



Austin Succeeds AISD School Board Candidate Questionnaire

Leadership & Governance

1. What perspectives or experiences do you bring to the school board and what is your broader vision for the district? *Please cite both the challenges and opportunities for Austin ISD that you would like to address as a trustee.*

I bring many perspectives to the school board.

- I'm the parent of two AISD students, a son who graduated in 2017 and a daughter who's a high school senior. Through them, I have personal experience as an AISD parent from kindergarten through high school, including 10 years as a parent at my neighborhood elementary school in District 5 and many more years as a parent at Kealing magnet and LASA. That gives me an in-depth understanding of a neighborhood school in D5 and as a family whose students exercised choice – both options that help keep families in AISD. I was deeply involved in all three schools – on CACs and PTA boards, creating a school garden, building relationships that I still have today.
- I'm a public school graduate from San Antonio, so I bring experience from my years as a student in Texas public schools.
- I bring experience as a 5-year board member and longtime delegate to the Austin Council of PTAs, including two years as president from 2018-2020. I have spent time on campuses throughout AISD, with families, students, teachers, parent support specialists, and principals. Our board has met monthly with the superintendent, and frequently with many other administrators. And I have built relationships with not-for-profit leaders and other AISD partners. That has given me a broad perspective – about what's working and what's not on campuses, about how families feel about their schools, about why families leave AISD, and about what keeps families connected to our schools.
- I have experience gained through three years on the DAC, two years with the NACER leadership team, and other AISD service. I have presented at the Adelante Conference and spoken at education conferences. Each time, I meet new people and learn new things.



- I bring experience as a non-practicing lawyer who works as journalist and documentary filmmaker – someone who has researched and reported in depth about education, and race, and our system of justice. I understand data. I know the power of personal stories and lived experience. And I listen – not for the sake of listening, but because I truly want to hear and learn.
- I bring experience as an advocate, who has used my own privilege to work for systemic change. I have partnered with others to advocate for an end to Austin’s juvenile curfew, for free CapMetro service for k-12 students, for increased school funding statewide, and for a complete count for Travis County in the 2002 Census.
- I bring experience as a mentor who has worked with media students at Austin High and at Navarro. Through the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs project, students have made videos that have been shared online and shown on the air. We have spoken together at SXSW. Some have graduated and worked with me on professional projects. And I am still in touch with several today. For the past three years, I have also mentored middle school students from Martin and Burnet who are applying to LASA, meeting with them weekly from November to January.
- I bring experience as someone who lives in Austin, and who knows that strong schools are essential for a strong city. We owe great schools to every child who AISD serves. And we owe great schools to everyone who calls Austin home.

These experiences give me a strong understanding of how AISD works, a broad and deep network of relationships, a reputation for bringing people together and learning from the people I meet, and a strong track record of effective advocacy for our students and our schools.

Challenges

- **FUNDING:** The challenge of funding underlies all others. Texas ranks near the bottom nationally in per student funding – a fact that limits pay for teachers and other employees, resources for students, and the options available in our schools. The burden of recapture is also immense – based on an outdated measure that does not reflect the deep need of the population AISD serves. It is imperative for AISD to manage the funds we have available well. It is also essential for our community to



- advocate at the legislature – for more funding overall for Texas public schools, and for recalculated recapture in AISD.
- **ENROLLMENT:** Enrollment is another major challenge. It impacts funding, of course. And there is great debate about how it should be addressed. Austin ISD blames affordability, above all. I agree that's a major factor. But I have also spent a great deal of time listening to families who say they have left AISD because the way their students have been treated in our schools. Harsh or inequitable discipline, low expectations, excessive focus on testing, a resistance to seeing families as experts in their children or partners with something of value to give – all of these contribute to students leaving AISD. Some leave for charters, others for surrounding districts. And for every child who leaves, AISD has fewer resources.
 - **EQUITY:** The data are clear. AISD schools are deeply segregated by race – a mirror of our city's racially segregated housing patterns. Discipline data show large racial disparities, with the harshest burden falling on young men of color – even in elementary school. Gaps in academic performance are large, too – again, predictable based on race. The inequities reach into which classes are available, the college counseling that's available, and which activities are available for students to pursue. Our inequities are a fact that should be measured, discussed, and addressed – in conversation with community.
 - **COMMUNICATION:** For many years, communication has been a challenge for AISD. Families and teachers share concern about communication that is unclear, infrequent, or fails to address the information that our community needs. Often, communication is delegated to campuses – which creates immense inequities. During Covid, those problems have only grown. AISD's communication has lacked empathy. AISD has often waited for perfect information that would never come, leaving families and staff wondering and waiting. And the information conveyed is often not the information that is wanted or needed. Our district can and must do better.
 - **TESTING:** High-stakes standardized testing, mandated by the State of Texas, drives far more than it should in AISD. I support testing to measure progress and identify gaps – testing as a tool. But testing as it exists today has unintended and damaging consequences for too many students. True learning is about more than test prep.



- And students are far more than numbers on a gridded chart. Ensuring that all students are prepared and learning the essentials is an important goal. But testing is a deeply flawed measure of learning. And with high-stakes testing, a score on a single test risks becoming the most important goal.
- **TEACHER TURNOVER:** Teacher turnover is expensive and disruptive. And it is a problem, disproportionately, at schools that already have immense need. AISD must identify and address the reasons for turnover. It's the right thing for teachers and the right thing for students.
 - **TRUST:** Trust with our community is ruptured – by a lack of transparency, by poor communication, and by damaged relationships.
 - **SPECIAL EDUCATION:** Teachers, specialists and aides who work in special education in AISD have been sounding the alarm and leaving in large numbers. Families, too, are telling us that the system is broken – with long waits for evaluation, overburdened teachers, and students who are not getting the supports they need.
 - **RELATIONSHIPS:** At its most fundamental, a strong school is built on strong relationships – among the people who work on a campus, between students and their teachers, and between teachers and parents. At schools where relationships are valued and centered, things tend to work well. At schools where relationships are seen as unimportant, the damage is felt by students, families, and staff.

Opportunities

- **NEW SUPERINTENDENT**

The arrival of a new superintendent is an opportunity to reevaluate our district, to assess what's working and what is not, to look at what more is possible, and to rethink or reinvent programs that are in place but not achieving the results that we want or expect. It is our community's job to do all that we can to help the new superintendent succeed – by making sure she knows and honors our community's priorities and values, and by staying engaged and involved.
- **COMMUNICATION & RELATIONSHIPS**

Communication and relationships go hand in hand. And Dr. Elizalde has spoken in promising ways about the importance of both. She has spoken about the importance of ALL district employees as communicators and relationship builders. And she has



spoken about the need for regular communication and the need for consistent communication – done in a way that is at least equal (and ideally also equitable) from school to school. Communication has been a major gap in AISD for many years – with families, with teachers and other employees, and with the larger community. Strong and honest communication is essential to building trusting and mutual relationships. Relationships also need to begin long before a student enters AISD. I hope our community can use this moment to get this fundamental need right. I support creating a communications advisory group to help with this essential work.

- **OPTIONS AND PROGRAMS**

Programs like early college high school, dual language, magnets, our rich mix of CTE options, IB, and many other special programs and options in AISD are a powerful way to give students a chance to discover new interests, explore passions in more depth, and retain or re-attract families. I believe strongly that this is one of AISD’s strengths and something that creates powerful opportunities.

- **THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY**

This is one of AISD’s biggest sources of strength. We are fortunate to live in city where people get involved and speak up. It is a clear sign that people truly, deeply care. When we listen to the community and truly engage, that helps create a powerful foundation for building the very best schools that Austin can have. Our community is ready and willing. There is a deep well of wisdom here. There is real opportunity to engage and involve people in ways that are more authentic, deep and wise than we have done before.

- **PARTNERS**

Austin is a city that’s rich with resources – knowledge, money, and groups that care deeply and have powerful things to share. AISD’s partnerships offer things beyond what our schools could do alone. They are a strength. And this is also a place where AISD could grow. I would like to see AISD create a task force to study existing partnerships and what more could be possible. AISD can work with our community to explore what exists, and what more is possible.

2. How long have you been in the Austin ISD community and what is your history in advocating for changes or improvements in the district? *Include specific examples, like*



organizing groups for a specific purpose, advocating for a particular policy, lobbying for/against a particular change in state/district policy, etc.

I have lived in District.5 for 18 years, and this is my 17th year as an AISD parent. I have been deeply involved on my children's campuses and at the district level – through ACPTA, three years on the DAC, and in many other ways.

ACPTA has provided many opportunities for advocating for changes and improvements in AISD. The ACPTA board meets monthly with the superintendent, setting the agenda based on information we learn from being in touch with the AISD community. As an all-volunteer organization that works with 112 PTAs in Austin ISD, the ACPTA has strong potential as an advocacy organization and it can be a strong platform for building creative and collaborative solutions.

- Under my leadership, ACPTA created a grant program that invites PTAs with large budgets to donate and invites PTAs with small budgets to apply. Many PTAs have donated. And many have received grants – using them for field trips, a clothing closet, events to build community, support mentoring, and other programs that directly support student well-being and academic success.
- In May, ACPTA partnered with Dr. Hawley's office, Dr. Ward's office, and the Parent Engagement and Support Office to create RaceTalks – a monthly conversation about race open to all. We are planning the fourth session, and we just received a \$10,000 grant to expand the work by offering Beyond Diversity: Courageous Conversations to a cohort of AISD parents.
- During Covid, we created Austin Fun + Learning to distribute books, art supplies, school supplies, puzzles and more to students – in partnership with Austin Voices, APiE and Marathon Kids. We have reached hundreds of families so far, and we won a \$15,000 grant last week to expand the project.

I have also been involved in advocacy and policy change beyond AISD.

- I sat on the City of Austin Juvenile Justice Workgroup and helped write the group's report, recommending the elimination of Austin's juvenile curfew. In 2017, the City



- Council unanimously approved our recommendation, eliminating the curfew after 27 years. Other cities are working to do the same, and often cite Austin as a model.
- Through ACPTA, I worked to build support for free CapMetro service for K-12 students. ACPTA won a national advocacy award for that work.
 - As a leader of Just Fund It TX, I worked with others to build a statewide network of public education advocates to seek increased school funding. Our advocacy network pushed hard for the passage of HB3, and we are calling now to protect school funding during the 2020-21 school year – with a commentary published statewide and a petition with thousands of signatures from across Texas that we just delivered to Governor Abbott.
 - As a member of the Travis County Census 2020 Complete Count Committee, I am working to ensure that our schools, roads, healthcare and more get every federal dollar that our community is owed – from now until 2030.
3. Describe how you see the current relationship between the board and these key stakeholders and how should it change, if at all:
- a. Superintendent

I see this relationship as too new to have a clear answer. I believe that it's our community's job to help Dr. Elizalde succeed, and I am optimistic that it will be a strong partnership. I believe that the board must work collaboratively with the superintendent, and must also hold the superintendent accountable. It's also the board's duty – as the representatives of the community – to ask hard questions, and the administration's duty to answer them.
 - b. Teachers

Teachers are our district's most valuable asset. The board's decisions impact teachers' workplace, teachers' working conditions, teachers' pay and benefits. Teachers have valuable insights to share with the board – as people who have intimate knowledge about all that happens in our schools – and they need opportunities to share their perspectives. The board does not have direct authority over teachers and does not answer directly to teachers beyond their role as constituents. But teachers and other district employees must be considered in board decisions. They bring expertise that should be honored and



considered. And their personal satisfaction as employees matters, as well. The impact of policies on teachers has an immense impact on the success or struggles of AISD. Some AISD teachers are also AISD Trustee's constituents. All should be considered in board decisions.

c. Families/community

Families have a choice about where children are educated. They also have an important role in AISD. Families can tell us if AISD's schools are working for them and their children or if they are not. They should be included in conversations and decisions about changes and opportunities in AISD – not as a box to check, but as people with valuable perspectives to share. Families are not customers. They are not consumers. They are partners. The same is true for students. They are part of AISD's families. And they should be at the center of AISD's decision-making.

The community has a role, as well. What happens in our schools impacts our entire community. And our entire community has value to add to what happens in our schools. Schools have an immense job to do – as educators, as employers, as a place where students and families access resources beyond what they learn in the classroom. Strong relationships with partners make our district stronger. Trustees can help to build that as ambassadors to our community.

d. Other board members

Board members have a duty to work together respectfully, collaboratively, and professionally. They have no duty to agree. In fact, some disagreement is healthy and necessary. They do, however, have a duty to work together, to hear each other's perspectives, and to honor the public's trust.

4. Define educational and racial equity. How will you use an equity lens in your policy decision-making? *If you have a specific example of an equitable/inequitable policy directly related to Austin ISD, please include it here.*

I agree with AISD's definition of equity, adapted from the National Equity Project: Academic equity means that every student receives what they need to develop their full academic and social potential. To achieve racial equity, we must eliminate patterns of



achievement, discipline and other measures that can be predicted based on students' race. We are very far from both.

AISD data, disaggregated by race, show glaring inequities. Discipline data shows that students of color – especially young men of color – are disciplined more often and more harshly than other groups of students. Graduation rates, which have improved steadily over the years, still show gaps along lines of race. Access to courses like 8th grade algebra is more likely for some than for others. The list goes on.

It is also important to recognize that other equity issues exist: for LGBTQ students, for students with disabilities and students with special needs. Data, disaggregated by race, special education status, gender, and other factors, helps us see patterns and identify work to be done.

There are many policies and practices that contribute to inequities in AISD – from the way students are identified for GT or special services to the expectation that all families use email, or have access to the Parent Cloud or BLEND.

I believe that equity is the lens through which all AISD policies must be viewed. When new policies are discussed, there must be thoughtful consideration of the consequences – both intended and unintended. Carefully drawn policies should be a tool to address and reduce existing inequities. Those policies must be based in data about best practices – what is working elsewhere, what we know about what has worked before in AISD. Policies must also be accompanied with metrics. Measurement must include impacts, and it must include a measure of fidelity – to be sure the policies being put in place are actually applied.

In AISD, Dual Language is an example of a practice that should be expected to increase equity – a system with clear data about how it impacts student performance over time, as well as clear evidence of the social, emotional, and cultural benefits of seeing students' first language as an asset rather than a deficit. We know without question that when DL programs are implemented faithfully, the results are strong. In fact,



academically, DL students tend to do even better than students in monolingual settings. Yet in AISD, testing pressure means that at many DL schools, the DL system erodes beginning in third grade – when STAAR testing begins. At some schools, the focus shifts to testing – often in English. Students are exited from DL programs, or programs that are called DL are watered down. The results are similarly diluted. When students are no longer in a true DL program, the results don't match what we have been told we will see. That, in turn, causes some people to question the claims made about DL. People lose faith. And support for true DL in AISD is diminished.

That can be addressed with strong professional development for educators and clear information – for teachers and administrators, and for parents. It can also be addressed by strong disaggregated data and strong fidelity testing – to see if what we say we offer is what we offer in fact.

Some equity issues have hard solutions. Others are easier – as long as someone sees what is and what must be addressed.

During the shutdown last spring, AISD did excellent work to provide meals and to send buses with hot spots to help ensure student access to WiFi. For two weeks last spring, high school students across AISD were taking AP tests online. The tests depended on WiFi access. But the bus service ended before the tests did – leaving students in need without a meaningful ability to take the test. On the second day of testing, I became concerned that the WiFi might not have been extended during AP testing. I emailed everyone I knew who might have been involved in the decision – the heads of technology, transportation, high schools, advanced academics, and the equity office. In my email, I explained the concern and said that certainly it had been addressed. But in the chaos of the pandemic response, no one had thought to address that. AISD responded immediately. WiFi service was extended. Students would have the resources they needed to reach their academic potential.

Many equity issues are not a question of immense resources. They are a question of asking the right questions – and being sure that we are seeing through eyes that are not our own.



AISD talks often about an equity audit, and about the importance of cultural proficiency. Those are ways to help people see with different eyes – and to build systems that catch issues like ensuring WiFi for AP tests as a matter of course.

This is one issue among many that I have been involved with. And it is one among many that we need to work thoughtfully together to address. It is not a Trustee's job to address issues one by one. But it is absolutely the Trustee's role to create policies and metrics that support a culture of inclusion and equity.

5. One of the major responsibilities of being a Trustee involves approving the budget. What are your current thoughts on how the budget is allocated and how would you change it, if at all, to support the students who need resources the most? How would you determine the best way to allocate resources? *Please be specific around where you think more resources are needed and where you would acquire more resources to support those students and communities that are underfunded and/or in higher need.*

I believe that AISD needs to shift resources to programs that we know work – to give students the tools they need to succeed, to support proven programs that boost academic achievement, and that keep families in AISD.

I believe that AISD needs to invest in more community schools – especially in the Eastern Crescent. Wraparound services, including high-quality after-school care with rich opportunities for learning and play, will serve working families and help keep students in AISD. These programs should include partnerships with community groups – those who already work in our schools, and those that do not yet, but have something of value to share with our students.

I believe that AISD needs to invest more deeply in proven programs like dual language, Pre-K 3 & 4, and high quality special education and dyslexia services. These programs are valuable and strong. But a deeper investment can make them all that it is possible for them to be. That investment will bring rewards. Students in high-quality Pre-K with low teacher/adult ratios will be better prepared to succeed in our schools when they



begin kindergarten, reducing costs. Students in high-quality dual language programs have strong academic success long-term – but only if the program is implemented faithfully and well. An investment in services for special education and dyslexia can ensure that student needs are identified early so students can receive the necessary support. High-quality project based learning and rich options in the arts must be offered at every campus.

AISD also needs to invest in strong professional development for staff. And that PD needs to respond to what staff say they need, as well as what AISD data says staff need. The district should also invest in data-driven programs that help retain teachers. That goal is a program that will pay for itself.

Savings can come, in part, by reducing expensive programs that focus on test prep and reinvesting those funds in proven programs that help children learn. AISD can also look do a thoughtful assessment of central office roles and possible savings. And we can look at sources of revenue – more community use of buildings, more partnerships that support our families and schools, continued investment in the growth of Austin Ed Fund and the use of those funds directly in the classroom, and strong statewide advocacy to increase the money that is available.

6. What metrics should we be looking at to determine student and district success and to guide the policy decisions that the Austin ISD board makes?

The superintendent scorecard is an important tool. But it is one tool among many. We need to look closely at the data we currently gather – about testing, discipline, graduation rates, postsecondary performance, and more. We must disaggregate it by race. We must look at data from individual campuses. We must look at TELL surveys and family surveys. We must look at different threads of data in relation to each other. We must look deeply and thoughtfully at what the data show us. And we must also recognize what the data do not tell us.

We collect an immense amount of data that offers important and essential insights. But we are missing other opportunities to measure and learn. AISD has a strong data team.



But I believe there is room for adding some experts trained in modern and creative ways of measurement – including qualitative data that can help capture lived experience.

I believe strongly that you measure what you value. And I believe that AISD can and should measure more thoughtfully and creatively.

All measurements – including the TELL survey and family surveys, should include data about race and other demographic factors, so we can look at the data across different categories. We also need to measure relationships in better ways – not just through the family survey, but through data that give people opportunities to share their lived experience. Do students feel connected to at least one adult on campus, and who is that person? How many students are involved in extracurricular activities? How many are feeling anxiety or stress – and how many know how to get support? Do families feel welcome? Which families? And on which campuses? And when they don't feel welcome, exactly why is that the case, and how are their students affected?

We also need to be looking at other data – how long each campus takes for a special education evaluation; what the student-counselor ratio is for seniors applying to college and how the advice students gets differs from campus to campus; which APs suspend more students and which suspend fewer.

We are living in the age of big data. AISD collects an immense amount of data. And used thoughtfully, it has stories to tell us. The data can help us increase attendance, improve performance, engage families, and support teachers – if we can figure out what to measure, how to measure, then listen to the stories the data tells.

Policymaking

7. What are your thoughts on Austin ISD's current pandemic plan regarding student learning and a potential return to in-person instruction? What, if any, changes need to be made to ensure that distance learning better meets the needs of all students and that students, teachers, and staff are safe when in-person instruction resumes?



We must delay in-person school until it is safe to return. Educators, students, and families are mourning the loss of school as we know it. We want to be back. But in Austin, at this moment, it simply isn't safe. I believe strongly that it's not safe now. And I am concerned that it will not be safe in early October. I believe AISD must apply for a waiver and must make plans for for a further delay, in case the early October caseload and infection rate are high.

The costs of being remote are huge. It's harder to teach, and harder to learn. Special education services can be hard to deliver remotely. Some students are working to support their families or caring for younger siblings. Abuse can go unseen and unreported. Inequities – already far too large in Austin ISD – are growing larger. The mental health impact of being apart is huge.

TEA rules risk pushing people onto campuses while infection levels remain high. Under current rules, school must be in-person for all who want it after four weeks – likely still too soon.

I believe that AISD and our community should fight that with advocacy – telling lawmakers that we demand rules that allow each community to decide when it's safe to return.

Science can help us know when that time comes. And when it does, science also tells us that being outdoors is vastly safer than being together inside. I have read many articles prescribing outdoor education as a response to COVID-19. And I was thrilled to see information about outdoor learning in the reopening plan. That is encouraging. But to be comfortable teaching students outdoors, teachers must be comfortable themselves. And not all are. We should ask teachers what they need, and begin to offer it - now.

We must also work more thoughtfully to address the needs of students and families. Providing tech is not enough. Families and students must have meaningful access. Sometimes, we overlook even the most simple steps. For example, a friend was in an online meeting recently where families were being told how to log onto an AISD portal.



Parents were told they needed their child's student ID – a number many did not have. And they were told the password included the child's birthday – but no one told parents to put the month first, as it's done in the US – even though many parents had immigrated from other countries. When knowledge is assumed, family connection is lost, and students suffer.

To ensure the best possible outcome, AISD first needs to partner more strategically with the county and city to help bring the virus under control. AISD also needs to prepare for both the best and worst case – the return to school that we all hope for, and the reality that we may need to be remote for months. We should identify the strongest lessons for each topic, and we should consider paying teachers who are best at creating online lessons to build a year-long bank that all teachers can turn to. Better still, we can partner with other districts to share the best lessons.

We also must consider resources – food, school supplies, parent support, student safety. And we must look both within and beyond AISD for solutions. This is a broad civic issue that requires a broad civic response.

8. School closures are a contentious issue. What does your decision-making process look like for making impactful decisions and how would you go about deciding on future school changes? *Please also include specific thoughts around the 2019 School Changes Plan released by the District.*

I believe that any future school changes process must begin with a more thoughtful and open plan for engaging the community. There is a widespread feeling that AISD's engagement is often more PR than information gathering, more about checking a box that says they have engaged than truly making space for what the community has to say. Trust is essential to the success of any major process – school closure, a strategic plan, or something like the superintendent search. And trust in AISD has eroded. I would support partnerships for engagement, with trusted community groups. And I would move away from events where conversation feels managed and constrained, as it often does at AISD engagement events.



For me, large decisions require careful listening and looking beyond my own perspective. Facts matter. Things like budget, regulatory requirements, and other facts must be considered. But the way people feel about schools is important, too. Each campus is a community. And each school is about more than a building and the way people learn. It can be about a neighborhood's history. At its best, it's a place where you find friends and support – the people you call when you have to work late, or when you need to talk about your child's struggle to learn. And it's where you find a community of teachers and other employees who help make a great school a home.

The school closure process last year leaned heavily on facts. The FABPAC collected data. AISD crunched numbers. And that data was presented to the community. But the process also leaned on assumptions – that a newer school is necessarily a more desirable school, and that fracturing a campus community does limited harm as long as people have a good school to land in. Any future process must consider both facts and lived experience, the emotional connection to schools, and the valid importance of a campus community – and what that brings to education for students, teachers, and families. If that is done, we are more likely to reach decisions that are made with people, rather than for people.

It's important to recognize that the conversation about closures overshadowed many other important elements of the 2019 School Changes Plan – topics that our community needs to discuss, debate, and consider. Our community needs to have a thoughtful decision, for example, about the extended school day that's included in the plan. Where and how will it be offered? What will students do with the time? Who will run the program? Will students have a chance for free play, or a chance to try new things? If a school wishes to use that time for test prep, will that be allowed – even for students who prefer to spend the time in another way? Will families have a say in what those programs look like – for example, can it be an after-school art or science program, if that's what the community wants?



That model is also important for academic changes and programs. When plans are truly co-created – not after a series of inputs during meetings and through online forms, but truly in community – great things are possible. Instead of telling Covington, for example, that it was getting an IB program, people could have met and discussed goals and options. Ideally, if an IB plan began to emerge, the group could have visited IB schools right here in Austin, so people could learn more for themselves. Instead, the plan proposed something that most people at Covington had never heard of. It assumed knowledge, rather than working with the community to build knowledge before the plan was released. It felt, to many, like someone else was telling Covington what it should want – rather than asking the community to help answer that question itself.

I would love to see our community return to the larger elements of the plan – the ones that have nothing to do with closure. Academic excellence for all, district-wide special education systems, strategic staffing of highly-effective teachers. There are many strong ideas in the plan. There are many that would make our district stronger and more successful. I believe we should discuss those, as a community, so we can decide – together – which ones we want to pursue.

9. Which policies do you support to improve diverse teacher recruitment, retention, and compensation in Austin ISD and how would you reward and retain teachers who demonstrate their proficiency in the classroom?

I love AISD's plan to support AISD students to become teachers – giving them a head start on college education, and helping them return to AISD as teachers. The program, which targets primarily young men and woman of color, is a powerful way to ensure a teaching pool that is more likely to share lived experience with students. It's also important for AISD to recruit at campuses with diverse student bodies. And it's important to involve a diverse mix of AISD teachers in the process of recruitment – so they can have honest conversations with prospective employees.

Retention is equally important. The rate of turnover is far too high at too many campuses – disrupting teambuilding and collaboration in the workplace, rupturing relationships with



students, and creating an expensive cycle where AISD invests in teachers who leave. Austin ISD should convene a work group to study teacher turnover – especially among teachers of color. The teachers must be empowered to take an honest look at why teachers leave. They must be compensated for the extra work. And they must be empowered to look both within AISD and beyond AISD for possible solutions – including proven solutions that have worked in other communities. We must also consider the impact of racism on our teachers. An environment that is culturally proficient and inclusive is essential for students. And it's essential for teachers and other employees, too.

AISD also needs a thoughtfully structured mentorship program for new teachers – led by the strongest teachers on each campus. It needs to be deliberate, and aligned with best practices. It needs to include room to build a relationship, one of trust that creates a partnership that novice teachers can rely on for support and guidance. Principals should be taught to be supportive of this process, and should be expected to give time and space for mentors and new teachers to work together. Respect and professionalism from principals must be a given – non-negotiable, and expected.

Programs that increase compensation have been shown to be successful at retaining teachers – but only as long as that extra compensation remains in place. Perhaps, instead, AISD could consider other solutions - like a loan forgiveness program that pays an increasing percentage of teachers' student loans for each year they remain on a campus. We are not the only district with these issues, and we need to look for successful models that feel like a good fit for our community.

Teachers also need more opportunities to become leaders on campus, and to advance within a campus without being forced to leave and move into administration. Positions that include more responsibility – for example, positions as mentors that require extra talent and experience and require more time – should be compensated accordingly. Teachers who demonstrate proficiency must be celebrated. We must work with teachers to find out what kinds of programs they would like to see. And we must be sure that



teachers are shown respect – by principals, by each other, and by the students and families in every school.

10. What is your background and knowledge of the complexities of special populations of students in Austin ISD and what programs/policies do you support to serve these students? *Please address specific special populations of students, including special education students, bilingual/ELL students, low-income students, and Black, Indigenous, and students of color.*

As a five-year board member of the ACPTA, I have spent time in dozens of schools throughout AISD – talking with families, parent support specialists, principals, students, teachers and other school employees, and learning first-hand what’s working and what is not. I have spent time with staff from many AISD departments and special campuses, including the Refugee Support Office, ALC, Rosedale, Clifton, and others. And I have learned from partners and advocacy groups like Austin Voices, VELA, Breakthrough, Creative Action, EcoRise, the Coalition for Special Education Equity, and so many other groups that do excellent work in our schools. And I have served with the DAC and with the leadership team of the NACER project in the Northeast Vertical Team.

That experience has given me the chance to learn more about the lived experience of many groups that AISD serves. Together, the stories and data that people have shared help me gain an understanding of the complexities that families face - food insecurity, immigration challenges, language barriers, difficulty accessing online tools and online information, housing instability, challenges getting access to services that students need, and even a sense, too often, that families are either not welcome on campus or have nothing of value to give as partners in their children’s education. There are schools that do all of this beautifully – even on campuses where the data show high levels of need. And there are also schools that fail to build relationships and trust.

Advocates and teachers in dual language programs have shared their time to help me learn about the data, the techniques, and the benefits to students. People have done the same to help me learn more about special education, about serving students who are



dyslexic, and about programs like Clifton, International High School, and Garza that work to give students what they need to thrive and succeed.

I think AISD is on the right path with many programs. But I also believe, from all that I have learned, that many of our programs only go partway. Dual language is one example of that. We have schools like Becker and Ridgetop where DL is embraced and implemented fairly well. And we have schools where it is offered, but also undermined – especially when testing pressure comes in the third grade.

I support all of these programs, and would love to see the scaffolding needed to ensure that each is implemented as it should be – giving all that they can to students. Teachers, principals, and administrators at the district level need to know the data and best practices for all special programs. AISD should have fidelity metrics to be sure the programs are being run as they should be. Families should be given the information they need to know when a program is working and when it's being undermined. We need an ombudsman to allow teachers, other employees, and families to speak up safely when things are not happening as they should. And I believe that AISD must do a better job of sharing successes with our community at places where things are being done right and where they are working well.

11. From a policy perspective, how would you leverage SB1882 and HB3 to benefit Austin ISD? *Please be specific around your thoughts on both pieces of legislation and your policy plans you would champion as a Trustee.*

I recognize that AISD currently has partnerships under 1882, and I am aware of the reasons that AISD chose to pursue those. But I do not support 1882 partnerships in AISD. They normalize charters and risk opening the door to charter schools within in our district – something I am firmly against. They create a new source of funding inequities between schools, they have fewer protections for parents and staff, and they cede control over a public institution.

My criticism is not of any early childhood program, I believe strongly that early childhood education is a valuable tool for increasing enrollment and a crucial resource for



supporting student success. I support the partnerships with United Way and Head Start. But I believe that an 1882 partnership for any program in our district is not the best choice.

For HB3, it is essential that AISD advocate to protect the current level of funding during the next legislative session. I strongly support the teacher raises that AISD provided after HB3 passed. I also support increased funding for pre-K, dyslexia services, and other aspects of HB3. We must be sure that money allocated by HB3 for specific groups of students – for example, the per student increase for students who are dyslexic – is actually used to increase resources available for those groups. We must also continue to fight outdated recapture formulas that ignore the reality of the population AISD serves. And we must advocate for not only maintaining but increasing funding for our public schools – not only in AISD, but across the state. I have a track record of statewide advocacy for increased school funding as a leader of Just Fund It TX, and I will continue that advocacy if I am elected to serve as an AISD Trustee.