



## 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? *My goal is to ensure meaningful progress by students receiving special education services right along with general education students, and to pinpoint needed strategies to ensure meaningful progress from year to year. I would ensure there is opportunity for parent and stakeholder communication with district leadership and administration on a regular basis to promote exchange of ideas and input so that every student leaves AISD well equipped for their next steps.*
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? *Meaningful inclusion is providing instruction in general education classrooms and providing consistent training and resources to teachers and paraprofessionals to teach students with diverse learning styles. Access to extracurricular and social opportunities with supports to ensure positive participation by all students. The benefits are greater diversity in school settings and a richer environment that promotes higher levels of achievement and better understanding of the strengths and needs of all students. Great gains in social and behavioral skills and attendance are also made through peer relationships and modeling.*
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, with an approach that differentiates the learning needs and assessment of the students and a teaching model that adapts for each student. Regular communication with the student and parents regarding the supports needed for the student to make progress will help inclusion be successful. Providing training and resources to teachers and staff is essential.*
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? *This is important to accomplish an inclusive environment with great emphasis on having students in the general education setting. Giving teachers and staff support so they can properly modify curriculum, utilize different teaching methods and make sure accommodations are fully*

*realized is essential. Inclusion of students could lead to more efficient use of the district's teachers, staff and resources by avoiding duplication. District leadership working with the special education department must review current practices and prioritize funding to accomplish this.*

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?

*There must be a very robust review of each child's needs and whether the campus has fully explored alternatives prior to such placements. Parental input is important. Programs such as these must have highly qualified and experienced teachers and support staff to ensure students make meaningful progress. Opportunities to transition back into a general education setting should be assessed regularly through the ARD process. A student's ability to practice skills they are learning in real-time with their peers can be limited if not in a general education setting.*

6. How do segregated placements affect the ability of students to benefit from SEL and other programs with their peers? *AISD's commitment to SEL district wide has led to integrating social and emotional programs and practices into students' everyday life as part of their instruction. My concern is that a student's progress on academics, social skills and relationships with peers becomes more difficult to develop in a segregated setting. The student's future opportunities for on-going progress, post-secondary studies and employment can be impacted.*

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 first steps should be assessing the current landscape across the district both internally and externally with input from parents and stakeholders. Creating district goals and measurable objectives will help guide the assessment and point to changes to be considered. Training about disabilities and approaches to best serve students with disabilities should be expanded to all levels of AISD administration.*

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? *Review of AISD disciplinary policies and practices is an important starting point to consider if there*

*is a need to update what is in place now. Also, review of how the policies are implemented is necessary to determine disparate application to students of color and those with a disability. District data must be reviewed to look at the incidence of disciplinary action in relation to the student population. A board level action plan with measurable outcomes and public reporting about progress should be updated regularly to evaluate the district's progress. Ensuring adequate resources are devoted to alternatives to removal from the school setting will best serve all students.*

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

*The Equity Office must assess all departments of AISD and make recommendations regarding how to make Special Education equitable. Furthermore, any report and recommendation should include disaggregated data to ensure a deeper understanding of how AISD is delivering Special Education Services.*

**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? Yes. 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? *I commit to monthly meetings with members of CSEE. I value direct communication from advocates to have a better understanding of issues that need addressing.*
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