



August 24, 2016

Dear City of Austin Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission Members:

First and foremost, many thanks to each of you for your ongoing volunteer efforts, passion, leadership and commitment to our Austin Latino community! Your hard work and dedication continues to make a significant impact on improving our quality of life in Austin.

It is an honor and privilege serving as Vice President of the Austin ISD Board of Trustees and advocating for our nearly 84,000 students and 130 AISD campuses across our City. As you know over 75% of our student population are students of color and over 60% are economically disadvantaged students qualifying for free and/or reduced meals. Latinos represent nearly 60% of our total student population, nearly 30% are English-Language Learners, we serve student refugees from 42 countries, we have 100 languages spoken in our schools and unfortunately, we continue to see an increase in the total number of homeless students we serve, now nearly 2,700 students.

Each of us knows from the results of decades of educational research that socioeconomic status; race and ethnicity are associated with divergences in educational achievement outcomes. And it is a fair assumption that in a city that is racially and ethnically stratified and that harbors one of the most extreme levels of economic isolation of our country's major urban areas, inequities in education are a distinct possibility. I also believe that these issues can undermine the academic and cross-cultural learning that supports a civically and economically vibrant city. These are important matters that those of us responsible for the education of our children must be prepared to face. And important matters that the City of Austin must be prepared to face.

I also firmly believe that educational equity for our district and city means ensuring that every student and school has the resources needed to assure that all students succeed to their maximum potential, regardless of family income, race, ethnicity, special needs and/or geographic location.

An additional challenge is that AISD's enrollment continues to decline. In fact, we lose on average about 1,000 students per year and have done so now for the last four-year. According to AISD's and the City's demographers affordability is the number one variable. Our families can no longer afford to live in Austin.

In addition to serving on the AISD Board of Trustees, I serve along side Council Member Delia Garza on the City's Regional Affordability Committee. The Regional Affordability Committee was created by Council Member Garza as an expanded opportunity for transparency, public input, and collaboration between taxing jurisdictions and local leaders to improve the manner in which we serve the Austin community.



Well I believe, that children and our economically disadvantaged families are among our most vulnerable Austinites and they deserve our support to ensure that every family, especially our children has access to a quality of life.

Most recently, our Board has continued dialogue with the City about ongoing support and funding for our Parent Support Specialists and Prime Time after school programming. Ongoing funding from the City will ensure that Parent Support Specialists (PSSs) will maintain fulltime presence at 60 AISD campuses the majority of which are located in low-income communities and communities of color. Our Parent Support Specialist play a critical role in stabilizing the home situation of our students, so that parents, single-parents, grandparents, and/or legal guardians can then focus on the educational success of their children.

PSSs connect families with resources, make schools and the system family friendly and identify family needs to support parents. In the Spring of 2015 our 60 PSSs, conducted nearly 15,000 referrals, meetings, workshops, or one-on-one support for families regarding: educating families about City Services, crisis interventions, family support and health and wellness checks.

In addition, ongoing funding from the City for the PrimeTime Program, the largest free afterschool program in the city of Austin currently located at 25 elementary and middle school campuses throughout the City will ensure that the doors of our schools remain open beyond the school day so that children have access to learning opportunities and resources. And that no doors are locked for children in our neighborhoods.

To quote my esteemed colleague Trustee Gina Hinojosa: "AISD cannot keep shouldering the brunt of the cost of the social services that our families need simply because those services are provided on our campuses. We once had the luxury of paying for these non-educational services. Because of the broken and outdated state finance system, we now do so to the financial detriment of the majority of Austin taxpayers."

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016 our AISD Board approved the FY16-17 budget of \$1.1 billion. However, as most of us painfully know, AISD is subject to Chapter 41 recapture payments to the State of Texas. This year, we will lose over \$406 million, leaving AISD with less than \$760 million. Of the \$760 million, 87% pays for the salaries of the over 12,000 AISD employees, leaving 13% to educate 84,000 students at 130 campuses.

Our total request to the City of Austin for the PSSs and PrimeTime Program totals over \$2.2 million. It appears that our budget request has gained enough traction and support from the Austin City Council to carry us through for an additional year. But as we know, nothing is certain until the Council formally adopts the 16-17 FY budget. However our funding needs and more importantly, the needs of our community will require future investments and coordination among all of our governmental entities, i.e. AISD, the City and Travis County.



We must put in place a coordinated effort to prioritize the educational needs of our students and community. This need has been documented repeatedly over the decades, but most recently in the 2005 Task Force on Education and the Quality of Life in Austin for Hispanic Students and in the 2007 City of Austin Quality of Life Initiative Report.

I firmly believe this requires a position (Education Coordinator) and or an Education office to ensure accurate documentation of the continuum of services currently being provided by all governmental entities and local non-profits/social service organizations; assess any potential duplication of services; and most importantly, that this position or office assume the responsibility for developing and prioritizing the needs of our community to present to our Joint City, County and AISD Subcommittee and each of our respective governing bodies.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Paul M. Saldaña".

Paul M. Saldaña, Vice President, Trustee District 6  
AISD Board of Trustees