

From: **Steve Dock** sdock99@gmail.com
Subject: AISD School Changes Proposal - Process
Date: September 28, 2019 at 3:02 PM
To: aratisingh2@gmail.com



Dear Trustee Singh;

I am writing to you today regarding the recent AISD Proposal for School Changes. This is the first of several messages which I will be sending to you on this topic. Each message will focus on one specific area which I hope will enable you to read and consider this information carefully.

However the action which I will be requesting will be consistent in each of my messages. That is for *the AISD Board of Trustees to unequivocally state that they will **defer** any decision on the proposed school changes until: necessary detailed information has been made available; the community has ample opportunity for authentic engagement; other school scenarios are considered; and the diversity and economic disadvantage of student populations at schools recommended for closure are considered in the school change decision making.*

While I'm sure all the members of the task force and administrators who worked with them acted in good faith to develop this proposal, I must strongly disagree with both the process that they used in the conclusions recommended.

There are many flaws that could be pointed out in the process however I'll mention just a few:

> AISD did not engage with any of the school communities that are being recommended for closure before the recommendations were released

> AISD has not provided clear and detailed information about the criteria and process used to select specific schools for closure. In fact AISD has stated the opposite - that general principles were used to guide the selections.

This calls into question the objectivity of these selections and furthers the perception that unconscious bias may have played a role in having 8 of the 12 schools selected to be closed located in the historically underserved East side of Austin.

> AISD has not provided any detailed information about how the school closures will affect potential over-enrollment that may result in the receiving schools, total cost savings by campus, specific future uses of the to-be-closed school properties, etc.

I look forward to your positive response to my request for postponing any action on the School Changes proposal until the actions listed above are completed.

Peace and love,

Stephen Dock
1803 E 40th St
Austin, TX 78722

=====

When the Power of Love
Overcomes the Love of Power
The World Will Know Peace

=====

Dear Trustee xxx;

I am writing to you today regarding the recent AISD Proposal for School Changes. This is the second of several messages which I will be sending to you on this topic. Each message will focus on one specific area which I hope will enable you to read and consider this information carefully.

However the action which I will be requesting will be consistent in each of my messages. That is for *the AISD Board of Trustees to unequivocally state that they will **defer** any decision on the proposed school changes until: necessary detailed information has been made available; the community has ample opportunity for authentic engagement; other school scenarios are considered; and the diversity and economic disadvantage of student populations at schools recommended for closure are considered in the school change decision making.*

While I'm sure all the members of the task force and administrators who worked with them acted in good faith to develop this proposal, I have substantial concerns in the area of AISD finances and their relevance to this proposal.

The **first** area of concern is the 2017 AISD Bond issue and whether AISD has faithfully acted to fulfill its commitments to the schools identified for closure. Or has the district administration inadvertently acted in a "Bait and Switch" manner with regard to using the voter approved funds.

Each of 12 schools proposed for closure has a page in the 2017 AISD Bond Issue book which was used extensively in the campaign to approve the \$1.1 billion bond package. Each page describes significant and substantial upgrades and or maintenance commitments for that school. While I only have direct knowledge of one of the targeted schools, I suspect that many of the 12 have **not** had the upgrades or maintenance performed as committed in the bond issue.

I believe this is a significant issue as it raises into question the credibility of AISD and therefore casts substantial doubt on the entire school changes process. A likely consequence of this challenge to AISD's credibility will be significant difficulty in approving any future bond issues.

If the Board of Trustees has access to information showing what bond funds have been expended since 2017 by school that may help to address this concern. If the data shows that the commitments to these schools have not been acted upon, then the AISD Board has a moral and possible legal responsibility to find out why.

The **second** area of concern is the changing Financial situation of AISD. My understanding is that the rationale for initiating the School Changes review process was based in large part upon a perceived structural deficit that AISD was facing along with declining student enrollment trends. The structural deficit is frequently given as a major reason for the urgency behind taking action on the task force recommendations.

However I question whether this urgency still applies in fall of 2019. The Texas state legislature has passed SB3 which will materially affect the total dollars available to the district. Also the total taxable property value available to AISD is moving on an opposite trend to enrollment and has been growing at 7 to 10% per year.

Has the AISD finance department provided the board of trustees with an updated five year revenue and expense forecast that takes into account SB3 and increasing tax rates? If not I strongly suggest that the board request this update as soon as possible.

While I can fully appreciate the desire of the board of trustees to support the administration and it's task forces and not second-guess the results of their well-intentioned work, this is a critical time for AISD and the residents of Austin. In this critical time the board of trustees must not be afraid to exercise leadership to ensure this difficult situation does not become a disastrous one.

I look forward to your positive response to my request for postponing any action on the School Changes proposal until the actions listed above are completed.

Peace and love,

Stephen Dock

1803 E 40th St Austin, TX 78722

Dear Trustee xxx;

I am writing to you today regarding the recent AISD Proposal for School Changes. This is the third of several messages which I will be sending to you on this topic. Each message will focus on one specific area which I hope will enable you to read and consider this information carefully.

However the action which I will be requesting will be consistent in each of my messages. That is for *the AISD Board of Trustees to unequivocally state that they will **defer** any decision on the proposed school changes until: necessary detailed information has been made available; the community has ample opportunity for authentic engagement; other school scenarios are considered; and the diversity and economic disadvantage of student populations at schools recommended for closure are considered in the school change decision making.*

This message focuses on the difference between “equitable access” versus justice. While “equitable access to 21st century learning environments” seems like a desirable goal, is this goal a reason to subject large numbers of students to uprooting from their neighborhood schools? Is the pursuit of this goal worth continuing the pattern of disregarding the needs and desires of the historically segregated and disenfranchised area of Austin located East of I-35? I think not.

When the task force process resulted in the recommendation to close 12 schools, the majority of which are located East of I-35, 9 of which are Economically Disadvantaged schools, and 11 are Majority Minority why didn't these facts raise a RED FLAG to the task force and the AISD Administration? The potential for harm to the students and communities who attend and support these majority minority and economically disadvantaged schools should have STOPPED these recommendations before they were made public. This evident lack sensitivity tends to invalidate the entire process and damages the credibility of AISD as a whole.

Furthermore of the 80,000 students in the district almost 11% will be either relocated or have large numbers of new students added to their current school. Over 50% of the elementary students in East Austin schools will be either relocated or have large numbers of new students added to their current school! (See bellow)

There is very little evidence that relocating underperforming students to high performing schools improves the relocated students performance. To the contrary the experiences of Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington DC have shown that significant problems result including; lost student records; less access to special needs programs; increased emotional issues among the relocated students; and further decreased attendance in the school district.

AI SD's proposes to relocate many elementary students to other schools some of which are 2 or more miles from the current school. AI SD offers busing as a solution to those affected students and parents. Should AI SD even consider adding the burden of taking a bus to and from elementary school for children in K to 3 grades? Instead of being walked to school by their parents and met at the end of the day by a familiar face, we expect these kids to be at a specified location at a specified time and spend significant amounts of their day in non-air-conditioned vehicles without safety belts!

AI SD must also consider the effect of school closure on the local communities. Most of these schools have a long history and are keystone community institutions. Closing neighborhood schools disrupts and further destabilizes communities that are already burdened with other forms of instability.

Now let's address the issue of old buildings which need substantial maintenance and therefore cost more to operate. Most of the schools recommended for closing have a substantial list of deferred maintenance issues. Many of these maintenance issues were to be addressed by the 2017 AI SD bond issue. However, almost none of these project have been initiated with AI SD's focus instead on building new schools. The Task Force now cites the poor condition of many of the selected campuses as one of the main reasons for their closure! Is this not the classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy!

In fact in recent meeting with parents of the schools to be closed, AI SD has justified not fixing air-conditioning and other in school maintenance needs by citing the imminent closing of the schools. This type of neglect is another example of the level of AI SD's insensitivity. These schools will be operating for another 2-4 years and JUSTICE demands that the committed repairs be made for the sake of the students who will continue to attend.

Several of the schools selected for closure show strong academic programs at

or above the average of the district as a whole. Some of these schools also have the kind of racial and economic diversity that the district is supposedly striving for. Presumably they made the closure list because of facilities problems. We know how to fix maintenance and building issues— it just takes money and time. We do **not** know how to create or transfer a diverse environment with a successful learning culture

Now to address the “structural deficit” that AISD faces which is also used to justify the School Changes. There is no doubt that the district population is decreasing; and that some schools are under utilized and inefficient. However, does a 2% deficit on a \$1.6 billion budget justify massive disruption of the entire school district? This is it a problem that should not require radical reorganization to solve.

In summary, it is not fair or just to expect the already disadvantaged areas of Austin to bear the brunt of “School Changes” no matter how well intentioned. Justice demands more than equal treatment. In the case of AISD it demands sacrifice and NOT by the historically underfunded and neglected areas of the City.

Finally I am compelled to note that AISD’S current course of action is likely to lead to several unintended but predictable consequences:

- dramatic loss of support for public schools throughout Austin
- skepticism which will hinder the success of AISD future bond issues
- increase in enrollment in Charter Schools
- increase in out migration to suburban neighborhood schools
- exacerbation of the divide between minority and lower income East Austin and and the better off areas of Austin
- possible court challenges which the Texas Legislature will use to promote their anti-public school agenda

While I can fully appreciate the desire of the board of trustees to support the administration and it's task forces and not second-guess the results of their well-intentioned work, this is a critical time for AISD and the residents of Austin. In this critical time the board of trustees must not be afraid to exercise leadership to ensure this difficult situation does not become a disastrous one. I look forward to your positive response to my request for postponing any action on the School Changes proposal until the actions listed above are

completed.

Peace and love,
Stephen Dock
1803 E 40th St Austin, TX 78722

Schools Recommended for Closure	2018-19 Enrollment	Receiving School	
			2018-19 Enrollment
Brooke Elementary	271	Govalle	369
Dawson Elementary	362	St Elmo	299
Joslin Elementary	272	Galindo	571
Maplewood Elementary	481	Cambell Elen	188
Metz Elementary	260	Schanez	269
Palm Elementary	445	Perez	601
Pease Elementary	231	Zavala	295
Pecan Springs School	232	Norman	148
Ridgetop Elementary	373	Riley	218
Sims Elementary	182	Norman	148
Total Elementary	3109		3106
Webb Middle School	683	Dobbie	561
Young Women's Leadership Academy	371	Ann Richards	856
	1054		1417
	Total District Enrollment		
	80,100		
	Total Students Affected		
	8686	10.84%	

List of All Elementary Schools in East Austin				
		Status	2018-19 Enrollment	
1	Andrews Elementary	Keep	353	
2	Blackshear Elementary	Keep	395	
3	Blanton Elementary	Keep	480	
4	Brooke Elementary	Close	271	
5	Campbell Elementary	Keep	188	
6	Govalle Elementary	Receive	369	
7	Harris Elementary	Keep	522	
8	Maplewood Elementary	Close	481	
9	Metz Elementary	Close	260	
10	Norman Elementary	Receive	148	
11	Oak Springs Elementary	Keep	255	
12	Ortega Elementary	Keep	238	
13	Pecan Springs School	Close	232	
14	Shanchez Elementary	Receive	269	
15	Sims Elementary	Close	182	
16	Zavala Elementary School	Receive	295	
	Total Enrollment All East Side Elementary Schools		4938	
	Total in Schools proposed to be closed		1426	
	% Enrollment in Schools proposed to be closed		29%	
	Total in Schools proposed to receive Students		1081	
	% Total East Side Students Affected by Proposal		51%	