

Coalition for Bilingual Education (CBEE) and Austin Area Association for Bilingual Education (AAABE) Austin ISD Trustee Candidate Forum

Candidate: Piper Stege Nelson

Office sought: AISD Trustee District 5

Please write your response to each question below and submit by Wednesday September 30, 2020

2020 Written Response Questions:

1. What do you believe is the role of the Dual Language program in Austin ISD? What do you think are the benefits and challenges?

Speaking more than one language is key to college-and-career readiness. AISD's Dual Language programs help students prepare for an increasingly diverse and globalized workforce by offering bilingual, biliteral, and bicultural education. However, test scores improve more for bilingual learners than they do for English language learners, and there is generally a drop in testing scores before the improvement is seen. There is also a communication challenge; oftentimes, Black and Latino families in underserved areas of Austin are not being informed about dual language programs and their benefits, which is why the district must do more to promote DL educational opportunities in more schools.

2. The role of principals and associate superintendents and their commitment to DL is critical. What is the role of the board in regards to oversight and accountability of dual language program administration?

The AISD trustees must take seriously the goals and needs of our district's DL programs. In the board's oversight capacity, school board members must demonstrate an understanding of our one-way Spanish and two-way Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin DL programs, and make them a priority during budget and policy discussions.

3. Some AISD schools do not offer a dual language program to emergent bilinguals, also called English learners ("ELs"), at their school, though state law requires that ELs be provided with Spanish-language instruction. What are your thoughts around revising transportation solutions for ELs whose home school does not offer a dual language program?

Before we start busing kids out of their neighborhood schools, we need to do a needs assessment of that neighborhood school to see if the community wants a DL program. If that assessment determines that the community has been informed about the benefits of DL and still determines that they do not want to have a DL program at that school, then we will need to talk about transportation options.

4. As a School Board Trustee, you must not overstep administrative functions that belong to the Superintendent, but having a general understanding of how the district

works and what the district offers to our students is essential. Please share what your understanding is about the different bilingual programs being offered to our students in AISD. What is your opinion about these programs? Please explain.

On top of the ESL programs offered at District 5 schools, Small Middle School and Oak Hill Elementary offer DL programming, and Zilker Elementary is piloting a Spanish language immersion program. These are a promising start, but I would like to see expanded DL programs offered at more District 5 schools. I would also encourage more focus on critical consciousness curricula elements that can augment the existing bilingual, biliteracy, and cultural competency goals of DL programs to ensure more socially just schools.

2020 Commitment Questions: If no, please explain.

1. Will you commit to supporting the implementation of DL programs at all AISD elementary schools (with sufficient numbers of ELs) to the 5th grade, and wherever possible, through high school?

Yes

2. Are you committed as a trustee to look at long-term testing results and other indicators of student success and not just annual state testing results during the elementary years as a measure of academic success of EL students in DL? Yes

3. Will you commit to the support of the strong and successful implementation of dual language programs even if that means: (1) having to prioritize DL programs in budgeting, (2) having tough conversations and (3) being creative around any challenges that may come up? 4. Will you commit to ensuring monitoring of the fidelity of implementation of bilingual programs in AISD, including prior to expansion or cancellation?

Yes

5. Will you commit to meet with our Austin ISD EL constituency, attend Multilingual Education Advisory Committee Meetings at times, and/or make efforts to educate yourself further at conferences (such as TABE, NABE, or Adelante) to better understand and advocate for Dual Language and bilingual education?

Yes