



## 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? **We need to improve communication district-wide and this is most critical to focus our initial efforts towards our families with the most need which certainly includes families whose children receive special services. This step should be prioritized so that any specific next steps (community forums, surveys, family interviews/focus groups, etc.) so that all of those next steps feel genuine and are sustainable.**
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? **Inclusion should always be working towards an always improving least restrictive environment. The ultimate goal here is that there is no "special education" and that educators are given the support to provide developmentally appropriate education to all students.**
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? **Absolutely. We need to prioritize (in hiring, retention, and professional development) the understanding that being an effective educator means successfully differentiating instruction and materials for all students. Additionally we should be working to prioritize push-in services over pull-out services in all possible cases.**
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? **As a former teacher of students receiving special education services I can attest to the fact that without a co-teaching model at best and a teacher assistant model at worst, it is incredibly difficult to provide developmentally appropriate education to all students. This funding is justified by prioritizing equity regardless of student ability. This will certainly be difficult to fund but I believe we should start by adopting a student-based budgeting system that directly funds students based on weighted measures of need to create a much more transparent and flexible funding system.**

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? **I haven't seen much data around segregated units leading significant improvements in student outcomes. I believe we need to prioritize a move towards providing education in the least restrictive environment leveraging push-in services over pull-out and segregated units wherever it's possible.**
6. How do segregated placements affect the ability of students to benefit from SEL and other programs with their peers? **Removing students from classrooms creates a culture of "othering" that can have long term impacts on both the students receiving services as well as those that do not. We must consistently work to dismantle the barriers that serve to segregate students.**
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? **I believe strongly in the power of school level autonomy. The problem with AISD is that autonomy has not been implemented in any structured and intentional way. Creating this clear structure (as I worked to do as the manager of school autonomy in Lawrence Public Schools). A well designed system of school autonomy would have clear accountability requirements for principals with transparent consequences if accountability requirements are met or not met. Additionally, central office supports must be strategically allocated across campuses based on principal skill and experience.**
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? **We must first engage in a detailed and comprehensive equity audit (3rd party lead) that addresses inequities across the system and across campuses related to race, income, student ability, and self-identities. This work should be overseen by the district's Equity Office. That same office should also be responsible for acting on the audit and creating an action plan with clear goals and metrics. With this added responsibility, we must also empower the Equity Office with additional staff and resources.**
9. What do you see as the role of the district's Equity Office and its evolving Equity Plan and Special Education? **See the response to question 8**

### **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?
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