Meet the Candidates - District 6

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Sarah Dille	Marie Lebron	Alex San Martin
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Why are you running for the Austin ISD board of trustees, and what are your qualifications?		
I'm running for the Austin ISD Board of Trustees because I want to put 26 years of experience in education to work for our students, educators, and public schools. At a particularly difficult moment for our district—with pressing budget challenges and the threat of state takeover—I felt the time was right to step into this work more directly. I come from a family of teachers, my parents, aunts, and uncles were all teachers and administrators. I spent 16 years as a high school English teacher, including 11 years at Crockett High School in District 6, and was honored to be named Austin ISD Teacher of the Year in 2013. I later worked as an AISD Technology Design Coach, supporting teachers across South Austin, and I now	I'm running because I believe AISD needs trustees who will listen to staff and families, understand what is happening in our schools, and ask hard questions when something isn't working. I've been an AISD parent and volunteer since 2010, including 15+ years as a PTA leader. I'm a special education advocate and literacy coach trained in the Science of Reading. I also bring a professional background in operations management, accounting, leadership, and team building.	"Putting Students First, Restoring Trust, Delivering Results." Classroom Experience. Capitol Expertise. 360-Degree Leadership for Austin ISD. Our public schools are facing a critical crossroads. From navigating strict state mandates and funding formulas to supporting our overworked teachers and ensuring every student can thrive, the decisions made today will shape Austin's future for generations. As your candidate for Austin ISD District 6 Trustee, I bring a unique, 360-degree perspective that bridges the gap between the classroom floor and

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teach future teachers at The University of Texas at Austin. Throughout my career, I've centered student voices and advocated for the professionalism and expertise of teachers. I've also served on numerous AISD committees focused on issues including literacy, teacher pay, technology, and academic offerings. I also know AISD as a parent. My children have attended AISD schools from kindergarten through high school, and I've experienced the district alongside them as they've grown. One recently graduated and is starting college and the other is currently an AISD sophomore. I bring the perspective of a teacher, a parent, and someone who has spent a career working to make public education better—and I'm ready to put that experience to work for Austin families.		the legislative dais. Having taught on the frontlines in both Austin ISD and Houston ISD, I intimately understand the daily pressures our educators, students, and families experience. But real-world classroom experience is only half the equation. To protect our schools from state overreach and secure the resources our children deserve, we need leaders who know how the system works. My years of legislative policy experience at the Texas State Capitol, paired with my proven record of service on state and city boards, mean I am ready to lead from day one. I don't just know how a school functions—I know how policy is built, how public budgets are protected, and how local governance can champion public education. I'm running to bring accountability, fiscal responsibility, and an educator's heart to the board. Join me in building an Austin ISD where every classroom has the support it needs to succeed.
What is the biggest challenge facing the district, and how would you address it?		
Our biggest challenge is protecting AISD's autonomy while proving that local leadership can deliver for students. A state takeover would move important decisions away from Austin families, educators, and communities. I believe decisions about our schools are best made by people who know our students and our community—but local control only has meaning if we use it well. That means we have to earn and protect our autonomy by confronting our challenges honestly, improving student outcomes, supporting teachers, and being accountable to the community we serve. The recent scores show us that AISD has made significant progress over the past year and we should be able to capitalize on that momentum. We have to be willing to continuously look closely at what is working, what is not, and where we need to change course.	AISD has an opportunity to rebuild trust and avoid a potential state takeover by showing that we can identify our challenges and solve them together. That starts with listening to families and staff, being transparent about the data, and following through on commitments. I believe AISD can turn this around, but we have to be willing to listen, work together, and hold ourselves accountable.	AISD faces the possibility of state intervention due to accountability issues. I will work hard and fight to: Improve student outcomes. Demand measurable goals. Restore public confidence. Keep local control through better performance. The biggest challenge is chronic underfunding caused by stagnant state formulas and massive recapture payments. As Trustee, I will use my Capitol legislative experience to fight for increased state funding per pupil, protect local tax dollars, and ensure transparent, classroom-focused budgeting that prioritizes competitive teacher pay and vital campus resources.

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We also need to build a strong community structure that can advocate for our schools regardless of what happens with state intervention. That means working closely with organizations such as Keep Austin Schools Independent, the Austin Council of PTAs and campus PTAs, Education Austin, families, students, and other community partners. We should be building those relationships now—not waiting until a takeover happens. Together, we can create clear channels for sharing information, organizing families, elevating educator and student voices, and advocating for local priorities if Austin's elected board loses authority. Protecting local control ultimately means more than keeping a locally elected board. It means building a community that is informed and organized. My goal is to help AISD demonstrate that Austin can face hard problems (which this current board has certainly had to do), make thoughtful decisions, improve outcomes, and govern its schools effectively—and to make sure our community has a strong voice no matter what happens next.		
What are the top priorities that AISD needs to focus on for the future?		
Financial stability, academic success, and transparent decision-making are all key priorities, but AISD's top priority needs to be making this a district where families and teachers want to stay. Everything else depends on that. We need families to choose AISD and stay in AISD. Enrollment and attendance directly affect the resources available to our schools, so we cannot build a sustainable budget without rebuilding enrollment and making sure students are attending school. That means giving families a reason to believe that their children will receive an excellent education in an AISD school. We also cannot improve academics without the people who make learning happen every day. Teachers need to feel supported, valued, and	Staff well-being and student outcomes have to come first. Staff need competitive pay, manageable workloads, strong campus leadership, and the support to do their jobs well. Students need strong literacy instruction, effective special education, safe and well-supported campuses, and timely interventions. Enrollment matters greatly. We also need to rebuild trust with staff and families and work together to make AISD a place where people want to work, learn, and send their children.	My top priority if elected will be improving student outcomes while putting AISD on a financially sustainable path. I believe those two things are connected. We cannot have a strong school district if students aren't learning, and we cannot sustain a school system that isn't financially responsible. As a trustee, I would focus on three things: academic growth, fiscal accountability, and rebuilding community trust.

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trusted, and students need to feel engaged, challenged, and connected to their schools. We need to listen to both groups and make sure they have a meaningful voice in how we improve our schools. That means strong academics, a financially sustainable district, and effective schools are not separate priorities. They all depend on having families who choose AISD, students who want to be here, and teachers who want to stay. I would want to prioritize rebuilding that confidence—by supporting teachers, improving instructional quality, listening to students and families, and making thoughtful decisions about how we use our resources. If we create schools where people want to be, the academic and financial health of the district becomes much stronger.		
AISD, like many districts, is dealing with a budget deficit and has had to make many cuts in an effort to balance the budget. What is your philosophy on how to balance the budget in AISD?		
My son, a current sophomore, has been texting me each day with photos or phrases labeled “evidence of budget cuts!” He’s mentioned his teachers talking about having to teach another class, a dual-credit option his sister benefited from disappearing, and changes to his CTE pathway. I know those losses are small compared with what some students are experiencing as they start this year at new schools, sometimes with very little notice. But his texts have made something very clear to me: we are at the point where students are directly feeling the effects of our budget decisions. My most important priority in balancing the budget would be to minimize that direct impact on students. I know that is much easier said than done, especially after the significant cuts AISD has already made. But I believe our budget has to start with a clear set of priorities: protecting the classroom, supporting teachers, and making sure	Protect the classroom first. Before cutting teachers, paraprofessionals, or student services, I want AISD to take a hard look at central administration, contracts, consultants, duplication, and programs that aren’t producing results. Every dollar should have a purpose, and taxpayers and families deserve to know what they’re getting for it. We cannot cut our way to better outcomes while protecting spending that doesn’t directly benefit students.	AISD has faced major budget challenges and enrollment pressures. Voters want assurance that money reaches classrooms. I will do the following when elected: Protect classroom funding first. Conduct efficiency reviews. Increase transparency on spending. Prioritize teacher retention.

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students have access to the programs and opportunities they need to be successful. At the same time, we have to be strategic about how we spend. We cannot keep cutting our way out of a structural budget problem. Every program, position, contract, and facility decision should be evaluated based on its impact on students and on whether it is sustainable over time. I would also push for a stronger multi-year budgeting process, so that we are looking not just at the immediate savings from a decision, but at what that decision will cost or save us over several years. I know some of this analysis already happens, but I think the community should be able to see more clearly how those long-term considerations shape our decisions. We also have to address the revenue side of the equation. We need to make AISD a district where families want to stay and where students and teachers want to be. Enrollment and attendance matter to our financial health, and strong schools are essential to rebuilding that confidence. And we need to continue advocating at the state level for changes to school funding, including per-student funding and the recapture system. AISD has a responsibility to make good decisions with the resources it has, but the district did not create the state's school funding structure on its own. We have a responsibility to help our community understand how school funding actually works. If we want Austin to advocate effectively for its schools, people need to understand where our money comes from, where it goes, and what decisions are within AISD's control and what decisions are made at the state level.		
To what do you attribute the decline in enrollment in AISD? What ideas do you have for increasing enrollment?		
I think there are several reasons for AISD's enrollment decline, and not all of them are within the district's control. Austin has become	There isn't one reason. Families have more choices, some are leaving Austin, and some have lost confidence in AISD. We need to make our	At the same time, AISD has to confront declining enrollment and significant budget challenges. I would push for a long-term financial plan that aligns

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increasingly expensive for families, birth rates have declined, and we are seeing smaller student cohorts coming through our schools. At the same time, families have more choices, including charter and private schools, and some families are choosing to live outside the district. The current climate also makes some families feel unsafe sending their children to school. We need to be asking why some families who could choose AISD are choosing something else? I can answer based on what I know, but I would also want to keep talking to families who have not chosen AISD to see what we learn directly from the source. We need to listen to families who have left AISD and understand what drove their decisions, rather than assuming we already know the answer. For me, increasing enrollment starts with making AISD a district where families want to stay and where new families want to enroll. As I've said in my other answers, that means prioritizing strong academics, excellent teachers, meaningful academic and extracurricular opportunities, and schools where students feel known and supported. I would also want AISD to do a much better job of telling our story. We have excellent schools, dedicated teachers, and programs that give students opportunities they may not find elsewhere. Our recent academic results show real improvement, with the number of A- and B-rated campuses increasing from 43 in 2024 to 61 in 2026. We need to make sure families know about that progress and, more importantly, that they can see and experience it in their neighborhood schools. At the same time, we need to be realistic about the demographic trends. We cannot build a budget assuming that enrollment will return to the levels we had 10 or 20 years ago. AISD's own projections show continued population decline through 2029. We need to plan responsibly for that reality while	schools places families want to choose. That means strong academics, excellent teachers, effective special education, safe and welcoming campuses, and clear communication about what each school offers. The best enrollment strategy is to build schools families trust.	staffing, facilities and programs with actual enrollment while protecting the classroom and the students who need the most support. Every major expenditure should have a clear purpose and measurable value.

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doing everything we can to retain the students we have and attract families who are looking for a public school.		
How will you address the needs of all students while still delivering a consistent academic framework at all schools?		
I don't think consistency and meeting individual student needs have to be competing goals. We need consistency in what every AISD student is guaranteed, but flexibility in how we get each student there. This is an area where I think I bring a particularly valuable perspective to the board. I have spent 26 years in education, including 16 years in the classroom, and for the last 10 years I have worked with teachers to develop exactly these kinds of skills. I know from experience that you have to teach the students you actually have—not the students you wish you had, or the students you taught last year. That doesn't mean lowering expectations. Some of the most important work a teacher does is figuring out what students need in order to reach a high standard. I know what it looks like to hold students to ambitious expectations while also providing the scaffolding, differentiation, and support they need to get there. I also know how much knowledge, planning, and time that requires from teachers. That is why I support a clear districtwide academic framework that establishes high expectations, a strong and coherent curriculum, effective instructional practices, and a common understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like. Every student should have access to a strong academic experience regardless of which AISD campus they attend. But consistency should not mean sameness. Our students have different strengths, needs, interests, and starting points. A student who is learning English, a student who needs additional support in reading, a student who is ready for advanced	Consistency should mean every student has access to high-quality instruction and the same high expectations—not that every campus has to operate exactly the same way. Students have different needs. We need a strong academic framework, evidence-based instruction, and clear expectations while allowing campuses to use appropriate supports and approaches for their students and communities.	I believe consistency and personalization should go hand in hand. Every school should have a clear, shared academic framework—high expectations, aligned standards, strong curriculum, and common measures of student progress. That gives every student access to the same core opportunities and ensures that a student's experience doesn't depend on which school they attend. At the same time, schools and teachers need the flexibility to respond to the students in front of them. We should use data and regular progress monitoring to identify learning gaps early, provide targeted interventions, and offer enrichment for students who are ready to go further. We also need to recognize differences in students' backgrounds, learning styles, and individual circumstances. The goal isn't to make every classroom identical. It's to make sure every student receives the same commitment to academic excellence while giving educators the tools and flexibility to meet individual needs. In that way, consistency becomes a foundation for equity—not a barrier to it.

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coursework, and a student receiving special education services may all need different approaches to reach the same high expectations. I see our job at the district level is to support teachers with the tools and support to do that work well: strong curriculum and instructional resources, useful professional learning, time to collaborate, and access to the information they need to understand their students. We should use student achievement and growth data to identify where additional support is needed, rather than expecting every campus or teacher to solve the same problem in exactly the same way. And we need to be careful not to confuse consistency with compliance. The goal isn't to tell teachers exactly what to say or do every minute of every class. The goal is to make sure that a student doesn't receive a fundamentally different quality of education simply because of the campus they attend. I want AISD to have a common academic foundation with room for professional judgment and student needs. We should be able to say what every AISD student is guaranteed—and then trust, support, and invest in the teachers who know how to get their group of students there.		
How has history shaped the public education landscape for communities of color here in Austin, and how can AISD better support those communities today?		
Austin's public schools can't really be separated from Austin's history. I think it is important to understand how we got here before we can figure out where we want to go. This is actually something I have taught my own students. I used the PBS series Austin Revealed to help students explore Austin's history and the ways that housing, segregation, schools, and race have shaped our city. One thing that really stands out is how visible that history still is. The racial divisions	Austin's history of segregation and unequal access to education still matters. We can't address today's disparities without understanding how we got here. AISD should listen directly to the communities affected, invest in schools based on student need, be transparent about outcomes and resources, and make sure students have access to strong teachers, rigorous instruction, and the support they need to succeed.	History has had a profound impact on public education in Austin, particularly for Black and Latino communities. Austin's history of segregation, including the legacy of the L.C. Anderson High School community and the effects of school desegregation and subsequent demographic changes, has shaped where students live, which schools they attend, and the opportunities available to them. We have to acknowledge that today's disparities didn't happen by accident—they are connected to decisions made over generations

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created through redlining and other discriminatory housing policies helped shape the crescent of communities that stretches along and east of I35, and those patterns of where people could live had a direct impact on where children went to school. Austin's history with school desegregation is complicated, too. AISD was slow to desegregate and eventually used court-ordered busing. For many Black families, integration also meant losing important community institutions, including L.C. Anderson High School, Austin's only Black public high school. When AISD eventually returned to neighborhood schools, the housing patterns created by decades of segregation meant that many of those schools became segregated again in different ways. These patterns still linger. I think we need to know this history because it helps explain why some communities may not automatically trust AISD. Those feelings didn't come from nowhere. Decisions made decades ago affected people's neighborhoods, schools, and opportunities, and some of those effects are still with us. So today, we need to listen. Families and communities that have historically been most affected by district decisions need to be involved before decisions are made—not brought in after the fact. That is especially important when we are talking about school closures, boundaries, programs, facilities, or how resources are distributed.		about housing, school boundaries, resources, and access. AISD can better support communities of color by being honest about that history while focusing on what we can do now. That means ensuring equitable access to rigorous academics, experienced teachers, advanced coursework, arts and extracurricular opportunities, and the supports students need to succeed. It also means listening directly to families and community leaders rather than assuming we know what communities need. Most importantly, equity has to be measurable. We should regularly examine achievement, discipline, enrollment in advanced programs, attendance, graduation, and resource allocation by student population and campus—and act when we see persistent disparities. Our goal should not simply be to close gaps on a spreadsheet. It should be to build schools where every family feels respected, every student sees themselves reflected in their education, and race or ZIP code does not determine the quality of opportunity a child receives.
What is your view on social studies instruction in AISD?		
I think social studies is a really important part of a good education, and I worry that it can sometimes get pushed aside when schools are focused on reading, math, and other tested subjects. I don't think we can afford to do that. Students need to understand how the world they live in came to be, how our government works, and how they can	Students need to understand history, civics, government, and how our community and country developed. Social studies should be rigorous, age-appropriate, and grounded in facts and evidence. Students should be able to learn about difficult parts of our history, ask questions, consider different perspectives, and develop the	My view is that social studies should be a core part of a strong AISD education, not simply a subject students need to get through. It should help students understand history, government, economics, geography, and civics while also developing the ability to evaluate evidence, recognize different perspectives, and think critically.

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participate in their communities. As someone who teaches future social studies teachers, this is especially important to me. Good social studies is about more than memorizing dates and names. Students need that historical knowledge, but they also need to learn how to ask questions, look at evidence, consider different perspectives, and figure out what they believe. Those are important skills for school, but they're also important for understanding the world around them and being part of a community. Texas has recently changed the social studies TEKS, and I expect there will be some things about those changes that our Austin community will have strong opinions about if they do indeed go into effect in 2030 as proposed. AISD has to follow the state standards, but we should still make sure teachers have the support and resources to teach history thoughtfully and accurately. As a board member, I would want to make sure social studies doesn't get pushed to the side, and that AISD teachers have the resources and support they need to give students a strong, thoughtful education in history, government, and their communities.	critical-thinking skills they need to participate in our democracy.	I would want AISD to maintain a consistent, academically rigorous framework across all schools, while giving teachers room to make the material meaningful to their students. Students should learn both the broader history of the United States and Texas and the history and contributions of the diverse communities that make up Austin. Social studies should also prepare students to be informed citizens. That means teaching students how our government and institutions work, how to evaluate competing claims and sources, and how to participate constructively in civic life. It is important that classrooms remain places where students can ask difficult questions and engage with different viewpoints respectfully, rather than being told what they are supposed to think. Ultimately, I want AISD students to leave school with a strong understanding of our history, an appreciation for the complexity of that history, and the critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions about the future.
What can AISD do to retain high-qualified teachers?		
I think retaining great teachers starts with making teaching a career that people can realistically build a life around. That means competitive pay, but it also means manageable workloads, meaningful support, opportunities to grow, and feeling like your experience and expertise are valued. I bring a very personal perspective to this. I spent 16 years teaching high school English, including 11 years at Crockett, and for the last 10 years I have worked with teachers and future teachers. I know how rewarding teaching can be, but I also know	Pay matters. Teachers and paraprofessionals need competitive compensation, and paras in particular are essential to our schools and often overlooked. But retention is also about working conditions. Teachers need manageable workloads, strong campus leadership, meaningful professional development, and less bureaucracy. People are more likely to stay when they feel respected, supported, and able to focus on students.	Teacher retention starts with making sure excellent teachers feel valued, supported, and able to do the job they entered education to do. Compensation matters, but retention is about more than salary. First, AISD needs to remain competitive on pay and benefits, particularly for teachers in high-need areas and those with specialized expertise. We should also look at meaningful retention incentives for experienced and highly effective teachers, rather than focusing only on recruitment.

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how hard it is. If we want great teachers to stay, we have to make sure the job is sustainable. I would start with the obvious things: competitive compensation, strong mentoring and support for new teachers, reasonable workloads, and making sure teachers feel appreciated and listened to. I would pay particular attention to those first few years, when teachers are most likely to leave. AISD has mentoring programs already, and I would want to make sure that support is consistent, meaningful, and helps teachers navigate the challenges of those early years. Part of that means being thoughtful about where we place beginning teachers and what we ask them to take on. A new teacher shouldn't automatically get the most challenging campus, the most demanding course load, or four different preps simply because that's where we have an opening. We need to think about how we can support teachers as they develop their skills rather than setting them up to burn out. That doesn't mean new teachers can't work in challenging schools—it means they shouldn't be asked to do it without the support and working conditions they need. I also see a lot of opportunity to build stronger connections between AISD and local teacher preparation programs. We have some good partnerships already, but I think we could be much more intentional about creating a pipeline, especially at the secondary level. If a student teacher has a great experience in an AISD classroom, develops a relationship with an excellent cooperating teacher, and can see a future for themselves in AISD, we have already started building that connection. We should be recruiting teachers while they are learning to become teachers, not waiting until they are looking for a job. And we can't forget experienced teachers. We should create opportunities for excellent teachers to grow, mentor others, and have a meaningful voice		Second, we need to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens. Teachers should have more time to plan, collaborate with colleagues, work with students, and improve instruction—and less time dealing with paperwork and initiatives that don't directly benefit students. Third, strong school leadership is critical. Teachers are much more likely to stay when principals communicate clearly, support them when challenges arise, provide meaningful professional development, and create a culture of respect and collaboration. Finally, AISD should listen to teachers systematically. Regular feedback should lead to visible action, so educators know their experience matters. If we want to retain our best teachers, we need to create schools where talented educators can build a career—not simply survive another school year. That means competitive compensation, strong leadership, professional autonomy, manageable workloads, and a genuine culture of respect.

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in instructional decisions without having to leave the classroom. There are many opportunities to grow teacher leaders and I know we have many amazing AISD teachers waiting for those opportunities to arise.		
What role should the community play in supporting the education of children?		
I really believe it takes a village to educate a child. I grew up in schools, with teachers and secretaries, custodians and administrators as my extended family. And over the years, as I've built my own teaching journey, I've realized that it takes a village to raise a teacher, too. I've been lucky to live and learn in a village that was always centered around school. I think we need to create that kind of village for every child in Austin. Schools obviously have a central role, but teachers and schools can't do this work alone. Families, neighbors, businesses, nonprofits, universities, and community organizations all have something to contribute. Sometimes that might be a mentor or an internship. Sometimes it might be helping a family connect with resources they need. Sometimes it's simply showing up for a school and letting students know that their community cares about them and their education. I think about the many ways PTAs already do this work. They support teachers in very practical ways. They create opportunities for families and teachers to come together and build a sense of community. And they advocate—not just for their individual schools, but for students and public education more broadly. That advocacy role is especially important. We need parents and community members who are willing to understand how our schools work, ask hard questions, and speak up for what students and teachers need.	Education works best when schools and communities work together. Parents should have a voice, but so should students, teachers, staff, businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations. The district shouldn't just ask for input after a decision has already been made. Community members should be genuine partners in identifying problems, developing solutions, and holding AISD accountable.	Finally, I want families, teachers, staff and taxpayers to have confidence that their voices are being heard and that their elected trustees are accountable to them. My goal is simple: stronger schools, responsible finances, and a district that earns the confidence of the Austin community. I don't want AISD merely to avoid a state takeover or survive another budget cycle. I want us to build a school district that performs well enough, manages its resources responsibly enough, and listens closely enough that Austin families can be proud of their public schools again.

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I also think we should be thoughtful about making sure community support isn't dependent on which school has the most active PTA or the most resources. Every child deserves to benefit from the incredible people and organizations in our city. At its best, public education really is a community effort. We are not just educating children for their own futures—we are educating the people who will shape the future of Austin. I think all of us have a stake in making sure they have the opportunity to thrive.		