



## **2018 Austin Kids First PAC Candidate Questionnaire**

### **Section I: Brief Personal Profile**

#### ***1. Tell us about yourself.***

I am a native of New York, born into a family of educators, including my mother who was also a school board member. I was the founding Chair of the African and African Diaspora Department and have been an Associate Professor African and African Diaspora Studies and Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin for the past 29 years. I am also Vice Provost for Diversity for the university.

I received my Doctorate in Social Anthropology from Stanford University, a Master of Arts from Stanford University in Anthropology and a Master's degree in Marine Sciences from the University of Miami.

I have had years of involvement with AISD. I was an active parent when my children were in District 1 schools, serving as a PTA member and as PTA president in my children's elementary schools. I was co-chair of the Austin - AISD African American Quality of Life Education Task Force as well as a member of the AISD African - American Community Advisory Committee for Educational Excellence.

#### ***Why are you personally motivated to improve public education?***

Coming from a family of educators, I know how education can elevate individuals and communities. The need for a strong education is more critical than ever, as Americans must be competitive globally. Because I believe public education can be a great equalizer, I devote my energy to public education in general, and District 1 in particular. Historically, Austin has neglected education in East Austin. I want to help reverse some of the historical damage done in District 1. I am working tirelessly to make a difference in East Austin schools, particularly in District 1.

#### ***2. What skills and experiences prepare you to serve as an AISD Trustee?***

My 29 years of experience as an educator as well as my managerial experience in an educational bureaucracy have helped prepare me to serve as a trustee. I also now have four years of experience as a board trustee.



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

If re-elected, I want to spend less time on the bureaucratic distractions the administration and the board structure create and devote more time advocating for changes that would make a difference in District 1 schools with particular emphasis on racial and economic disparities in educational opportunity and achievement.

## **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?***

AISD is extremely successful in educating its affluent Anglo population with three of the highest-ranking high schools in the state. On the other hand, less than half of the students of color in our district are able to meet grade-level-standards in reading. Eliminating this disparity should be the districts #1 priority. There are a number of other serious problems that the district needs to attend to including the problem of teacher and staff compensation as AISD descends into fiscal insolvency. However, the principle challenge facing the district is one that it has never been able to successfully resolve, educational disparities.

***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?***

AISD creates barriers to the success of District 1 schools by not selecting and retaining the best principals and teachers and not reproducing the District 1 achievement successes. (i.e Graham, Hart, Ortega, Blackshear at one time ). I propose that the district provide a pay differential (salary or housing benefits) to retain quality/proven educators in District 1 schools.

***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?***

All AISD contracts for academic services and programs should be subject to a performance audit. A reduction in administrative perks and a freeze on non-essential administrative positions should also be considered. Inasmuch as possible, central office administrators should be placed in under enrolled schools and central office space reduced. The district's budget priority should be quality



education and curriculum in all classrooms but especially in elementary schools. Everything else should be of secondary importance in terms of funding.

### **Section III: Approach to Governance**

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

The Board should set priorities and policy. The Board should set as its highest priority resolving the educational disparities based in race and economic status.

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

A successful student is one who shows steady development in their intellectual capacity over time and is able to reach their maximum potential within our schools. Student success has a number of different components, important aspects of which are not measured by standardized testing. However, as of now standardized tests are one of the major tools we have to assess basic skills and intellectual development. I believe that the District needs to work to create better measures of student success and put all its resources into meeting them.

**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?**

The most important issue affecting D1 is the number of elementary school children who do not have reading and math skills that reach grade level proficiency. This negatively affects all other aspects of student success at all grade levels. In the long run I do not believe that there are significant tradeoffs involved in this. Fixing our disparities in basic skills acquisition in the early years of elementary school will positively impact disciplinary issues, attendance issues, graduation rates, and academic achievement at all levels reducing costs in many of these areas. No better investment can be made in the district.

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

Top priority will be improving the levels of academic achievement in D1 elementary schools. My expectation is that this refocusing will have a positive effect on District policy with regard to these schools.

**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 will continue to work with the East Austin Coalition for Quality Schools relying on this group for input, critical thinking on the issues, and expert thought. I will also continue to meet with neighborhood organizations and any other individuals and/or groups of the D1 area for input on important decisions.

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

I will use the Superintendent’s scorecard on the internal level and the court of public opinion to try to cajole, hold accountable and embarrass the District into doing what is necessary to eliminate achievement disparities in the District. I will use star test results and the states’ accountability ratings as the basis for evaluating progress in this area until we have developed acceptable alternative tools for doing so.