

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 role of the Dual Language Program is to provide an opportunity for all students to benefit from being bilingual, no matter what their first language is. Bilingualism is a necessary skill in life and in the workforce, and a dual language education will prepare students to succeed after graduation. Dual language benefits students learning English by building their self-esteem and pride in their culture and language, and it benefits native English speakers by teaching them the value of diversity and respect for other cultures. Children learning dual language might also help their parents learn English as a second language, which can help parents be more involved in their students' education. The challenge with dual language is that the criteria for admittance limit the students that can take advantage of it. Many campuses limit DL to one-way programs, and that segregates emerging bilinguals and makes it too easy for them to be treated as afterthoughts by administrators and to be bullied by their peers.

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 role of the board in regard to oversight and accountability is to create a system of evaluating administrator leadership. The board is responsible for guiding the district's operation, and there's no reason why that operation doesn't have accountability built in at every level. If you were a parent looking for the best dual language program for your child, you would not be able to find a clear answer of how the programs are run at different campuses or what learning outcomes are for students. On the district's most recent scorecard, there is no specific metric for evaluating administration or outcomes of dual language. Why?

We as trustees need to ask ourselves why a program with the potential to have such a positive impact on our students and our community is being brushed aside, and then we need to spearhead the change in culture that's needed to truly prioritize the multicultural respect and inclusivity that dual language fosters on our campuses.

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?

First, it needs to be acknowledged that the real issue here is not transportation -- it's that schools are getting away with singling out certain groups and depriving them of the instruction they need and that is legally required.

But while we're working on holding these schools accountable and teaching them why not offering Spanish instruction is racist, there's no reason why we can't arrange for students to be transported to the school that offers DL just like we do for magnet students. Why don't we do this already? Because of the way that we view EL students. We make special arrangements for magnet students because we recognize that they're extraordinary, yet we still view students whose first language is not English as being behind their peers. We need to change the culture of administration to recognize that emerging bilinguals have the same amount of talent and potential as other students, and to treat their bilingualism as a necessary skill to nurture rather than a barrier for them to overcome.

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.

I understand that there are a few main types of bilingual programs: ESL, one-way dual language exclusively for students who lack proficiency in English, and two-way dual language for both proficient English speakers and English learners. While these programs offer a broad spectrum of language learning, the way they're implemented on our campuses is not comprehensive enough. The district doesn't require dual language throughout every vertical team, which means that a student who is in a dual language program in elementary school, but whose middle school doesn't offer DL, won't be able to re-enter DL in high school. Mendez Middle School in District 2 is a perfect example. The elementary schools offer DL, but Mendez refuses to. Parents have expressed frustration and concern that their kids are getting cheated out of continued DL learning, but Mendez doesn't care. We need to work toward DL being implemented in every school, at every level, where there is a need so that these students' educations stay on track.

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