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Candidate for HPISD Trustee, Place 5, 2022 Election

Some HPISD board members, educators, and parents have expressed concerns with the district's approach to literacy. What is your take on this issue?

There is a growing body of evidence that balanced literacy strategies and Lucy Calkins' Units of Study are not equipping students to be proficient readers and writers. I have engaged with many parents who are concerned their students aren't getting the explicit instruction they need in phonics, spelling, and grammar. Others are disappointed in the lack of high-quality reading selections.

I applaud the efforts of concerned parents and groups like the HP Literacy Coalition to engage our District in respectful and fact-based dialogue about curriculum. And the recent announcement by the Board's Education Services Subcommittee to phase out Lucy Calkins' Units of Study is a great first step! I was glad to learn that the District will be thorough in choosing materials aligned with the Science of Reading and will engage a consultant experienced in shepherding this important shift in instruction. These are the first steps, but this will be an iterative process. If elected to the Board of Trustees, I commit to paying close attention as new materials are selected to ensure they properly align with research-based best practices and community expectations.

HB 3, passed in 2019, contains several reading elements (ie Texas Reading Academies investment in mandatory teacher training in the Science of Reading and the new requirement for districts to adopt a systematic phonics program). What do you believe the intent is behind the reading initiatives in this law?

According to Houston ISD's Reading Academies' website, the purpose of HB3's framework is "to increase teachers' and principals' knowledge and implementation of evidence-based practices to positively impact student literacy achievement." [www.houstonisd.org] For more than 30 years, the prevailing framework for literacy instruction has been balanced literacy—whole language instruction with phonics sprinkled in here and there. But the explosion of published research in the last ten years identifies explicit phonics instruction as the best way to ensure all students have the tools to be successful readers. The provisions in HB3 are designed to give parameters, training opportunities and accountability for literacy instruction in Texas. HB3:

- Requires the use of a phonics curriculum that uses systematic direct instruction
- Requires Teacher Certification to include a science of teaching reading exam
- Requires all K-3 teachers to complete Reading Academies training

How does HPISD’s Balanced Literacy Framework, including instructional materials such as Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell, align with the reading initiatives in House Bill 3 — and the significant body of research around the Science of Reading?

The short answer is that it doesn’t because it currently lacks well-defined scope and sequence for explicit phonics, spelling, vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction. Thankfully, as of March 31, 2022, HPISD has announced a phasing out of Lucy Calkins’ Units of Study and a systematic transition to materials and teacher training in line with HB3 Reading Academies requirements.

Texas law says district Board of Trustees “shall provide oversight regarding student academic achievement and strategic leadership for maximizing student performance.” (TEC 11.1515) Can you describe what you think this should look like for a Trustee in the current conversation around literacy?

I think the most recent advocacy and engagement of our Trustees on the Educational Services Subcommittee is a great example of what this should look like. Our Trustees listened to the evidence provided by concerned parents and qualified experts and engaged in systematic, purposeful due diligence with our Administration to understand the current landscape, how it is serving our students and where we needed to consider changes to comply with HB3’s requirements and provide the best possible educational experience for our students. While this process might have taken longer than some would hope, our Trustees and District personnel have worked hard to arrive at a path forward that aims to support our beloved classroom teachers while taking an honest and constructive inventory of our instructional practices.

As a Trustee, I would pursue a thorough review of instructional materials proposed for adoption to ensure they are aligned with the stated HB3 guidelines and our district’s values. I will work with the Administration to set goals and monitor metrics that provide a complete picture of students’ performance. And I will hold the District accountable for its renewed pledge to seek regular feedback from teachers, students, and parents regarding areas of both progress and needed improvement.