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MENTORED BY GOVERNOR LAMM, PUBLIC POLICY ALUM LEADS THE WAY IN EDUCATION

Dan Schaller (M.P. ’10) started his master’s program at DU’s Institute for Public Policy as a high school teacher interested in exploring ways he could engage in and influence the larger education debate. Now he is leading the way as the Director of Advocacy with the Colorado League of Charter Schools in Denver.

Governor Richard Lamm, co-director of the Institute of Public Policy Studies, said, “I have been a fan of Dan’s for some time. We have stayed in touch [since he graduated] because I believe he has great talents and I want him to succeed. He has skills and ambitions that qualify him for a variety of top jobs. He is not only a hard worker, but also extremely dedicated to improving U.S. education. This is a talented young man who deserves to play a key role in education reform.”

Schaller’s undergraduate degree was in political science, so policy and politics were always areas of interest for him. After spending five years in the classroom as a teacher at Arrupe Jesuit High School in northwest Denver, he decided “to go back to my roots,” he said, to examine what sort of impact he could have on education by approaching it from the public policy perspective. Knowing that he also wanted to stay in Denver, it was an easy decision for Schaller to pursue an M.P.P. at DU.

When Schaller left Arrupe to pursue his degree at DU, he did so with the intention of supplementing his coursework with real-world policy experience. During his time at DU, Schaller had a number of internships and work experiences in public policy: interning under Governor Ritter’s Education Policy Advisor; working in the Education Program at the National Conference of State Legislatures; spending a year at Montbello High School with the Denver Scholarship Foundation; and interning with the Denver Preschool Program. The Denver Preschool Program hired Schaller as their Program Manager after he completed his M.P.P., and from there he was promoted first to Director of Outreach & Operations, then on to Senior Director of Strategy & Communications in his 3-year tenure with the organization.

One of the highlights of Schaller’s career thus far was ushering the Denver Preschool Program through its 5-year anniversary. In that time, the program helped more than 25,000 Denver children attend preschool, and “the results demonstrate that those children are doing better in kindergarten and beyond,” stated Schaller. “It’s extremely gratifying to know that I played some small part in helping to make that happen.”

Today, as the Director of Advocacy with the Colorado League of Charter Schools, Schaller is responsible for educating policymakers and the broader community on charter schools and what they have accomplished for the children of Colorado. He is also
responsible for working to advance the policy agenda for Colorado's charter school sector, both at the state capitol and at the district level.

Schaller credits his degree from DU for helping to ground him in some of the fundamentals of the policy-making process. "It gave me a solid framework through which to assess policy while at the same time exposing me to a wide variety of policy areas, ranging from education to energy to the economy," he said. But Schaller also built relationships at DU for life. "I still consider certain professors close mentors and I continue to solicit their advice on career and life decisions," he said. "The relationships I established with various professors were by far the most memorable and valuable part of my time at DU. I consider a couple of my professors as mentors to this day, and one of them in particular - Governor Lamm - has been invaluable in terms of the ongoing career advice he has offered and the networking doors he has opened."

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