

## Austin ISD School Board Trustee Candidate Written Response Questions

Please write your response to each question below and submit by Wednesday September 30, 2020

### Written Response Questions

1. What is one specific thing you would like to do differently to improve, create, build and maintain community trust and partnership with diverse families whose children receive special education services? *Survey all SPED families in their home language and sped employees/schools with high sped enrollment on what is working and what needs improvement, prioritize goals from survey, and form a group or add representation to an ongoing sped advisory group, etc. that include voices from all schools, backgrounds and disabilities that meet regularly to accomplish said goals.*
2. What is your definition of meaningful inclusion of children of all abilities including those with intellectual disabilities and those working on prerequisite skills and what are the benefits of including those students? *Allowing ALL children to be placed in the least restrictive environment as much as the child and family wants with support from school staff.*
3. Do you believe children working on prerequisite skills and those multiple grade levels behind their peers can be included and educated in the general education classroom? How could this be accomplished? *YES! They need one on one or small group led instruction within a general ed placement, and possible pull outs for more focused one on one or small group instruction.*
4. Why should the district properly fund an inclusion model to include co-teaching and providing resources to properly modify, adapt, and accommodate all learners including those working on prerequisite skills and multiple grade levels behind their peers? How can this funding be justified and accomplished? *An inclusion model creates success for all i.e., Montessori model; which allows all learners to go at their own pace while also supporting one another. More inclusion allows for Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for sped kids, allows for general ed students to learn about differently abled peers, and vice versa. You build community this way! This investment in education creates empathy and community that can pave the way for long term relationships and supports.*
5. What are your views on segregated placements like Life Skills, Social Behavioral Skills (SBS), Social Communication Resources and Services (SCORES), and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and the need to potentially, remove a child from the general education setting and/or their home school and community to be placed in these units? *A child should be placed in a general ed class as much as the child and the family want. And, the child should be supported in their home school or a school very close by. Least Restrictive Environment is a win for all with appropriate teacher / classroom supports. Kids in segregated placements can be moved around from year to year. Segregated placements affects their ability to form community, depend on stability and create friendships. These are the kids that need stability the most.*
6. How do segregated placements affect the ability of students to benefit from SEL and other programs with their peers? *It's important to see peers modeling different behaviors i.e., typical vs. neurotypical, non verbal, etc. Kids start to see ableism differently and learn to work and accept each other from a young age.*

7. AISD has long given tremendous amounts of discretion to principals with vastly different levels of knowledge about disabilities, or none, to make decisions about the education and inclusion of students at their campuses. This has resulted in vast differences in the treatment of students with disabilities across AISD. This “local control” has forced parents to wage individual battles for services and inclusion on a campus by campus and one student at a time basis. How will you address the fact that local control hinders students with disabilities and leads to inequities across the district? *There needs to be a streamlined approach to the special education process from child find to admittance into special education. Principals and their administrative staff need to be trained on this and held accountable for following through. Special education services should not change depending on your zip code or the color of your skin. Schools should be held to follow the IDEA guidelines. It should not change principal to principal. IDEA is the law.*
8. There is overrepresentation in disciplinary removals of students with disabilities and a great deal of intersection between disability and ethnicity, with Latino and black boys being vastly overrepresented in disciplinary removals. How will you ensure that policies are in place and monitored across the district to ensure equity and reduce the numbers of disciplinary removals for students with disabilities and students of color? *There need to be more training on how a disability plus trauma can affect behavior, and that schools recognize that bad behavior is not always bad behavior. It can be trauma, autism, add, and/or lack of food, sleep, and shelter. More training on understanding, compassion and intervention for the intersectionality of disability, ethnicity and lower socio economic populations that DE-ESCALATE behaviors. A diagnosis should not put a student on the school to prison pipeline because their behaviors look different than what is perceived as acceptable. These students need proper supports from an early age. Training for staff and parents on this is a must!*
9. What do you see as the role of the district's Equity Office and its evolving Equity Plan and Special Education? *To ensure that special education students are general ed students first and that all students should be treated with equity in terms of child find, special education evaluation, special education DESIGNATION, school supports, and unit placement.*

Commitment Questions, if no, please explain

1. Will you commit to making special education students everyone’s responsibility to educate, including general education teachers, administrators, and central leadership and not just special education staff? Will you commit to providing meaningful education on inclusion for special education students and on disabilities and behavioral support training to all AISD staff? *Yes!*
2. Are you committed to funding training in best practices for students with disabilities and not training primarily focused on the district’s compliance? *Yes!*
3. Will you commit to ensure that the district studies whether access to segregated units leads to better outcomes for students? *Yes!*
4. Are you committed to supporting legislative action to reform and increase special education funding in Texas? *Yes!*
5. How do you commit to educating yourself about our disability community and how will you

advocate to combat ableism in AISD? [By meeting with identified local disability groups to learn about their priorities i.e., Disability Rights, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, VELA, CSEE, AISD special education task force, etc.](#)

6. Are you committed to including in the Superintendent Scorecard metrics around disability to include literacy levels, outcomes such as post-secondary program participation, meaningful employment, and independence, amount of legal expenditures, family satisfaction, inclusion time by PIEMS code, and disciplinary measures for students receiving special education? [Yes!](#)

7. Will you commit to a third-party audit of special education in AISD? [Yes!](#)

8. Will you commit to a third-party survey to include teachers/staff and also families of children receiving special education? [Yes!](#)

9. As you committed to increasing transparency with respect to special education expenditures (publicly sharing information on the budget with respect to special education income and expenditures, including how much is spent on attorney's fees, mediation, due process, litigation, how much is recovered from software that bills Medicaid)? [Yes!](#)

10. Will you commit to pushing for the improvement of the working environment for special education educators to include increasing pay for Teaching Assistants, providing teachers with dedicated case management time and manageable caseloads, and improving communications between the special education administration and special education staff? [Yes!](#)

11. Will you commit to improving communications with and support of families of students receiving special education by working on reinstating the Special Education Parent Support Specialist and related programs, strengthening the SEAC and ensuring that it has a role in providing guidance to the Superintendent and board, and pushing for honest/open/transparent communications from the district? [Yes!](#)