reflects my dedication to fostering an environment where every student can succeed, regardless of their starting point.
- **Community Collaboration:** The emphasis on community involvement underscores the importance of partnerships in providing students with real-world experiences and support systems.

Strategic Level Implementation:

1. **Develop a Comprehensive Strategic Plan:** If it is not already in place, we would lead the creation of a strategic plan along with our governing board and our SAC's that outlines clear goals, objectives, and metrics aligned with CEC's mission. This plan would involve input from stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, and community partners and be designed with 8 key components: vision, mission, values, goals, objectives, strategies, performance measures, annual work plan.

2. **Promote Equity and Inclusion:** I would ensure that equity and inclusion are central to all strategic initiatives and interwoven in each of the 8 components, providing resources and support to address disparities and promote diverse representation.

3. **Foster Community Partnerships:** I would strengthen partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations to enhance learning opportunities and support student development.

Classroom Level Implementation:

1. **Professional Development:** I would invest in ongoing professional development for educators to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to implement the mission effectively in their classrooms. This includes training on differentiated instruction, cultural competence, and character education.

2. **Curriculum and Instruction:** I would ensure that the curriculum is rigorous, inclusive, and aligned with the mission. This involves integrating character education and social-emotional learning into daily instruction.

3. **Support Systems:** I would establish robust support systems for students, including academic tutoring, counseling services, and extracurricular programs that promote

physical and character development within budgetary frameworks and state/charter authorized staffing levels.

By integrating these strategies at both the strategic and classroom levels, I am confident that we can bring CEC's mission to life, providing every student with the opportunity to thrive academically and personally. (448 words)

6) What does educational equity mean to you, and how would you ensure its application across the CEC network?

Educational equity means providing every student with the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. It involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers that create disparities in educational outcomes and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education.

Ensuring Application Across the CEC Network:

1. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** In the event it is not already in place, I would recommend implementing a data analytics system to identify achievement gaps and monitor progress. This system would track key performance indicators, disaggregated by student demographics, to ensure we are meeting the needs of all students.

2. **Targeted Interventions:** Based on data insights, I would work with school site teams and the academic division to develop targeted intervention programs to support underperforming student groups. This could include tutoring, mentorship, and additional academic resources tailored to specific needs within budgetary constraints.

3. **Inclusive Curriculum:** We will ensure that the curriculum is inclusive and reflective of diverse perspectives. This involves incorporating multicultural education, promoting cultural competence, and addressing bias in instructional materials.

4. **Professional Development:** We will provide ongoing professional development for staff on equity and inclusion. This training would focus on recognizing and addressing implicit bias, implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, and fostering an inclusive classroom environment as an ongoing area of focus rather than a one time workshop. The work will also be integrated across the strategic plan to have consistent access and application across network schools.

5. **Community and Family Engagement:** I would actively engage families and the community in our efforts to promote educational equity. This includes creating opportunities for parent involvement, establishing partnerships with community organizations, and providing resources to support learning at home. For elementary students, the Ready Readers decodable books, for example, provide resource at home and at school for practice delivered in personalized student packages. Or, Amira Learning provides an opportunity for a student to listen and to read aloud to an animated character bringing together fluency and comprehension.

6. **Resource Allocation:** I would advocate for equitable resource allocation across the CEC network, ensuring that schools serving higher-need populations receive additional support. This includes funding, staffing, and access to enrichment programs.

By prioritizing these actions, I would work to create an educational environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed and achieve their full potential. (386 words)

7) *If selected as CEC's CEO, outline your priorities and planned initiatives for your first 100 days.*

Priorities for the First 100 Days:

1. **Engage with Stakeholders:**
   - Conduct listening tours with students, parents, staff, and community partners to understand their perspectives, needs, and aspirations - as an ongoing practice.
   - Establish open lines of communication and build relationships with key stakeholders, including the CEC Board, faculty, and community leaders ensuring priorities are named and addressed promptly.

2. **Assess Current State:**
   - Review existing strategic plans, policies, and performance data to gain a comprehensive understanding of CEC's strengths and areas for improvement.
   - Conduct an organizational review to evaluate the effectiveness of current programs and initiatives along with the executive leadership team.

3. **Develop a Strategic Plan:**

- Collaborate with stakeholders to review and update or to create a strategic plan that aligns with CEC's mission and goals. This plan will outline clear objectives, strategies, and metrics for success.

4. **Promote Equity and Inclusion:**
   - Launch initiatives to address educational equity, including professional development for staff, targeted support for underserved students, and inclusive curriculum development.

5. **Strengthen Community Partnerships:**
   - Build and strengthen partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations to enhance learning opportunities and support student development.

6. **Enhance Communication:**
   - Implement transparent and effective communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed and engaged. This includes regular updates, newsletters, and town hall meetings.

Planned Initiatives:

1. **Listening Tours and Town Halls:**
   - Schedule meetings with students, parents, staff, and community partners to gather feedback and build relationships.
   - Hold town hall meetings to share initial observations and plans, fostering a culture of transparency and collaboration.

2. **Strategic Planning Workshops:**
   - Facilitate workshops with key stakeholders to develop a strategic plan that aligns with CEC's mission and goals.
   - Establish working groups to focus on specific areas such as academic excellence, equity, community engagement, and operational efficiency.

3. **Equity Audit and Action Plan:**
   - Conduct or review equity audit to identify disparities and develop an action plan to address them.
   - Provide professional development on equity and inclusion for staff, focusing on culturally responsive teaching practices and bias reduction.

4. **Community Partnership Program:**

- Launch a program to build partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations either based on the pathways program such as working with Schoolinks or other providers to ensure seamless transition into college, career, and certification pathways.
- Create opportunities for students to engage in internships, mentorships, and real-world learning experiences.

5. **Communication Plan:**
- Along with the strategic priorities, review and update a comprehensive communication plan to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.
- Use multiple channels, including newsletters, social media, and in-person meetings, to share updates and gather feedback.

By focusing on these priorities and initiatives in the first 100 days, I am confident that we can create a strong foundation for success and drive positive outcomes for all students within the CEC network. The anticipated outcomes of this plan include: build trust, establish clear goals, address disparities, leverage community resources, ensure transparent communication, and drive continuous improvement to support the mission of CEC. (487 words)

8) *Describe a challenging situation with a coworker or subordinate and how you addressed it.*

A challenging situation arose when a key member of my leadership team at Park City Schools consistently missed deadlines and failed to communicate effectively, impacting our project timelines and team morale.

Steps Taken to Address the Situation:

1. **Private Meeting:** I scheduled a private meeting with the individual to discuss my concerns. I approached the conversation with empathy, seeking to understand any underlying issues that might be affecting their performance.

2. **Clear Expectations:** During the meeting, I clearly outlined my expectations regarding deadlines, communication, and teamwork. We reviewed the specific instances where expectations were not met and discussed the impact on the team and our goals.

3. **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** We engaged in a collaborative problem-solving session to identify barriers to their performance and develop strategies to overcome them. This included setting realistic goals, creating a more structured workflow, and identifying support they might need.

4. **Regular Check-Ins:** To ensure ongoing support and accountability, I implemented regular check-ins to monitor progress, provide feedback, and address any emerging issues promptly.

5. **Professional Development:** I encouraged the individual to participate in professional development opportunities to enhance their time management and communication skills.

Results and Reflection:

Through these steps, the team member showed significant improvement in meeting deadlines and communication. The regular check-ins and support helped to rebuild trust and morale within the team. Reflecting on this experience, I learned the importance of addressing performance issues promptly, setting clear expectations, and providing ongoing support to facilitate professional growth and team success. (247 words)

9) **Can you talk about a challenging experience with a board member and how you handled the situation to resolve any conflicts?**

In my role as Superintendent at Greenwich Public Schools, I encountered a challenging situation with a board member who disagreed with the strategic direction of our facilities improvement plan. The disagreement centered on the prioritization of projects and the allocation of resources.

Steps Taken to Resolve the Conflict:

1. **Open Dialogue:** I initiated a one-on-one meeting with the board member to understand their concerns and perspective. This open dialogue helped to identify specific areas of disagreement and underlying issues.

2. **Data-Driven Approach:** I presented comprehensive data and research supporting the strategic plan, including the long-term benefits and the positive impact on student

learning environments. This evidence-based approach helped to provide clarity and address misconceptions.

3. **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** We engaged in a collaborative problem-solving process to find common ground. This involved revisiting project priorities, exploring alternative solutions, and considering adjustments to the plan that addressed the board member's concerns while still achieving our overall objectives.

4. **Building Consensus:** I facilitated additional meetings with the full board to discuss the revised plan and build consensus. This included providing opportunities for all board members to voice their opinions and participate in the decision-making process.

5. **Transparent Communication:** Throughout the process, I ensured transparent communication with all stakeholders, including staff, parents, and community members, to keep them informed and involved in the planning process.

Outcome and Reflection:

By taking a collaborative and transparent approach, we were able to reach a compromise that satisfied the board member's concerns while maintaining the integrity of the strategic plan. This experience reinforced the importance of open communication, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration in resolving conflicts and achieving organizational goals. (270 words)

10) ***What are your greatest concerns regarding this opportunity, and how do you plan to address them if chosen as CEO?***

One of my greatest concerns regarding the CEO position at CEC is ensuring that we effectively address the diverse needs of our student population, especially in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Another concern is maintaining and enhancing the financial stability and operational efficiency of the organization to support our ambitious goals.

Strategies to Address These Concerns:

1. **Personalized Learning and Equity:**
   - **Data-Driven Interventions:** Implement a robust data analytics system to identify achievement gaps and tailor interventions to support underperforming student groups.

This aligns with my experience in implementing a learner dashboard and data analytics system in Park City Schools to monitor student performance and outcomes
 - **Professional Development:** Provide ongoing professional development for educators on differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students. My experience in organizing professional development workshops on equity and inclusion will be instrumental in this effort

2. **Financial Stability and Operational Efficiency:**
   - **Strategic Planning:** Develop a comprehensive strategic plan that aligns with CEC's mission and includes clear financial and operational goals. My experience in managing large budgets and strategic initiatives will be helpful in this area.
   - **Resource Optimization:** Ensure efficient allocation of resources by implementing best practices in budgeting, procurement, and operational management. My track record of optimizing staffing structures and enhancing operational efficiencies in various districts supports this approach.

3. **Community Engagement and Partnerships:**
   - **Strengthen Community Partnerships:** Build and strengthen partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community organizations to provide students with real-world learning opportunities and support systems. This strategy is consistent with my efforts in building robust community partnerships in Park City Schools.
   - **Transparent Communication:** Maintain open and transparent communication with all stakeholders to build trust and foster a collaborative environment. My experience in facilitating town hall meetings and engaging with diverse stakeholder groups will be valuable in achieving this goal.

4. **Innovation and Adaptability:**
   - **Embrace Innovation:** Foster a culture of innovation by encouraging the adoption of new educational technologies and teaching methodologies. My background in leading innovative learning initiatives, such as the comprehensive personalized learning program in Fremont School District, will guide this effort.
   - **Continuous Improvement:** Establish mechanisms for continuous feedback and improvement to ensure that we adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities. My experience in launching and sustaining Professional Learning Communities across districts will support this initiative.

By addressing these concerns through targeted strategies and leveraging my extensive experience in educational leadership, I am confident in my ability to lead CEC effectively and achieve our shared goals. I would be honored to have the opportunity to lead the

Colorado Early Colleges Network into its next era of growth in partnership with the faculty and staff, with partnership and authorizing agencies, and in working with the dedicated governance team. (453 words)

Thank you for this opportunity to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jill Gildea