



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?

Our family has benefitted from peers and parents who already engaged the Special Education infrastructure in Austin. I would like the district to dedicate resources to help foster this form of peer networking.

I would also like to have SPED raised to either address the superintendent directly or the board. This could prevent – like what happened with school closures and the current COVID19 situation – that SPED is always an afterthought and not included centrally in the planning, especially given all the moving parts and legal obligations associated with closing and reopening schools in general.

Nuestra familia pudo beneficiarse del apoyo de amigos y colegas que tuvieron experiencias con SPED y discapacidades en el distrito. La información y la empatía fueron muy valiosos y nos proveyó herramientas y recursos culturales.

Me gustaría subir la importancia de SPED en el nivel administrativo, para evitar cuando el distrito hace planes, se les olvida cuestiones de discapacidad, acceso y vulnerabilidad. Esto se vio en el proceso de clausuras y en la respuesta a COVID19.

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?

Eventually, everyone will need a measure of support to move along in life. Having peers with a variety of abilities and engagements with material is part of our workplace, part of our family life, and finding ways to have students work together or in the same room on tasks is part of what schools do – prepare people to be part of a complicated and varied society.

El lema que captura esta cuestión mayor es de ADAPT: 'nada sobre nosotros sin nosotros.' Nothing about us without us.

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. People already work on different materials in classrooms. Having people work on different materials and skills in a shared environment is part of Universal Design principles.

Si. Lugares de trabajo siempre bregan con gente de varias habilidades. Porque no también los estudiantes y personal de las escuelas.

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?

Yes.

Inequality along ability intersects and strengthens established inequalities along sex, race, language and national origin. By strengthening UDI and educating faculty and staff to think more broadly about learning and access, costly separate interventions can be minimized, lessened and avoided.

Classrooms already deal with students with a variety of skills and perspectives. This would help socialize everyone around these matters – and introduce teachers and students to the variety of tasks and skills that it takes to keep a workplace and a family going.

Also, given the school to prison pipeline for children with disabilities, the long history of housing and mis-treating people by placing them in separate spaces, the decision to separate causes its own harms that will have long-term costs for students and society in general.

Si.

Si el distrito puede establecer un modelo 'universal design and inclusión', esto puede ayudar que el distrito mantenga los costos asociados con una infraestructura separada y costosa.

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?

Students should have access to these services in all schools – see above regarding UDI. Creating specific spaces meant to address some of these issues also outsources

responsibility for education on to these other units.

This is a complex question requiring a broader shift in understanding how children with disabilities overlap with students who do not yet have a disability.

El momento que el distrito decide mandar a un estudiante a una clases separada y segregada es un momento que el instituto está practicando discriminación. La decisión se debe tomar cuidadosamente, especialmente si existe la posibilidad de que los estudiantes puedan mantener sus lazos con sus estudiantes y sus comunidades.

6. How do segregated placements affect the ability of students to benefit from SEL and other programs with their peers?

Students in SCORES, SBS, and ECSEE will learn how to deal with each other; students not in those will learn how to deal with each other. When they graduate, these newly minted adults will have to learn how to deal with each other without having learned the structured forms of interactions that shape people within these separate tracks. This poses a broader problem for how disabilities and ableism will shape interactions between adults.

Si. Uno aprende muchísimo de sus amigos, mucho que a veces no se incluye

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?

the recent report on the broad differences in discipline and suspension rates across middle and high schools demonstrates the costs of the ‘strong principal’ model. Moving to require universal design capacitation for principals and making the incorporation of SPED – along other forms of incorporation across gender, race and nationality – a priority for evaluation might present a more even relationship between SPED parents, kids and their school authorities.

Me cuesta apoyar un modelo que se basa en discursos antidemocráticos – ‘strong leaders = caudillos apoderados.’ No sé porque el distrito estableció este modelo. Requiriendo capacitación y esquemas de evaluación a la administración que requieren ‘Diseño universal’ podría romper of modificar el esquema.

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?

I have a number of responses. What I will say is that Dr. Angela Ward is running a highly-regarded restorative justice program and this needs to be expanded (or it has expanded) to help disciplinary authorities take disability and ableism in mind when students are deemed out of place.

I will also say that suspensions are part of the score card, but also including SPED outcomes in terms of inclusion, referrals, parent surveys for the superintendent score card would help ensure equity.

I have also heard that it takes the AISD diagnosis staff 2 – 3 weeks more to prepare staff to address and respond to the initial diagnosis when the diagnosis is in Spanish. Given the concern and attention and legal requirement that these diagnoses happen quickly, this delay contributes to disheartening and alienating outcomes for already stressed parents.

Duele saber que casi 45% de la gente arrestada y en prisión tienen dislexia diagnosticada. Duele saber que os jóvenes puestos en asilos o escuelas del estado en California e Indiana fueron esterilizados, y desproporcionalmente la decisión se enfoco en gente Afrodescendiente y Latina. Duele también saber que hay demoras para los padres que requieren traducción, por lo menos dos o tres semanas.

El distrito debe hacer cambios para mejorar la confianza de padres y estudiantes en el distrito.

9. What do you see as the role of the district's Equity Office and its evolving Equity Plan and Special Education?

It is my hope that the new board will require an equity audit and that the finances and general resources that shape the ableism of Austin ISD also come under the purview of the equity audit. If I am part of the board I will push to have disability and ableism be part of the equity review and audit.

Espero que la nueva mesa requiera una asesoría de las desigualdades del distrito y que la asesoría incluya discapacidades.

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. This is a great idea and a worthy ideal.

Si. Buena idea.

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. Moreover, using best practices might help staff and faculty see beyond compliance to multiple pathways to creating learning communities.

Si.

3. Will you commit to ensure that the district studies whether access to segregated units leads to better outcomes for students?

yes.

One of the key arguments against Jim Crow segregation was that creating separate institutions was financially unsustainable in fiscally conservative body politics. There is no reason not to test to see if segregated – or dedicated – units provide similar outcomes to education within the context of established family and community schools.

Si.

4. Are you committed to supporting legislative action to reform and increase special education funding in Texas?

yes. The current TEA administration and the general ISD community still has to find ways to reconstruct itself from the 8.5% cap TEA imposed on schools and school districts.

Si.

5. How do you commit to educating yourself about our disability community and how will you advocate to combat ableism in AISD?

Reading, talking, taking notes, and asking. My brother, the middle-school teacher, says all knowledge is social knowledge, so expanding the boundaries of my community to include networks of disability advocates and parents in Austin would be another important way. Finally, using a disability lens to examine general questions of schooling and finance would be a way to start identifying and addressing ableism, both that that comes from TEA and the ones that come from our attitudes and institutions.

Seguir y escuchar lo que dice la comunidad movilizado, las familias y los estudiantes.

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?

Si.

Yes.

7. Will you commit to a third-party audit of special education in AISD?

yes. I am not sure I would want the audit to be separate from the general third-party equity audit all candidates have said they would support.

Si. Pero prefiero que la discapacidad este incluida en una asesoría de desigualdades en el distrito.

8. Will you commit to a third-party survey to include teachers/staff and also families of children receiving special education?

yes. See above.

Si.

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)?

I assume that would be part of any audit. I would encourage engaging those questions, given the concerns articulated by parents I know linked to CSEEE.

Si.

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?

Recent testimony given at an Education Austin listening sessions demonstrated that the current situation is unsustainable. The turnover rates are horrifying – given the need for skills and familiarity and time off required for effective special education learning contexts.

El Sistema en este momento es insostenible. Hay que escuchar lo que dicen los empleados en estas oficinas.

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. I would also like to learn why the SEAC is no longer around.

Si.