

Cindy Anderson
District 8 At-large



Section I: Brief Personal Profile

1. Why do you want to be elected an AISD Trustee?

I have spent the last decade volunteering at Austin ISD in multiple capacities and leadership positions serving all of our students. Each and every one of those experiences has provided me with valuable insight about our campuses, neighborhoods and how we operate as an institution. This work has culminated in a desire to take my service to the next level. Public education, and more specifically, Austin ISD, is my passion and has been for over a decade. My focus is 100% on serving our students, staff and community, supporting Austin ISD in providing the highest level of education for ALL of our students.

2. What personal and professional experiences (e.g. education, high-level leadership roles, previous board experience) most qualify you for service as an AISD Trustee?

I am a parent of two, a 2015 AISD graduate and a current AISD sophomore. My children have attended AISD schools from elementary to high school, providing me with first hand experience as to how what we do downtown impacts our students, families and staff. Over the last ten years I've also held multiple PTA officer positions at two different schools, served on campus CAC and numerous AISD district-level committees and advisory bodies: DAC, BAC, BFAC, DTPC, CTEAC, HB5, and Strategic Planning. I've served on the Executive Board of the Austin Council of PTAs for the last 5 years, holding three different leadership positions for an organization that supports roughly 16,000 local PTA members and leaders across 114 PTAs in AISD. All of this work has allowed me to work regularly with students, parents and community leaders from all over Austin.

Prior to my volunteer work, I spent over 5 years working as a legal assistant in a variety of areas of law and 6 years working for a major insurance company. Both provided significant exposure to legal statutes, documents and policies, making me very comfortable in understanding, applying and drafting new policy.

I believe that my experience, combined with my institutional knowledge of AISD leadership skills and passion for public education, have uniquely prepared me for this position making me the most qualified candidate for AISD At-Large Trustee.

3. If you are elected to the school board, what would be your greatest area of growth?

There is, without question, a learning curve for anyone elected to this position. I do expect my learning curve to be shorter, however, on average given my 10 years of experience working in AISD. Every Board also has a unique dynamic dictated by its members, their personalities and experiences. It takes time to get to know your colleagues, identify how they like to work and learn how to best establish trust and build consensus. I have worked directly with the vast majority of our current Trustees during my years of service in AISD. I have a strong working relationship with the Board and am confident in my ability to serve as a valuable and collaborative addition to the team.

Aside from the above, our district will have ongoing challenges driven by inequities in the State school finance funding formula that will require us to continue to be very purposeful and creative in how we allocate our dollars to best serve our very diverse population. We must continue our advocacy efforts across the State and at the Legislature highlighting the ongoing, severe impact of inequities in the existing formula that disproportionately penalize Austin ISD.

4. Provide an example when you had to build consensus and buy-in with people of varying opinions? What was the outcome?

In January ACPTA received calls from high school parents about AISD's new attendance policy relative to course credit. I contacted the Administration for information about the policy change, the basis for it, how it was implemented/communicated and asked how we could partner to address these concerns. Campuses worried that more changes could negatively impact student attendance and/or reduce their ability to identify and intervene with students who had patterns of concern or whether they would need more resources. Parents were concerned that students were being required to make up hours, along with how and when that was expected to occur. They were also concerned about the timeliness of notice to students who were at risk, that it might delay graduation and that different schools had different policies or practices.

I offered to gather parent leaders to collaborate with the Administration in modifying the policy to address widespread concerns and to assist them in creating processes that would facilitate implementation, compliance and communication. We spent a lot of time considering the varied, and at times, competing concerns, how to balance them against each other, how any changes might impact students, teaches and campuses, and what additions/modifications could ultimately best support our students and staff, and of course, comply with the law.

After three months of collaborative work involving a lot of stakeholders, we were able to make some critical changes to the policy that became standard across all high schools and provided our students with greater flexibility and support. Campuses were allocated more efficient tools and enhanced support reducing the amount of time they were spending on managing attendance/credit. Our work then expanded to assisting the Administration in drafting communications to families and campuses to streamline the messaging and clearly articulate the "what, why and how."

Section II: District Overview

5. What, in your view, are the three biggest challenges facing AISD? What are the district's greatest strengths?

Like many large urban public school districts, Austin ISD faces specific challenges simply because of its sheer size. We employ nearly 12,000 people, support 130 campuses (plus administrative facilities) and educate over 83,000 students, within a budget of roughly \$1.3 billion. We have many needs and insufficient funding streams in order to meet them. Implementing the right programs and initiatives (and with fidelity) and allocating as much of those resources directly to classrooms is key to achieving the best possible educational outcomes for **all** of our students.

Communicating our vision timely and clearly and to a wide variety of stakeholders that often have different priorities is challenging. Our students and their families also speak over 90 different languages.

The affordability of living in Austin impacts our families as well as our employees. It affects enrollment (how we attract and retain students as well as how we utilize our facilities), competitive compensation, employee retention, and so much more. The decline in enrollment results in less money.

Despite our many challenges, Austin ISD has significant strengths. Our high school graduation is at 89.7%, an increase of over 15% since 2008. We boast some of the most recognized schools and programs in the State and in the Nation. We have Dual Credit, ECHS, robust fine arts, SEL, libraries and more that our competitors do **not** have. We have the largest number of National board-certified teachers of any district in the State. We have the best certified, classified, teaching and administrative staff anywhere, not to mention extraordinarily dedicated community partners.

6. The Texas Academic Performance Report indicates that from 2011 to 2014 AISD's percentage of "college ready" students in both math and English increased from 53% to 61%. During this same time period, the percentage of ELL students graduating from high school college ready decreased from 7% to 2%. What AISD practices and programs are playing into these numbers? What can be done to continue to increase the number of college ready graduates and ensure equitable outcomes for all students?

While AISD continues to trend upwards in overall graduation rates, we conversely struggle in demonstrating similar, let alone comparable, progress in college readiness. We have invested significant resources and attention over the last several years specifically to improve our high school graduation rates. At the same time, State accountability standards/testing have continued to place increased demands on our students and staff, requiring our students to pass more exams, and at specific intervals, in order to progress to the next grade level and/or meet high school graduation requirements. That reality translates into disproportionate focus on remediation which in practice results in double-blocking, more time spent on test preparation, students repeating courses, and reduced opportunity/flexibility to take advanced level courses that enhance college readiness.

While we can't choose not to comply with State requirements, we can, however, set the same high expectations for all of our student populations, and provide the same rigor, course selection and high quality teaching in each and every one of our schools. In doing so, and doing it consistently, we can eliminate "preparatory" courses and double-blocking that focuses primarily on remediation and test preparation that translates into students gaining an entire class year (or more) that enables them to add additional advanced courses. The addition of a single course in a series, such as a 4th year of high school science, dramatically increases college readiness. Similar progress occurs when we can prepare more students to successfully take and complete Algebra 1 in middle school.

7. In May of 2016 a Texas Supreme Court ruling upheld the state's education finance system as constitutional while recommending top to bottom reforms. Meanwhile, AISD continues to grapple with the effects of the 2011 state education cuts as well as decreasing local tax revenue caused by "recapture". In such a climate, what should the district's top budgeting priorities be?

Nearly 87% of AISD's budget is allocated to staff salaries. Debt service and recapture payments are also fixed expenses. That leaves just 13% of a \$1.3 billion budget to allocate to everything else. The cost of maintaining, upgrading, and building new facilities has to be balanced between limited M&O dollars and through bonds that require taxpayer support.

We have to continue to invest in our largest and greatest asset, our staff. We have to offer competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain a highly qualified staff and support them through stellar professional development opportunities. We need to continue to invest in and expand Pre-K for both 3 and 4 year olds.

We still have work to do to ensure that **ALL** of our students are graduating on time and performing well academically. Our African-American students (and more specifically males) are still struggling. Our ELLs, economically disadvantaged students and Special Education students also need significant support and resources. We must continue to identify and address these challenges and invest in the programs that will bridge and ultimately eliminate these gaps that we have seen historically. **ALL** of our students deserve the same rigorous curriculum, high expectations and to graduate fully prepared for college, career & life.

We also need to continue to collaborate with our local employers and educational partners (ACC, UT, HT, etc.) to ensure that we are creating the skilled workforce that gives our students options and makes them highly competitive in the job market.

8. In January of 2016, the Austin Monitor reported that AISD enrollment has dropped by 3,000 students since 2012, which CFO Nicole Conley estimates as a loss of \$49 million in funding. Davis Demographics & Planning, Inc. estimated this number will continue to drop at a greater rate than initially predicted, decreasing another 6,140 students from 2015 to 2025. In what ways does this represent a challenge for AISD, and what is the board's role in responding? What actions should be taken?

Declining enrollment in AISD is an ongoing issue. Fewer students mean less revenue that we need to educate and serve our students. It also means some of our schools are under-utilized.

The availability of affordable housing is a significant contributor. Many families can't afford to buy or rent in Austin. Property taxes for homeowners have consistently increased over the as have real estate prices. Rent specials also drive mobility, necessitating that families move frequently in order to take advantage of more affordable housing options. We have areas where we face strong competition from local charter or private schools, especially in areas of high density and where our schools are overcrowded. Other areas are experiencing re-gentrification, and we are seeing more singles or married couples without children. Families can't afford to live here, including our staff.

We need to continue to research and acknowledge why families are leaving AISD or not enrolling altogether and be willing to address areas of concern. As a board we must be committed to allocating the necessary resources to support the Administration in providing exceptional customer service to our families and ensuring that all of our schools are high performing and offer rigorous and innovative curriculum.

The Board also has a role in publicly supporting and touting our schools and our strengths as a district, to support the Superintendent in creating a multi-faceted plan of action and allocating resources to address opportunity areas/contributing factors. We need to excel at telling our story. We educate students better. We serve all students. We have unique offerings that our competitors do not. Our graduation rates are higher. We have an extraordinary number of National Board-certified teachers, SEL, fine arts, libraries, and more.

Section III: Approach to Governance

9. Identify an important issue affecting a specific district or vertical team within AISD. What priority should the district leadership place on resolving this issue? What trade-offs, in terms of taking time or resources from other areas of need, will be required to fully address this issue? How can the board ensure such sacrifices are mitigated?

Several of our vertical teams face challenges with overcrowded schools. Student enrollment significantly exceeds the capacity of the facility that it was designed to accommodate. There are an insufficient number of classrooms available to serve our students that require the addition of portables or even a reassignment of entire grade levels to other geographically proximate facilities. Campuses have to become particularly skilled and creative as to how they use shared spaces to accommodate serving higher unexpected numbers of students.

For each of these areas, we've implemented all of the solutions that were within our immediate power and resources. We've also thoughtfully considered boundary changes, but as we've worked through the implications, the reality was that we didn't have enough capacity at neighboring schools to accommodate shifting boundaries in a way that made sense for our students and their families. The alternative, and long-term solution, is building additions and/or new schools that require bonds and voter approval.

It's often hard for our stakeholders to understand the vast complexities of how changing what is seemingly one small part of our district has an exponential impact that can radiate across the district. We have other areas, for example, with campuses that are under-utilized, albeit for different reasons. The automatic assumption is that we can simply adjust boundaries or bus kids to those schools to balance out enrollment. Logistically, things are far more complicated. Enlarging boundaries can make it less accessible for kids to walk or bike to school, and for parents to participate and volunteer. Transportation costs also increase, which in turn requires us to hire more drivers and purchase more buses.

The trade offs for solutions that truly solve some of our issues require ongoing taxpayer support passing bonds.

10. What expectations do you intend to set for the upcoming term? What will be your top goals and priorities?

I would like us to continue to focus as a Board on framing our work intentionally around creating policies and environments that support and empower our staff and Superintendent.

We must have the same high expectations for all of our students and allocate resources accordingly to drive needed improvement that will bridge and ultimately eliminate achievement gaps. Our African-American, ELL, economically disadvantaged and Special Education populations historically track lower graduation rates and lower percentages of students considered to be "college ready" when compared to other student groups.

More specifically, we need to work with the Administration to set stretch targets supported by clear strategies identified by the Administration that focus on high quality instruction with a rigorous curriculum across all of our neighborhood schools. We must measure progress frequently, with regularly scheduled conversations, evaluating whether we've sufficiently allocated the necessary resources to support this priority.

I will continue to prioritize and support Pre-K for both 3 and 4 year olds. High quality Pre-K programs can greatly improve Kindergarten readiness and help bridge future academic success, especially for our most vulnerable students.

We must continue to invest in and expand programming in **all** of our schools to prepare **all** of our students for success in college, career and life. This necessitates close collaboration with our local employers and partners to continue to design and align curriculum that produces the highly skilled workforce that our community needs. We also need to increase opportunities to showcase career opportunities to all of our students and help them connect career goals to educational pathways.

11. How would you describe the specific role of the school board in improving education for Austin's students?

The Board and Superintendent have reciprocal roles that necessitate a balanced approach to governance. The Board is charged with providing the Superintendent with the necessary resources

to accomplish their shared vision for the district, and to create an environment that enables the Superintendent to execute against these mutual expectations.

In other words, the Board must provide the appropriate conditions for the Superintendent to implement the details of this shared vision, share the responsibility of engaging the community's support, leverage their own strengths and expertise in support of these efforts, and hold the Superintendent accountable for the outcomes. Both entities must constantly maintain the overarching focus on achieving high student outcomes for all demographics. For the Board, this support and focus must be policy and governance driven, not in the details of the execution which should be left up to the experts hired by the Administration that have had the education and experience to make such decisions.

That being said, both the Board and the Superintendent must be willing to be progressive, innovative and collaborative in providing educational opportunities that will truly take **all** of our students to the next level in preparing them for college, career and life.

12. As a board member, one of your important responsibilities will be to engage with parents and other members of the Austin community. What specific actions do you plan to take to fulfill those responsibilities? Provide an example of how you would bridge differences between diverse constituent groups on a given education issue.

I would like to focus on a couple of different approaches to improve access to engagement as well as frame conversations differently depending on the type of stakeholder.

It can be challenging for many of our stakeholders to attend meetings, join committees, or volunteer. I would like to hold more meetings out in our communities at recreational centers, libraries, churches, places most convenient and comfortable for our stakeholders and provide more options as to when these opportunities are scheduled to increase accessibility.

We need to remember to explain **what** we're doing and **how** we're doing it, **why**, **how** they might be impacted, and **how** we can truly partner.

In addition to the above, I would like to join the Board sub-committee on engagement to continue the progress made by current and former Trustees in making policy changes that allow us to continue to improve in making engagement more accessible **and** more valuable for our stakeholders. I think it's important to consistently articulate how feedback/work has been incorporated, and if we cannot do so, to explain why, and/or when it will be so that folks don't feel like their time/effort was wasted.

We frequently work with groups that have different perspectives/priorities. Generally we often want the same thing, for all of our students to receive the best possible education and become future contributing members of our community. Spending extra time listening to each other's perspective, what's driving their "want" or expectations, what they're looking to achieve, will help in clarifying what's most important to them and why. This can also provide opportunity to realize some common goals, beliefs, interests or shared experiences that even if unrelated to the topic at hand, may help build trust and facilitate a willingness to compromise later in the process.