

1. What population do you see as being most underserved in AISD at present? What do you intend to do about it?

*The most underserved populations in Austin ISD are also the students that compose the majority of Austin ISD students – low income, Latina/o/x, African American, immigrant, LGBTQ, students with disabilities, students in schools east of Lamar. In other words, the majority of the students attending Austin ISD are, collectively, the most underserved.*

*Putting together school practices, policies and curriculums that help address the challenges students face in negotiating STAAR tests, general U.S. culture and getting established and prepared for life after public school should address these different intersecting categories of difference. I truly would hesitate to compare the challenges of a low income African American student in Gorzycki middle school in Southwest Austin with the issues facing a low-income Latina/o/x trans student in a mixed status family in Martin Middle School. Rather, policies should address the shared and intersecting situation facing students and staff in these schools.*

*First, the parent support specialists that help families link with support services should be supported and expanded. Second, students need broad support to focus on challenging, educationally stimulating curriculum, done in a way that resonates with their experiences and folds in the narrative-problem solving skills that will also help deal with the regular STAAR testing. Third, as part of a long-term enrichment strategy, I would push the board to start implementing wider scale Dual Immersion programs in Title I schools, reaching hopefully to high schools like Travis, East Side, Crockett, and Akins. Fourth, SPED needs to be lifted as a priority and mandated to report directly to the board, separate and parallel to the superintendent. Both in school closures and in pandemic planning, SPED has been an afterthought to addressing the coming changes, leading SPED parents to deal with their issues on their own, without having other students recognize the challenges and disparities facing SPED and 504 parents alongside other students. I would support expanded capacitation in disability, getting people to go beyond Helen Keller (a socialist and an eugenicist, fyi) to address the extreme disparities and inequities people with disabilities faced and face as part of general and civil rights curriculum across different ages. Fifth, having had the good fortune to have failed and excelled in middle school biology and language arts in both English and Spanish, in Mexico and the United States, I know that all subjects can be taught in any language. Having a school district where more than a third of households have a home language other than English, Austin ISD should make it a priority to help*

*students reduce the distance between home language and school language cultures – pushing schools to shrink the gap by making Spanish or Vietnamese be a failsafe official language. Finally, Communities in Schools and SEL have made impressive strides in foregrounding matters of consent, boundaries, and gender expression – and I would push to find ways to expand this productive city-school-nonprofit interaction.*

2. A month after the school year has started, we've had an opportunity to see how our reopening strategy has worked here, and across the nation. Based on this information, what, if anything, do you think we need to do differently in January?

*First, we are dealing with seven months of federal indifference and hostility to the impact and burden of COVID19. The transition between November and January will be even more chaotic than the reality we are living right now, thanks to the hostility and open lack of faith the Department of Justice has displayed toward the election process. Much of the funding we have comes from the emergency commitments the congressional majority has implemented and demanded. I can only hope that after the election the lame duck representatives in the Senate will do their job and start passing the emergency supplements to reinstate the 600 dollar unemployment benefits, emergency state and school supplements, change Medicare and Medicaid eligibility, pass paid sick leave for all and make the vaccine and treatments that mass public funding of research may have made possible publicly and accessibly available. I would say free (as in paid for collectively), but here we are.*

*Second, the risks of exposure to COVID19 are unevenly distributed. People over 60, people with chronic conditions and chronic pulmonary disease, stress and – horribly, not a pre-existing condition – low wage jobs are structurally more at risk for a serious and/or long-term infection with COVID19. What does this mean for schools? Well, staff members live in multi-generational households, and coming home exposes vulnerable people to COVID. S*

*Moreover, students of all ages seem to be equally effective at transmitting and acquiring COVID19, according to a CDC report written and peer reviewed by actual scientists. This makes schools semi-spreader events, akin to daily weddings and funerals and football games. Many now consider weddings, quinceañeras, and bar mitzvah celebrations irresponsible expressions of family values and togetherness; what do we call equivalent gatherings that happen 5 days a week, 8 hours at a time? School.*

*This is also the reason zip codes matter to life chances. Right now, East Austin, South east Austin, Del Valle, and Pflugerville have positivity rates and case loads much higher than others. This is where – because of service sector employment – community spread is highest. The only way to get buy-in from the more affluent parts of Austin is to make sure school opening is tied to the most afflicted sectors, or otherwise more fortunate zip codes' political pressure will continue to render Latina/o, Black and refugee populations more vulnerable and exposed to COVID19. More people will die. The city and the district with – I wish, with additional state and federal aid – support should come up with more creative ways that support risk mitigation and COVID19 spread suppression in my communities, including money, paid sick leave and PPE to stay home safely in the midst of a surprisingly geographically specific pandemic.*

*So, I do not see TEA or Governor Abbott changing their adherence to the appearance of an open economy, unless the House in the Texas Lege changes hands. Then, you can expect substantial changes in the attitude of Morath and Abbott. I expect that – as teachers and staff become more burned out as they juggle virtual, physical and COVID19 workplace risks – there will be more sickouts, wildcat strikes, rolling stoppages and perhaps even strikes. To avoid this now and in January, I hope the district will start honoring all staff with CDC recommended workplace accommodations and implement the promise of paid sick leave to all employees, including subs. Given that this will burden staff without children and chronic conditions, Austin ISD needs to start hiring more long-term substitutes and start training them to work in already risky workplaces. All the people exposed to COVID19 workplaces should receives HEROES Act pay, to accommodate the risks and damages associated with COVID19 and/or 'long haul' recoveries. All this means re-visiting the idea that one teacher should teach in hybrid, f2f and remote modes AT THE SAME TIME.*

*I hope districts across the state get to exercise their authority and their obligation to open, close and re-open slowly under conditions that do not endanger staff, students, or their communities. I hope – but am very doubtful – that the TEA will allow this to be a public health decision, not one done under the current fiscal duress exercised by TEA.*

3. As you all know, the decision of the board to move forward with the school closures, principally in East Austin, has caused considerable controversy. If elected, how will you work to ensure the affected students have their social, emotional, and educational needs met?

*After a year of trauma and chaos, capped by COVID19 driven school closures, closed schools never got the opportunity to have closure. Moreover, many of these students transferred to other schools still on the school closure or consolidation list. One thing Austin ISD never did was guarantee transfers to the students whose schools they closed. This is still true. Austin ISD treated students, families, and schools on the 'flip this school' school closure plan like they were disposable. This needs to stop.*

*Austin ISD needs to demonstrate to all the families and communities that witnessed and/or experienced the school closures that they are a permanent part of the district and that they are loved and needed (especially given that the ostensible reason people closed schools was under enrollment and competition from charters). Dr. Elizalde can do this easily, because she was not part of the process, and declare that Austin ISD needs the reserve capacity to address the emerging baby boom in Pk3 and elementary school attendance and commit to using attendance zone re-drawing to even out overenrolled and under-enrolled schools, establish democratic equitable criteria to do this re-shifting and start moving more staff and skilled personnel to help support the educational environments in d2, d1, d3 and d6. From day 1, Austin ISD needs to commit publicly, symbolically and financially to schools that best resemble its mission – teaching the low income, Black, Latina/o and migrant, SPED, 504 and LGBTQ students that make up the majority of its students.*

*Finally, because the City of Austin and Travis County are growing, we need the reserve capacity of these allegedly under-enrolled schools. Perfect capacity this year means crowded schools in half-a-decade.*

4. Everyone swears their oath before the school board intending to act on a whole host of great things, but often new members are confronted with the perennially precarious position of the district's finances. What will you do to ensure our finances do not hinder our goals, but work in service of them?

*Beautifully put, and on a day-to-day basis, very true and very paralyzing.*

*Every staff member and front office personnel know that every penny is guarded, hoarded, and eventually spent. This non-deficit mentality adds to the paralysis.*

*However, even a review of broad legislative changes over the past 15 years demonstrates how politically driven the situation has been. In 2009 and 2011, the TX*

*Lege cut more than 5.4 billion dollars in support to schools. Funding levels – despite the roaring economic recovery and the population growth our governors have been trumpeting – have not recovered. Everyone needs to remind legislatures that it might be a good start to return to the funding levels the conservative republican majority passed in the 2000s.*

*Second, HB3 created incentives to keep ‘English language learners,’<sup>11</sup> sped students, and low income students learning and in school. The district needs to re-double their efforts to keep these populations in schools.*

*Third, public school teachers tend to be more certified, more regularly trained and more exposed to and experienced with a variety of learning styles and assessment outcomes. This helps explain why – when compared across SES status – public school students tend to do better than charter enrollees and private school enrollees even when public schools cannot expel or choose students based on disability. Austin ISD needs to find a way to have every household know this fact about public schools.*

*Fourth, the state of Texas needs to develop more and different funding streams for public education. What to tax is a different matter? Property taxes distributed state-wide are probably the most equitable way to fund education, and the state of Texas should be commended for this. Using tax giveaways to bring businesses to Austin is always dicey and likely unfair to existing businesses. I am personally persuaded by the idea of sin taxes, from sugar in sodas to alcohol to other leisure pursuits. I would also encourage recalibrating recapture to weigh the relative cost of housing in its allocation calculations. Taxing oil and natural gas piped through Texas could also begin to account for the social cost of fossil fuels, the risk and potential damage of pipeline leaks and these funds perhaps should be dedicated to Green New Deal renovations across the school district. I know some grumpy people in my extended family might appreciate a tax on electric scooters, even though they do relieve parking stress in downtown areas. Ultimately, the city of Austin needs to push its residents and officials to push the legislature to invest in public schools, perhaps the best symbol of the common good.*

*Finally, the city of Austin is growing, and money is following the movement of people into Austin. Budgets are tight, but Austin ISD needs to realize that its tax base is always growing and act in that fashion. We have a AAA credit rating at a time of zero interest rates and a time-dependent crisis (even if the vaccine takes longer than February) meaning a recovery will start. This might be the best time to run a deficit and think big.*