



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?

I bring to the school board 1) A perspective of being the most recent and former AISD pre-school-high school student in this race. 2) The perspective of having served as both a volunteer and a dedicated General and Sped educator at several dozens of Austin ISD schools all over the district for several years.

These actual perspectives and lived experiences along with my very strong commitment to attending and actively participating at every single regularly scheduled AISD board meeting has definitely prepared me for this very serious run for and to secure a seat on the Austin ISD school board.

Prior to COVID-19, I have continuously urged our trustees to take some very bold and serious action steps around the predictability and the highly disproportionate academic achievement gaps that exist in our district. This is just one of the very many seriously challenging issues that I will be strongly addressing with a commitment of prioritizing and advocating for equitable funding and strategic staffing to better address the needs of our most vulnerable students (i.e. African-American, Hispanic, low-socioeconomic, ELLs and Special Education).

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?

Again, I have been invested in Austin ISD for all of my life. Growing up, I attended Austin ISD schools from Pre-K through High School. I have been volunteering and have even worked as an employee at several Austin ISD schools (elementary, middle, high and disciplinary schools). As far as advocating for change, one of my most proudest accomplishments as a public school advocate was when I successfully and consistently lobbied for one of our district's most vulnerable and underpaid staffing populations, substitute teachers. Back in 2019, when all other staffing populations were given a raise,



but I knew that substitutes weren't, I stood up for them and that is what helped us to get a raise as well. Also, when we hired our very first Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Stephanie Hawley, I was right there at the table with our city's most diverse and qualified stakeholders building the actual candidate profile which led us to ultimately hire Dr. Hawley. Any issue that have come up over there years, I have definitely taken a position on them and I have been right there, on the front row, standing with our community, doing what is right for the thousands of teachers, students and families that I have served.

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: The relationship between Superintendent Dr. Elizalde and the Board is one that is actually just officially beginning. When the Board recently voted on Dr. Elizalde's contract, I know that there was not necessarily a unanimous consensus that she was the best candidate for our school district. Not that one is required, but it is notable. Change? Right from the beginning, begin to hold her accountable to ensure that all district policies are correctly implemented with a drive for true and systemic equity.*
 - b. *Teachers: For the most part the relationship between the Board and our teachers is one that is good. However, I have to note that many of our district staff members have been reaching out and they are really concerned about our district's reopening plan and the safety measures that are being taken. Depending on how our board continues to handle COVID-19, that will determine the real relationship between our Board and our teachers. Continue to strive to respect and take the concerns of all of our teachers and staff members seriously and all else will be fine.*
 - c. *Families/community: The relationship between our families and community has been quite a rollercoaster. The uncertainty with our school reopening plan (as TEA and health data constantly changes) and the communication between our community has definitely put many of our families on edge. Not to mention what recently happened during a public board meeting with a Board member and one of our top district level staff members.*



d. *Other board members: For the most part, there seems to be a sense of unity among the board members. Again, despite the most recent comments from a board member which prompted the uncomfortable pressure being placed on the other trustees to have to say something about that trustees' actions. Besides dealing with COVID there's not too many contentious issues happening right now.*

4. Define educational and racial equity. How will you use an equity lens in your policy decision-making?

Educational equity is something that I've always been advocating for, even before it became the big buzz word around town. What is it? Simple, it's ensuring that every student is being provided with the resources, support and tools that they need in order to reach their full amount of potential as students. Racial equity is very much the same. Racial equity means to ensure that all people, no matter their racial background, have the necessary resources, support and tools in order to reach their full amount of potential as a person. Serving as the proud twice elected president and leader of our national award winning NAACP unit at HTU, equity has been the main priority of our student led organization. All of the programs and actions that we have taken have been equity driven for our communities most vulnerable populations.

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?

Currently, our district's budget has not uniquely been able to meet the needs of all of our 80,900+ student and our 12,000+ staff members. One of my most important priorities as a trustee is to be able to give our most marginalized and vulnerable student and staff populations a high-quality education and a high quality and appreciative place of employment. This means I plan on making some very serious and bold budget suggestions that will ultimately help us to be able to close our district's highly predictable and disproportionate academic performance gaps. Our children are in some very



desperate times of need for investments, especially during and even after COVID-19. When it comes to investing in strategic staffing, we need to be all in to make sure that we can afford to hire and retain the most highly qualified and experienced educators at our low rating and low performing schools. It's investments like these that I believe have the potential to draw in more students and ultimately more funding.

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?

When it comes to actual measurable metrics for our district I believe we should be utilizing the following (just to name a few): early literacy (to ensure all of our students are able to read and write prior to exiting the third grade to avoid predictable futures), discipline trends (to ensure that we're actually not harming or over disciplining one or two of our student groups over others), student, staff and family customer service ratings (to ensure that we are actually meeting the needs of our most important stakeholders and that they truly find our district to be home) graduation rates (to ensure that we are indeed preparing and giving all of our students the pathway for a successful life, career and/or college experience).

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?

Simple, I believe that we should be looking at primarily our local, but also our state and nationwide data in order to inform us when and if we will be able to safely reopen up our schools. I strongly believe that we've already lost way too many of our employees due to COVID-19 and we can not afford to lose any more employees, yet alone any of our students. We must also look at what has happened in other school districts when they have tried to reopen their schools to in person education. It sounds bad (out of context) but I'd much rather for a student to be alive and safe and to fall behind academically, than to have a student that is deceased and can never ever have a chance to catch back



up academically. Safety must always be the goal and until we are absolutely positive that we have the best plan that will ensure safety for everyone, then we should not have face to face instruction and we should be strengthening and providing all of the tools that are necessary for a non-in person school year. As an educator, one that has actually served as a classified employee of AISD, I am absolutely 100% in support of HERO Pay. Our hourly workers already do not get compensated enough for the amount of work that they do. So, especially during an unsafe pandemic they should be compensated with time and a half. I support whatever we have to do in order to make sure that that happens.

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.*

Do I believe that the entire School Changes plan was wrong? Absolutely not. There were some amazing things inside of the School Changes Plan that ultimately got lost. Things such as the districtwide cultural proficiency and inclusiveness training, the expanded school hours, the Pre-K to Pre-Med, the Legal Studies and Social Justice Program. All of that was amazing, but the school closures process, we all know that that process was not done right. To be very clear, moving forward, I will strongly oppose any disruptive school closures especially if any inequities exist. I will also ensure that our district looks at all other options before deciding to put that amount of stress on any more students or families. Lastly, I will make a motion to make sure that there is a limit on how many campuses can be closed in any part of our district. It is completely inequitable to make majority of disruption and uncertainty fall within a historical segregated part of town.

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?

From my background experience as an educator, the truth of the matter is is that most teachers will ultimately go to and teach at a school district where they can earn the most



livable wage, especially beginning/first year teachers. So, I am fully invested in making sure that we prioritize increasing every one of our teachers and staff salaries. I truly know the amount of work that our teachers are expected to do and I know that if we continue to overload our teachers (and quite frankly all of our employees) with an immense amount of work or if we don't pay them enough then we'll eventually either get teachers that won't be fully invested in our mission of providing a quality education to every student or we'll continue to lose staff. And none of us want that. I plan to work with our superintendent and Chief Human Capital Officer to make sure that we are visiting HBCUs and HSI campuses to ensure that our staff becomes way more culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse than it currently is. We need more college and AISD teacher mentor relationships. We have several colleges and universities right here in our own backyard.

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.*

First and foremost, as an educator (most recently serving as an AISD substitute and a former Special Education teachers assistant), I can tell you that we are not currently serving all of the unique needs of our Special Education student population. I've been inside of our classrooms and have seen where there are completely understaffed classrooms. It's important to say that the reality of understaffing ultimately does trickle down to our students and our students often times do feel that very unfortunate reality of understaffing. I've also been inside of classrooms where our Special Education teachers have confided in me and told me that they feel really overwhelmed and that they need more support from our district. We definitely need to be able to provide more support for our students and make sure that their IEPs stay up to date, so that were always in compliance and meeting the unique needs of all of our students. We must continue to provide stipends and pay increases and additional coaching on things that our teachers and staff actually need to learn in order to continue to improve their skill sets for our students. As it relates to our ELL and bilingual student populations, I believe that we should give our students as many opportunities as possible to be distinguishable in the working market. We should not limit our students full potential, but yet we should stretch it out. This is why it is highly important that we implement dual language programs across our entire district with at least 50/50 beyond 5th grade dual language implementation. We should make sure that we embrace our student's native languages and cultures (while including their target language as well). And we must invest in closing gaps for our marginalized student populations as well.



11. From a policy perspective, how would you leverage SB1882 and HB3 to benefit Austin ISD?

In the past, I can definitely and honestly tell you that I have not personally supported the idea of SB1882 partnerships. I won't hide that. I have remained completely skeptical of the idea of a charter takeover in our district. However, from a policy perspective, I know that I am going to want to be able to make sure that I remain as open-minded and unbiased as possible because ultimately it's about being able to maximize our student's full academic and social potential. As a trustee I do not want to automatically shut any doors of opportunities for our students before we even get the chance to open them up and decide to close it or open it. I also know that there is extreme value in us being able to use community partnerships in order to best and equitably meet the needs of every single one of our students. However, if it isn't done in consultation with the campus community and if their voices and concerns are not taken seriously then it's going to be a no for me.

Lastly, I'll say that HB3 definitely brought some very rewarding things to our district this past year or so. The investments in our teachers and our staff members, the investments in our pre-k and early literacy programs, those were all among the major bonuses for our district as it relates to HB3. Post COVID-19, it's going to take some serious lobbying and advocating for us to continue to receive funding like this again but it's what we will strongly have to do and what we will do to continue to support our students and staff.