

# HP LITERACY COALITION

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**Incumbent HPISD Trustee, Place 4, 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?***

On March 31, HPISD's ELA subcommittee announced the results of its months-long evaluation of literacy instruction methods and materials. It recommended that HPISD remove Lucy Calkins Units of Study and align literacy instruction with the Science of Reading.

I shared the concerns raised by many in our community, and I applaud the diligence with which the subcommittee and administration researched, investigated, and now have addressed those concerns. I plan to vote to approve the recommendation that the subcommittee presented earlier this week, and I expect for Lucy Calkins to be phased out and replaced.

Although I understand that many parents were frustrated because the process took a long time, I am reassured that the deliberate and thoughtful process worked. This is a significant change, and no school district should make such changes without thorough reflection and study. I am confident that the result of the process will be substantial change to provide better literacy instruction for all HPISD students.

While the subcommittee was performing its independent evaluation for many months, I spoke and met multiple times with leaders of the Literacy Coalition and other concerned parents and community members. I participated in dozens of hours of phone conversations with concerned parents and community members, attended multiple discussion sessions and presentations, watched video presentations, and studied hundreds of pages of correspondence, reports, articles, and other information prepared and shared by experts, concerned parents, and educators. I cannot commend the Literacy Coalition enough for their thoughtfulness, respect, and collaborative approach.

During these conversations, I heard from the parents of many HPISD students who struggled with the district's balanced literacy approach, and also from many parents whose children have required private tutoring in attempts to accomplish success with basic reading skills. It became clear that under the balanced literacy approach and through workshop model, too many HPISD students were falling behind. The

research I received and read convincingly demonstrated that our district must deliver a structured approach to literacy, including code based, explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction in order to foster successful development of reading skills for the vast majority of students.

HPISD leadership has a process that works. And that process worked here. It started with appointment of a subcommittee to investigate the concerns and potential solutions. School Board President Tom Sharpe appointed Trustees Maryjane Bonfield, Stacy Kelly, and Bryce Benson as the three Trustees to serve on the subcommittee. (By law, the other three Trustees and I were prohibited from attending or participating in the subcommittee's meetings. Therefore, the four of us who were not members of the subcommittee could only learn about its progress when the subcommittee reported back to the board, periodically, during public board meetings.)

Throughout the subcommittee's evaluation of HPISD's approaches to literacy instruction, I consistently and continually assured the concerned parents with whom I spoke that I understood and shared their concerns and that I had confidence in the district's process for evaluating and improving literacy instruction.

I am extremely thankful to the many people who worked together to achieve this great result.

Although I worked behind the scenes communicating with community members and providing support, leadership, and oversight, I do not personally claim credit for the positive result of the ELA subcommittee's months-long evaluation of literacy instruction methods and materials. It would be disingenuous and insulting to the dedicated people who worked so hard to make this change for any political candidate to wrongly try to claim credit for their hard work, especially when the Literacy Coalition expressly disavowed any connection to any candidate or group.

- I am thankful for the leaders of the Literacy Coalition for all of their research, advocacy, and other hard work. I am also thankful that they remained cooperative and diplomatic throughout a long process of advocating for substantial change within our school district.
- I am thankful for the numerous parents and community members who enthusiastically shared their concerns and experiences with district leadership in a collaborative manner without ever trying to tear down our school district or our community.
- I am thankful for the 3 Trustees and 2 Administrators who served on the ELA subcommittee (and the numerous teachers, Principals, and other school

district staff) who spent hundreds of hours working on the task of determining whether to replace the district's balanced literacy framework.

All of these people are great examples of why HPISD has been, is, and will continue to be, the best public school district in the state – because our community members care so much about always improving our schools, and because they are committed to working in ways that unify, rather than divide, our community.

***HB 3, passed in 2019, contains several reading elements (i.e. 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?***

The legislature's intent behind the reading initiatives in House Bill 3 (2019) was to ensure that Texas public school teachers have a greater mastery of evidence-based classroom practices, and that teachers increasingly implement those practices to help students achieve greater levels of literacy. Personally, I believe this intent dovetails perfectly with HPISD's long tradition of academic excellence, and with the upcoming change, HPISD students will achieve greater levels of literacy.

***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 reading initiatives in House Bill 3, and the research around the Science of Reading, emphasize the need for instructional practices based on scientifically-based reading research, including direct and systematic teaching of foundational language skills; inclusion of rich and varied opportunities for students to build vocabulary, comprehension, and composition skills; and implementation of high-quality, evidence-based, content-rich curriculum aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

A balanced literacy framework falls short of the reading initiatives in House Bill 3 and research around the Science of Reading. That framework only provides indirect phonics instruction; uses leveled readers instead of decodable texts; de-emphasizes the use of code-based strategies for determining unknown words in favor of contextual methods (like three cueing); and relies on a substantial amount of independent reading to build vocabulary skills and reading fluency and comprehension.

As discussed above, Lucy Calkins is being phased out, and HPISD will be moving in the direction recommended by the ELA subcommittee.

***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?***

School Board Trustees take primary responsibility and accountability for the quality of education provided for all of the community’s public school students. They do so, under Texas law, by adopting educational goals and policies, hiring and overseeing a Superintendent who administers the goals and policies, and approving the school district’s annual budgets

Although I am a former classroom teacher, Texas law does not require that School Board Trustees be trained and experienced educators or school administrators. As a matter of best practice and common sense, Trustees cannot insert themselves into the day-to-day operations of the schools, which is the responsibility of the superintendent.

In exercising their “oversight” and “leadership” responsibilities, School Board Trustees must:

- establish performance goals for the district concerning academic performance indicators;
- ensure that the superintendent takes necessary action to meet performance goals and is accountable for achieving performance results; and
- ensure that improvement plans for the district and for each campus are developed, reviewed, and revised annually to improve the performance of all students.

The Board exercised its oversight and leadership responsibilities by conducting a formal review of HPISD literacy instruction methods and materials in response to both parental concerns and review of standardized test scores.

I am thankful for the hard work performed by the three Trustees and two administrators who served on the ELA subcommittee. I am also thankful for the hard work performed by other members of district leadership and staff – especially the principals and teachers. Together, they performed the lion’s share of the work by district representatives.

Ultimately, the School Board’s deliberate and thoughtful process worked and produced a great result, and I am thankful that HPISD will soon begin phasing-out Lucy Calkins.