

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

Given conditions related to intersectionality, it feels inappropriate to single out one group as being “most” underserved. Clearly, we don’t serve any historically marginalized community well. We must give students and families a voice and guarantee equity in access and opportunities for all, regardless of race, income, ability, & self-identities. I am a proponent of creating and implementing a cyclical school redesign process that brings the voice of every special population to the table. This inclusion is critical since the system at its foundation was built without their voice and was designed to uphold a white middle- to upper-class power dynamic. I am running to represent all of the Austin ISD, and I recognize that I will have to go further than most because of my background to prove that I am a champion and advocate for every student.

For our students of varying abilities, we need to first understand that providing special education services is about more than just meeting federal and state legal/reporting requirements. We need to focus on providing differentiated quality education to all students regardless of ability. We are already othering students by grouping and tracking within General Education and Special Education when we should be talking about this in terms of specialized instruction. We should be talking about how we work towards providing developmentally appropriate education to all students in an environment that works to continuously become less restrictive with careful planning to incorporate teacher, student, and family support.

I am not familiar with all of the details around the current Special Education situation (described by many I have spoken to as a crisis) in AISD. However, I have already begun speaking with parent and community advocates and I look forward to learning more as I speak with various educators and more community members. My goal as a trustee will be to listen, learn, and be a trusted advocate who is committed to inclusion and continuous improvement.

It was great to see Austin ISD as one of the ten leading districts in the nation with the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative. Sadly, that initiative lost momentum after President Obama left office. There are many ways that we can encourage the best works of MBK to continue in the district. For example, we know that Hispanic and African American males are more likely to drop out of school. We need to further develop and enhance systems to ensure that our schools develop the necessary and wanted support to engage and educate all students. By offering additional school

options and customized community centers across AISD with a focus on historically neglected neighborhoods, we can provide greater opportunities for BIPOC students and families.

My own experience as a district administrator was in a district with 31% of students being English Language Learners and 71% of students identifying a language other than English as their first language. While the vast majority of those students identified Spanish as their first language, it highlighted the need for a district to go well beyond just translation and bilingual education as the means for creating equitable access to the district for students and families identifying any language as their first. This includes enrollment and registration supports, intentional school visits at the families' convenience, access to additional learning time in math and English literacy, and first access to the highest quality early childhood educational options available. AISD's equity audit must identify every area where the district can improve access and opportunities, regardless of a student's or family's native language.

Finally, as a heterosexual, cisgender, white male, I do not have all of the answers here and am interested in creating a system that is flexible in design to ensure we can structurally meet the equitable needs of every student. I look forward to using my privilege and experience in navigating our inequitable systems to help elevate and prioritize the voices of all marginalized people into spaces where they have been frequently overlooked and ignored. I commit to establishing community based working groups and listening over talking while using the skills I've developed in my career to govern the operationalization of the great ideas that have been and will continue to come from across our communities. I believe we need to establish a clear, accessible, and secure community voting/feedback system to bring in community feedback more formally.

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?

It is important to note that I do not believe there is any one right answer that will make everyone happy. We need to be focusing our energy on understanding every need of our students, families, and staff and identifying ways that we can meet each of those needs. The updated third draft of the AISD Open for Learning Plan incorporates most of what I would expect and want to see. So long as we are prioritizing safety and not

forcing anyone into any situation that they are uncomfortable with, while focusing on the needs of our individual students first, then we are moving in the right direction.

What is concerning to me is the lack of information related to educator/staff support. This gap may be more of an internal communication but if it exists it should be added into the school reopening plan. There are many members of the community that are concerned for our employees and would like to know how we plan on supporting them. What is the process for teachers who want to volunteer to return to campus? Are they receiving any supplemental pay or an emergency stipend? If not, they should, assuming the district has the funds available (hopefully additional Federal aid will arrive in the coming days) Are they being held harmless on sick days if they test positive for COVID-19? If not, they should. Will they be required to pay out of pocket expenses for COVID-19 related medical expenses? If they are, they should not. Are we requiring teachers to teach both face to face and virtually? If we are, I strongly recommend that we work to ensure no teacher is serving both in person and virtual students.

Another area of concern to me that appears to be missing from the current reopening plan is related to school culture. This important variable relating to the success of both students and staff does become negated by a virtual learning situation. The reopening plan identifies the district's professional school counselors as responsible for creating safe, supportive, inclusive school learning environments through the counseling program. These professionals cannot be solely responsible for creating a culture of safe and supportive environments. I would like to see AISD further flesh out a plan for intentionally building and maintaining a positive school culture (whether virtual or in person) with a focus on being safe and supportive for every student.

Moving forward, attention must be focused on the students and families with the most need. The district appears to be progressing well with ensuring all students have the technology hardware and software needed to access equitable learning opportunities. This must continue and there must be immediate response plans the moment there are any technology or connectivity issues. We need to understand that our own personal experiences do not represent all other students and families. Returning to campus should be prioritized (with all safety procedures and protocols in place and pressure tested) for our students who are identified to be unable to receive the most appropriate supports and services virtually. We cannot allow this crisis to further exacerbate the stark divide between our students based on race, income, and ability. Our administrators must explicitly respond to this need with a very clear plan. Early literacy is one of the most critical components for success in school and beyond. Austin has

the ability to serve as a model for success if we create the will to step far outside of the box and reimagine all of our systems with this as the priority.

Further, we must lobby the state to ensure that schools are fully reimbursed for the additional costs posed by COVID-19 which has disproportionately affected our BIPOC students and families.

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?

We need to start by understanding that our school buildings are more than just classrooms for education purposes, they are also community centers. When we close a school for any reason, we need to understand that we are simultaneously closing a community center that many come to rely on for different purposes. I don't believe that the best academic option for every student will always be the school that is closest to their home. Even if a school needs to close its doors to academics (for any reason), every effort should be taken to ensure that its role as a community center can be maintained or even expanded. For too long (or forever) the system has disregarded the needs of our Black and Brown Austin residents. In fact, the system is perfectly designed to get the results that it's currently getting. To protect the educational opportunities for often systemically marginalized communities we need to redesign the system explicitly with their voice since the original system that we are still working from was designed to keep them down and perpetuate a school to prison pipeline. In regards to what resources should be available to the families affected by the school closures, I would need to listen to those members of the community and make explicit policy changes.

4) Everyone swears their oath before the school board intending to take action 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?

We must have a budget that is strategically aligned with clear and transparent goals and priorities (as far as I can tell these don't exist in any practical format). I've spent time with many districts around how they have spent their Title 1 funds and find it is

ever rarely aligned with the district's overall strategy. For example, If we set an outcome goal around improving 3rd-grade literacy by x%, an aligned budget would disproportionately allocate funds meant to actualize progress towards that goal. We need to start with developing a set of clear SMART student outcome goals within the superintendent's scorecard and then hold the district accountable to developing a budget that is clearly aligned to those.

We must address our internal school funding system. The current system for most of the school funding in AISD is based on an antiquated staffing allocation formula depending upon the student population in each building. I am a proponent of a thoughtful and well-designed student-based budgeting system to enable a more transparent and equitable. I am a proponent for a thoughtful, well-designed student-based budget to ensure our budget has the potential to become the moral document that it should be. In a student-based budgeting system, the district can use a weighted student formula as a way of allocating the district's resources to schools based on assigning weights to student needs. Weights are assigned to student characteristics, identities, and needs and applied district-wide. Examples include grade level, English Language Learners, student ability and severity, and poverty level, etc. The greater the need, however that is determined in collaboration with the community, the higher the weight. A per-pupil amount would be calculated based on the total pool of funding allocated to schools and the total weighted enrollment. Schools would then receive a budget based on their projected enrollment multiplied by the associated student per-pupil amounts. Allocations are not based on what schools have historically received or a staffing allocation model. Principals then have the opportunity to create budgets to be within their total allocation, including staffing, and non-salary costs. To increase allocations, schools would have to increase overall enrollment and/or serve more students with greater needs. This system creates a more transparent and equitable approach by funding students--not buildings, not adults--but students and where they go to school. Creating a student-based funding system would require a significant investment in systems and professional development (enrollment projections, scenario planning, and principal training) prior to launching but given the sincere focus on dismantling inequities within our system, it is likely worth it.

We must also be working at the state level to pragmatically address the state's recapture system and that starts with ensuring that any funds generated by student weights (ELL, FRL, SPED, and more) should not be subject to recapture to ensure that our most disadvantaged student populations have access to these additional resources.