

## HISD DISTRICT V CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### ZONING

1. Do you believe in periodic rezoning of schools? If so, on what basis?

I support the periodic rezoning of schools, though I believe the process should focus on smaller schools that apply for the “small school” subsidy. Larger schools should be considered for rezoning if enrollment projections forecast sustained overcapacity, but care should be taken not to disrupt a high-quality program.

- a. Would you vote FOR or AGAINST rezoning the West University Elementary boundary lines?

As it stands, I would vote against rezoning West University Elementary until I had sufficient time to engage the West U community to understand all points of view and gauge support for several potential solutions. West U has by far the largest student population of any elementary school, but it is also one of the highest-performing programs in the district. I would not want to endanger the quality of the program by moving too quickly or without adequate community buy-in.

- b. If FOR, how would where would you propose sending zoned West University Elementary students?

Based on the data, opening a second elementary school in the West U zoning boundary seems like a workable solution as the student population at West U Elementary is nearly double the district’s median elementary school population. However, I would want to ensure that robust community input had been received and incorporated before any solution was adopted and implemented.

### WAIVERS

2. Under state law, the ratio of students to teachers in a kindergarten thru 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom must not exceed 22:1 without a waiver from the Texas Education Agency. Would you vote FOR or AGAINST reducing and/or eliminating waivers in HISD?

I would vote in favor of reducing/eliminating waivers so long as a long-term plan was in place to adequately staff schools. I expect that such a plan would require a couple of years to develop.

- a. If FOR, what remedy would you apply for the overflow of students?

At high-performing schools, I would advocate for additional permanent facilities to accommodate the smaller class sizes so long as campus

leadership believed that it would add the required number of teachers without sacrificing the quality of the program. At other schools, I would advocate for a mix of new construction and rezoning to make the numbers balance.

- b. On what basis would you select schools for the first reduction or elimination of waivers?

I would focus on implementing solutions at lower performing schools first, though plans for all schools should be developed simultaneously by campus leadership.

3. What is your position on a student who resides within his or her neighborhood school zone, such as West University Elementary, for example, not being allowed to attend his or her neighborhood school based on capping? Neighborhood schools should ensure that all zoned students are seated before students from outside the zoning area are admitted. Contingency seats should be reserved to accommodate students who move into the neighborhood at the beginning of the school year.

## FUNDING

4. Currently, HISD follows the following weights for funding of various classification of students:

a. Free/Reduced Lunch	x .075
b. At-Risk	x .075
c. Special Education	x .15
d. Gifted and Talented	x .12
e. Career and Technology	x .35
f. English Language Learner	x .1
g. Homeless	x .05
h. Refugee	x .05

Do you feel these weights are inequitable?

I find them more arbitrary than inequitable. When the above factors are considered alongside other factors like magnet funding and the small school subsidy, the funding formula doesn't direct funding at any subpopulation in a statistically significant way (only one variable – middle school students with special needs – has a correlation coefficient above 0.3).

- i. If yes, how would you propose to change them and how would you find funding?

I do not think that changing the weightings is a priority. I would like to simplify the funding formula to bring additional transparency to the process.

5. Do you commit to ensuring the rebuild of Bellaire High School?

Yes, I commit to ensuring the rebuild of Bellaire High School.

6. What is your position on HISD placing a cap on the amount of money PTOs at schools may raise?

I am opposed to HISD placing a cap on funds raised by PTOs.

- a. Would you vote FOR or AGAINST setting maximums PTOs could raise?

I would vote against setting maximums PTOs could raise.

7. Do you support the ability of a school and community to raise money for their own school building enhancements?

Yes, I support this.

8. Did you vote in FOR or AGAINST the recapture measure to send taxpayer dollars to the state?

I voted for the recapture measure to send taxpayer dollars to the state.

- a. If FOR (to send the money to the state), why?

Detaching property makes it much more challenging to take advantage of any reforms that might be passed in the state legislature and exposes the district to significant budget pressure if property values ever decrease.

- b. If AGAINST (not to send the money to the state), why?

9. HISD increased teacher salaries by 3% for the 2017-2018 school year. Many, including the Houston Federation of Teachers, were in favor of a 5% increase.

- a. Would you have voted for 3% or 5%?

I would have voted for a 3% increase due to the lack of funding for a 5% increase. I also would have advocated for a vote to establish a committee to review the budget to find additional funding to give teachers a raise next year.

- b. If 5%, where would you have found the extra funding since HISD is currently in a deficit?

## AUTONOMY

10. Do you believe in the centralization of HISD decision-making and using a staffing model or a decentralized system allowing schools and their Shared Decision-Making Committee to decide what is best for the school?

I support a truly decentralized model for Houston ISD as campus leadership, teachers, and their shared decision-making committees know what's best for each campus's unique needs.

11. What is your position on changing the names of schools as in the context of Lanier Middle School's name change?

I oppose changing school names by fiat from the board. If a name change is to be considered, there should be extensive and robust community engagement to determine whether the name should be changed and what it should be changed to.

## **MAGNETS and VANGUARD**

12. Under the current HISD structure, a school may propose to become a magnet to the district. Should schools maintain this ability or should HISD administration decide which schools should be magnets?

Schools should maintain this ability.

13. Currently Magnet Vanguard schools receive additional weight for the Gifted and Talented students and also Magnet funding. Do you favor dropping the Magnet funding for Vanguard Magnets as a means to create equity across HISD?

No, I do not support this. If you look at the budget data, Vanguard Magnets don't receive more funding per student than other campuses when all budget factors are considered (for example, Carnegie Vanguard HS receives \$5600 per student, which is below the median high school funding of \$5850 per student).

## **EVALUATION**

14. What types of checks and balances do you believe are applicable in the evaluation of principals and teachers since under the current structure, we do not have a test of measurement and evaluations are based on personal appraisals?

I believe that the district should reimplement test-based accountability as a portion of teacher and principal evaluations. Test scores should not be the only metric considered, but should be one of a basket of measures to ensure a well-rounded evaluation process.

**15.** Do you support the new system of ranking schools A-F? Why or why not?

Yes, I believe that the public needs a straight-forward metric to understand the relative quality of the schools in HISD. I also think that the metrics behind the A-F ranking need to be reviewed to ensure that they align with what parents and the community find meaningful.

**16.** How do you propose dealing with the STAAR Test administration this year, if you feel any change is necessary?

I would advocate for STAAR testing to proceed as normal. Houston is going through a lot as we continue to recover from Hurricane Harvey, but must do our best to ensure that HISD's students don't fall behind as a result. HISD should engage with the TEA if significant impacts are seen in the STAAR data once the tests are graded.

## **AT-RISK POPULATION**

**17.** District V has the largest immigrant population of any of the school board districts. How do you feel HISD should handle our immigrant student population?

I would advocate for immigrant students to be screened for special assistance prior to being routed to one of HISD's campuses to ensure they can be successful in their new school. The focus of any special assistance would focus on critical skills such as reading and writing in English and basic numeracy. It's vital that immigrant students be set-up for success.

## **WEBSITE**

**18.** You may list your campaign website here so that voters can attain more information.

Website: [www.seancheben.com](http://www.seancheben.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/seanchebenforhisd](https://www.facebook.com/seanchebenforhisd)

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