

**KRISTI LARA**

**District 8**

**2013 (November) DKF Questionnaire Responses**



**2) Please describe your involvement in Dallas ISD or public education issues over the last five years.**

I have a Master's Degree in Educational Counseling with an emphasis in School Counseling and Community Agency. As an undergraduate, I worked closely with AmeriCorps as well as independently to help engage targeted neighborhoods and create after school programs that would be affective to children in need. As an academic advisor at both the secondary and post-secondary level, I worked to provide whole health and wellness counseling to both my students and their families. My work in DISD has been at the grass roots community level, working to empower communities to make their own choices that are imperative to the future of our children. My work as a community liaison, community organizer, and community advocate has been to help the families and communities in our schools and neighborhoods. It is my hope we can come to clear and concise budgeting decisions based on these concerns, while keeping in mind the needs of Dallas Community Wellness models and the ability of parents and students to thrive under those conditions.

**3) Please explain leadership positions and responsibilities that have prepared you for school board governance.**

I have had a vast array of educational and non-profit management experience. The budgetary decisions that need to be made are vital to our students and the communities in which they live. As a former accounts manager for the University of Maryland University College Asia, I reported directly to the comptroller of the business office. I helped manage the accounts receivable books and managed due to/due from reporting measures. As the former organizational office manager for Habitat for Humanity, I worked closely with the accounting office to prepare and allocate funding for an operating budget of over 1.2 million dollars. I will work to ensure tax payer dollars are spent wisely and effectively in regards to their child's educational and academic wellness. In the world of public finance, spreadsheets are our friend and we need to use them in to help ensure we are making responsible and appropriate decisions that will affect students, teachers, families, and the Dallas community as a whole.

As a certified participatory community development liaison and an active community organizer, I strive to work closely with families, students, and teachers regarding the issues at hand. The DISD budget and its allocation of funds, based on the needs of students and community wellness model, continues to be a pressing issue for me.

I have been president of my Graduate Student Program Counseling Students in Action (CIA), where I pushed for community and neighborhood outreach and curriculum development. I was made an honorary member of the Trumbull Neighborhood Association and a lead volunteer organizer for AmeriCorps afterschool programs. Recently, as Vice President of TAPA, I helped organize the 93<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary Suffrage Celebration March here in Dallas. Simply put, if I see work that needs to be done; I do it.

**4 & 5) Please identify three specific issues that you think should be addressed in order to improve the quality of education in Dallas ISD. If elected, what would you do to address each of these issues?**

a. Budget allocation and transparency: We must assure parents, teachers, and other community members that their money is being spent wisely. Using an 85% direct services model-15% overhead model we must strive to ensure tax dollars are spent wisely and that community stake holders are aware of situations that may come to fruition. We must work to help ensure that Dallas communities are aware of the State of Texas education allocation funds and how these decisions may affect our local Dallas communities.

b. Community trust and transparency: We must trust that community members have the answers to the problems they are facing. Sustained participatory community development and community outreach is imperative to community trust and transparency. As a trustee, I would work to help organize and engage

community members block by block to become empowered to help make the decisions that affect their children at each neighborhood school.

c. A culture of trust: DISD must always work to build a culture of trust. As community members, trustees must work to emphasize and organize teacher input. Teachers know the problems they are facing on the front lines and they also have the solutions. We must empower teachers to submit dialogue that would open up the lines of communication and encourage respectful and ready response models to incorporate innovative solutions.

d. Encourage Parental involvement: Parental involvement is a strong resource DISD must actively utilize in its quest for providing a quality education to students. This resource can be tapped by using traditional outreach techniques such as surveys, phone banking, block walking, and on the ground neighborhood outreach. Our commitment to the quality of education students receive is dependent on relationship DISD has with community members.

**6) Do you think Dallas ISD faces a teacher morale problem? If so, what do you think are the primary causes, and what would you do as a Trustee to improve morale?**

Trust Teachers. Teachers know the problems they are facing on the front lines and they also have many of the solutions. As trustees, we must work to empower teachers to submit dialogue that would open up the lines of communication between admin and staff and encourage respectful and ready response models to incorporate innovative solutions.

**7) Do you think Dallas ISD teachers and principals receive effective professional development?**

As a community educator, I understand that you can never stop learning. As professionals, we can never stop growing our base of knowledge. I believe creating integral networks of knowledge are imperative to the distinguishing qualities of any successful school system.

**8) Please rate the following Dallas ISD practices in terms of effectiveness.**

Teacher recruitment-somewhat effective

Principal recruitment-somewhat effective

Teacher professional development-somewhat effective

Principal professional development-not sure

Retention of high performing teachers-somewhat effective

Retention of high performing principals-not sure

**9) For any of the Dallas ISD practices rated "very weak", "weak" or "somewhat effective" in the question above, please explain what you will do as a Trustee to improve the practices.**

No response

**10) Parental and community involvement is extremely low, which prevents Dallas public schools from consistently generating high-achieving students.**

No response

**11) Dallas ISD's college-readiness failures (i.e., the district's SAT/ACT scores are in the bottom 25% of all U.S. test takers) are the school board's ultimate responsibility.**

No response

**12) Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds cannot consistently perform at high academic levels without first addressing poverty and other social issues.**

I disagree with the wording of this question. Statistically speaking, there will always be student outliers. There will always be students regardless of socio-economic status, access to social capital, or inherent academic ability who fall two standard deviations about the mean. It is important as educators that we work to realistically identify the mean and analyze organizational and educational goals based on the data presented.

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**13) Dallas ISD's superintendent has identified the following structural problems that negatively affect student achievement. Which three issues should be "top priorities" (please highlight exactly three top priorities)? Similarly, which issues are less important? Please label at least one issue as "not critical".**

Teacher morale is at a long term low.-top priority

Principal evaluations are routine and meaningless.-important but not a top priority

Principal evaluations are routine and meaningless.- important but not a top priority

The District's budget is not driven by instructional priorities.-top priority

Principals are paid the same regardless of performance. -important but not a top priority

Teacher evaluations are not accurate or rigorous.-top priority.

There is no standard or process for identifying high quality candidates for schools, classrooms, and central office positions. -important but not a top priority

Micromanaging staff is a pervasive problem and undercuts progress.-top priority

There is no accountability for poor customer service (where customers are parents and students). –top priority

We are losing strong candidates because the hiring process sometimes takes months. -important but not a top priority

**14) Analyzing information is a fundamental Trustee responsibility. What information will you rely on to have a full understanding of board issues, and what groups will you call on for perspective (e.g., staff, central office, constituents)?**

Centralizing community members as a source of information is imperative to the work of school board trustees. As an organizer, I would work to speak to parents, teachers, staff, and neighborhood coalitions to ensure transparent decision making is a priority. For data and stats, we will need to rely on the office of educational statistics as well as the office of accounting and budgeting.

**15) Please highlight three school district micromanaging pitfalls, and explain how you would avoid these pitfalls as a Trustee.**

I cannot emphasize enough, our need to trust our teachers. They are working professionals who work for the tax payer and are instrumental to the decision making process.

We must trust parents. Parental input is imperative and we must open up the lines of dialogue to ensure our schools are run efficiently and orderly.

Overstepping the bounds of the organizational decision making process can undermine community trust. Transparent community awareness and development models are imperative to the success of our schools and the students which attend them.

**16) What local organizations are you affiliated with, and how have they influenced your thinking regarding the needs of the district? Please give at least three examples.**

As a community organizer and community member, I work with several grassroots organizations. I cannot emphasize enough that the voices I will listen to most are the voices of the stake holders affected such as parents, students, teachers and community businesses and organizations. We will work directly to provide education and outreach about issues that affect schools, communities and neighborhoods as a whole.

**17) How do you plan to balance the needs of your individual voters with the needs of the whole district?**

Making sound organizational decisions about DISD is imperative to our work as public education providers. Our schools and are students are often centralized investments in many of our neighborhoods. As a volunteer and trustee, I will work to help educate students and teachers about the issues at hand and develop a

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collaborative decision making model with cooperation and compromise at the forefront of community development and school vitality.

**18) Who will you consult with when considering and making key decisions for the district?**

Parents, students and teachers will be at the forefront of a community empowerment model. Responsible and situational decisions will be consulted with the office of budget and affairs, superintendent recommendations, teachers, parents, and finally neighborhood and community allies.

I cannot emphasize enough that the voices I will listen to most are the voices of the stake holders affected such as parents, students, teachers and community businesses and organizations. We will work directly to provide education and outreach about issues that affect schools, communities and neighborhoods as a whole.

**19) What is the ideal relationship between the superintendent and the Board of Trustees?**

This relationship must be one of collaboration and mindfulness. The public trust is in the hands of board members. The DISD superintendant must respond to not only organizational concerns, but the concerns and well being of the general public as well.

**20) What district relationships need to be created or improved?**

We must work to improve community outreach, business collaboration efforts, and volunteer outreach initiatives with schools.

**21) What are three questions you would ask a candidate for Dallas ISD superintendent? What would you want to learn from those questions?**

Can I please review the raw data for DISD's budget allocation report preferably in an excel spreadsheet to include its due to/due from accounting logs?

How active are you in building community relationships with the parents and teachers of each school?

Do you see our DISD public school system in the realm of a "for profit" business model or as a non-profit tax allocation model?

If you could do anything, what would you do at the state level to help ensure the proper funding of our public education system and what would you change about our current funding and allocation model?

**22) How will you encourage parent and community collaboration with teachers, principals, and the superintendent?**

Canvassing, phone banking, neighborhood outreach, and surveying are imperative to the collaborative community participatory model.

**23) How do you plan to communicate and connect with all Dallas ISD stakeholders -- students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and the community?**

As a community school board trustee, I will work to go directly to the people of our communities using Facebook, twitter and blog sites. Ideally, we must canvass, phone bank, and provide neighborhood outreach as well as survey parents, teachers and administrators on a continuous basis. These elements are imperative not only during campaigns and elections, but they are imperative in creating a culture of trust and democratic organizational leadership. Outreach elements are imperative to the collaborative community and to the school participatory model