

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

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?

The Dual Language program's goal is to help students become truly bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. The program is most powerful and most important for students who come to AISD speaking a language other than English at home. The data are clear: A well-implemented Dual Language program serves as a scaffold

and a bridge, giving students the opportunity to develop literacy skills and learn all subjects in a familiar language while acquiring a second language. To be done well, the Dual Language must begin with a focus on the student's home language as an asset, rather than seeing the need to learn English as a deficit. This requires the support and understanding of teachers, principals and other administrators. It also requires conversations with parents, who are essential partners.

Dual Language also has a role for students who speak English when they begin school. Many AISD families are eager for their children to be truly bilingual. Dual Language programs are less essential for the success of English speakers. But they are sought-after by many families and when space is available, the families of students who speak English should have access.

The benefits to students who arrive at school speaking a language other than English are clear. Dual Language programs give students the opportunity to learn literacy skills in the strongest way possible, working in their home language. Programs celebrate who students are and what students bring. They offer social and emotional benefits. And for programs that persist for enough years, students emerge stronger academically than students who are learning in a traditional monolingual program. That is true for English speaking students who enroll in Dual Language programs, as well.

Still, the challenges are real. There are too few teachers to meet the need that exists – a problem that must be addressed. Many campuses fail to implement DL programs faithfully – a practice that should not be allowed. Administration at AISD headquarters does not always fully support DL programs. There is a belief among some that DL does not work as promised – a belief reinforced by experience with DL programs that do not follow best practices. The pressure created by high-stakes standardized testing puts many DL programs at risk, as does an overemphasis on test prep. Parents whose students could benefit most from DL programs are not always fully informed of the benefits. That includes the parents of Black students, who enroll in DL programs at lower rates. And where DL programs become popular with families, gentrification can push out students who can benefit the most. These problems are not insurmountable. But they do need to be acknowledged, seen for what they are and addressed.

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?

When AISD chooses to invest in a program, that investment must include both an expectation of full support for that program, and the education required to make that support meaningful. That must be true for classroom teachers. It must be true for principals. And it must be true for the people who supervise those principals. The board sets policy, creates expectations through scorecards, and oversees measurement of those expectations. To guarantee success, the board should include measurements of fidelity of programs. The board should also include thoughtful scorecard measures – how long students persist in DL programs, what language skills students have as they advance to middle school and high school, how DL relates to discipline, family retention in AISD and academic success. Thoughtful metrics can help us know where programs are working, and who they are working for. Measures should also include a look at the training of administration, and the lived experience of families and students. While the board is not involved in hiring (other than the superintendent), it is fair for the board to expect and measure whether the superintendent hires administrators who are supportive of the programs that AISD has in place. The goal is to set programs, staff and students up for success.

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?

To be meaningful, access to a program must include access to transportation. There are two solutions to the requirement to provide Spanish-language instruction: bring the instruction to the student or take the student to the instruction. The first option is the better choice. Where possible, students should be provided what they need where they are. When that is not feasible, and instruction is offered on another campus, it is only fair to provide the transportation that is needed to make that transfer meaningful and workable. There are, of course, costs to transportation. I would love to see how much that cost is offset by providing students the instruction they need when they need it – reducing the need for expensive remediation that costs both our district and individual students.

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.

The spectrum of bilingual programs offered by AISD is broad. There are two-way DL programs in elementary schools offering Spanish, Vietnamese and Mandarin. There are one-way Spanish DL programs. There are some DL options at middle school and high school. There are some elementary schools that are fully DL for all students. And there are some where the programs are fairly faithful, and others where they are often not.

ESL programs are also offered to fill a need – although the focus on English at the expense of students’ native language is far from ideal, and should be replaced with true DL whenever possible. There are also

programs that serve students who struggle with both English and Spanish – a problem that can be caused by a failure to support students’ need to learn literacy skills early, in a familiar language, by undiagnosed or unaddressed learning differences, or by other factors.

I support a spectrum of options. Austin is a city that values choice – not only in our schools, but in so many spheres. To be meaningful, however, the choices families make must be truly and fully informed choices. And AISD has a long way to go before we can say that is truly what families are offered.

I believe strongly that a full DL model is the best for almost all students. And I would love to see that model strengthened everywhere it is offered, and truly extended through high school, so students can study any subject in either language. To create truly biliterate students, ready to learn and work in both languages, nothing else will do.

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?

YES

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