

2018 Austin Kids First PAC Candidate Questionnaire

Section I: Brief Personal Profile

1. *Tell us about yourself. Why are you personally motivated to improve public education?*

My name is Kristin Ashy and I am running for a seat on the Austin ISD Board of Trustees, District Four. I grew up in Crockett, Texas. My mother was a teacher in public education for 30 years and my dad was a local businessman who also served on the school board when I was growing up. After graduating from my small, East Texas public high school, I attended the University of Texas at Austin where I received my BS in Child Development and Family Relationships in 1996. I went on to earn my teaching certificate in Special Education and taught in the public schools in Texas for six years. I have two children both enrolled in AISD, ages 14 and 9, and am happily married to my husband Kirk Ashy for 18 (nearly 19) years. I have long been an advocate of the public education system exemplified by my years of volunteering both within my community's schools and with AISD.

While I am excited about the great strides the district has made in it's attention to their facilities and focus on literacy, I believe there is still more work to be done. Having been a special education teacher, I would like to be a part of the future of special education within the district. Special education has come under scrutiny recently with state and federal attention now being squarely focused on what is happening in Texas. I also hold early intervention as a cornerstone value and would like to see full day Pre-K within AISD.

2. *What skills and experiences prepare you to serve as an AISD Trustee? If you are elected to the school board, what would be your greatest area of growth?*

I have been a public school teacher and have a degree in Child Development and Family Relationships. When my children entered elementary school, I became involved in their schools and have served as both the Doss Elementary and Murchison Middle School PTA President, giving me insight to how schools operate and staff with their limited BTOs/local budgets to meet the needs of their students. I have also served on the Campus Advisory Council for both Doss and Murchison and was co-chair of the Doss CAC one year. For the last three years, I have served on the Facilities and Bond Planning Advisory Committee and served as the chair of the Community Engagement Sub-Committee Chair all three years. My greatest area of growth will be learning more about the intricate details of the District's budget, especially as we face upcoming shortfalls that could put into peril our fund balance and the district's bond ratings.

Section II: District Overview

- 3. Imagine you are holding a community meeting tomorrow to inform constituents on the state of Austin ISD. What successes and challenges would be important to share? What else would be on your agenda to share with the community?***

While there are many success stories to be found within AISD, I believe the biggest success story at present is the passing of the \$1.05 billion dollar bond last fall. I would look forward to sharing the current states of implementation of each aspect of the bond as well as how it would impact District Four, as that is who I would hope to represent. I would also share how the implementation of the bond elevates the exciting academic/business partnerships such as those at LBJ, Reagan, and Lanier. I would discuss how the schools being built and renovated foster the focus on teaching the whole child and appreciate that each child learns differently. Another success is AISD's commitment to the concept of the whole child through social and emotional learning and mental health supports of our students and staff. The challenges I would acknowledge are centered on the budget and ensuring that students across the district receive the same incredible foundational education. The budget is an intricate, living document that will take time and study to comprehend its complex information. I would hope to educate people on the current state funding system and how that impacts AISD's bottom line. I would also share my opinions on how they, as voters, might influence change. An ongoing challenge for any large, diverse district is equity and making sure all kids receive what they need to be successful. I look forward to identifying those needs for each school and community so that AISD can intervene where necessary.

- 4. According to the Strategic Plan Scorecard, 54% of students meet the grade-level standard in reading. Those numbers are 31% for African American students, 40% for Hispanic students, 33% for Economically Disadvantaged students and 80% for white students. What AISD practices and programs are contributing to this gap? What can be done to increase the number of students meeting grade-level reading standards and ensure equitable outcomes for all students?***

This struggle can be seen nationwide. As an educator myself, I have felt the pressure of state testing all the way down to the Pre-K level. As an early childhood educator, I know firsthand the importance of early intervention and its positive impacts on reading levels. I would advocate for state funding of full-day Pre-K resulting in more students receiving quality programming at an early age. For those students already in elementary school and beyond, I believe in and have seen the success of reading and math specialists. Considering the financial pressure placed on the district, it will take some out-of-the-box thinking to acquire funding for more of these educators.

- 5. Assuming no financial relief from the legislature, how will you approach making difficult decisions about the budget? What should be the district's top budgeting priorities?**

There is no question that AISD is unique in its situation due to the current education funding system in Texas. I will approach budget decisions with the goal of retaining the incredible academic programming/options provided to AISD students. The District has worked hard to provide varied and high quality programs, such as Early College High Schools, dual-language, career launch programs, and others, that families have come to value. I think maintaining this level of quality and variety should be one of the top priorities. Additionally, I know the importance of reading and how success in school is directly tied to it. Funding to assure all students are reading on level by 3rd grade should remain atop the list.

Section III: Approach to Governance

- 6. Describe the specific role of the school board in improving education for Austin's students?**

As a governing body, the school board's largest impact on education is through holding the Superintendent accountable to the strategic plan. The School Board also works to create policies which support the strategic plan within the confines placed on districts by the state.

- 7. Define student academic success. How do you know it is happening?**

I believe academic success to be defined individually meaning it is not an across the board singular indicator. Progress and growth beyond one's current level of understanding is a successful student. I believe it is important to focus on the whole child meaning each child in a school is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

- 8. 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, regarding taking time or resources from other areas of need, will be required to adequately address this issue?**

District Four faces some unique challenges around overcrowding within their schools. I see the district's Facility Master Plan as the biggest step AISD has and will continue to take in resolving this issue. One of the reasons I am interested in being an AISD trustee is to see continued implementation of the Facility Master Plan now and in the coming years.

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

I intend to spend much time discussing the budget and how the District will continue to function at a high level with less funds. I would like continue and deepen the relationship with the Austin Board of Realtors. As people continue to move to Austin, AISD can educate those helping others to find houses so that they can speak knowledgeably about all the wonderful things happening throughout the district. I would like to see full day Pre-K funded through additional state dollars. In addition, I think it will be important to continue to implement the Facility Master Plan and work diligently to engage AISD families and taxpayers. AISD has continually made a commitment to voters to be efficient and effective with their valuable tax dollars. I plan to stand by this commitment.

10. *As a board member, one important responsibility will be to engage with parents and other members of the Austin Community. What will be your approach to weighing community concerns along with other data when making policy, budget and contractual decisions?*

I plan to approach community engagement in several ways including, but not limited to: attending PTA meetings, attending neighborhood association meetings, social media, e-mail, and Vertical Team meetings. While serving as a FABPAC member, I personally witnessed how important quality community engagement is to the district and would like to see similar efforts with all district communication. There were times in the Facility Master Plan process when what the community wanted conflicted with data. Upon further examination, decisions were made that may not have been exactly what the community described. It is vitally important to come back to families and taxpayers to explain why the decisions were made and provide them with information to explain those decisions. I want families and taxpayers to know that they have been heard.

11. *What measures will you use to hold the Superintendent accountable for improvements in racial equity and outcomes?*

The primary tool used to hold the Superintendent accountable is the scorecard created by the Board of Trustees. It is my understanding that within the scorecard, the criteria are specifically constructed to address these important issues. The Board will then make decisions about the success of the Superintendent and his work both now and in the coming years. If the results are not evident, it will be crucial for the board to act.