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Place 6 RRISD School Board Trustee Candidate Forum hosted by Round Rock ISD Council of PTAs

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Good evening. and welcome to the Round Rock ISD Council of PTAs school board trustee candidate forum for place 6. I am Snehal Phirke the president of Round Rock ISD Council of PTAs a non-commercial non-sectarian nonpartisan Association that does not endorse any candidate or political party. The Round Rock ISD Council of PTA is aware of alleged endorsements by individual PTA leader leaders. The council PTA does not condone or support such endorsements implied or real. And those who have not followed the PTA protocol for elections have been instructed to cease and desist immediately. I will repeat, PTA does not endorse candidates. I would like to welcome our special guests. Texas PTA president Suzi Kennon and Texas PTA field service representative Choni Hajibashi from Texas PTA. Thank you for being here today. Our advocacy committee represents all learning communities. And the questions for these forums were sourced from our community. As you know PTA is the oldest and largest child advocacy organization in the nation. With the mission to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for our children. Please allow me to remind our participants that families including children will be watching this forum live as well as recorded. We expect everyone to conduct themselves in a professional manner, be respectful of our volunteers and to each other. If we notice a disruptive behavior a warning will be given and if it continues the behavior will be addressed. We hope everyone will be civil and cordial so that we can have an informative session today. With that I present to you our Council PTA Advocacy chair Heather Lawrence.

Hello. And thanks to the candidates, viewers and our Round Rock ISD Council volunteers for joining us today. I will also be the timekeeper for today's forum. Is my honor to introduce you to our moderator for these forums, Maria Medina Milner. Mrs. Milner is a notable and accomplished voter engagement and community outreach leader in central Texas. She leads and develops non-partisan comprehensive community voter outreach and partnership programs across all communities and school districts. She is also the third year founding leader of equity and inclusion at a leading voter engagement organization. As a Latinx cultural consultant Mrs Milner co-founded VOCES Tejas in 2017, presenting regularly on the topic of Latinx voter outreach to communities throughout the Texas Hill Country. She is a spokesperson and panelist on the topic of voter engagement and history at numerous events. She is also featured as a nonpartisan voter outreach leader on media programs throughout the Austin area including regular guest spots on Univision. We thank Mrs. Milner for lending her time and expertise to the candidate forums. And with that the candidates are in your good hands, Mrs. Milner.

Thank you to the Round Rock Council of PTAs for the invitation to moderate tonight's forum. I'd like to take this moment to remind our audience that when we discuss an office such as School District Board of Trustees that we're discussing down ballot voting. Down ballot voting is the process of voting for officers that are often attached to our major elections such as voting for president or Congress and Congressional office. I would like to introduce to all the candidates for place six, Russell Winston Collins, Tiffany Nicole Harrison, David G Schmidt and Christina Gándara. Candidates will each be

given a two minute candidate statement to make and in 90 second closing statement. You'll be given one minute to answer each question. Our timekeeper will hold up a yellow card at the 30 second mark and a red card when your time is over. Candidates are asked to refrain from any personal attacks on their opponents. In the event that a candidate loses their web access we ask that you quickly re-enter this forum. After reentering the webinar will be allowed to answer the questions that you missed, time permitting. We will ask the questions in ballot order and alternate who begins each time. Let's begin with the two-minute statement from Russell Winston Collins, Mr. Collins?
Mr. Collins if you can unmute yourself, please.

I am already revealing myself as a not terribly experienced politician at least, but thank you. Thank you very much to the PTA for this opportunity to speak to the group and to address some of the issues that are involved in this race. You are truly correct when you refer to down ballot as I do believe this particular race might be the last item on the last page of the last ballot. So it's important for people to stay focused and to be aware of time and stick to it. Hang in there, baby is what I'm telling the voters. Hang in there to the end. We have some important things to discuss in terms of things that the district is doing in terms of spending the way we're allocating our time and pressure and this is deeply important. I'm presenting myself as a dynamic true conservative, traditionalist voice in this matter. It's my intention to be fiscally extremely conservative, to disavow all extremist groups such as black lives matter organization, with its Marxist and anti-nuclear family matter and to re-emphasize to our students that we are a free country. That they are already limited only by the extent of their imagination, the amount of their education and in fact the amount that they're willing to put working toward those goals. And with that I'll yield back my time.

Now we will hear from Tiffany Nicole Harrison. Ms Harrison you have two minutes.

Wonderful. Thank you. Good evening everyone. My name is Tiffany Nicole Harrison. I have been an educator in Round Rock for nearly a decade. I teach career and technical education, marketing to be specific. So I am passionate about young people. I'm passionate about education and I'm running for school board because I care about public education and I care about our local community. I'm actually a product of Round Rock ISD schools and a proud two-time teacher of the year at Round Rock High School. I would like to be able to guarantee equity for schools across the district and for students across the district. Round Rock ISD is a great school district and I believe that every single student deserves a robust learning experience that prepares them to be successful in life. I've been concerned that we aren't serving all students well, and the good news is that I think that we have the capacity to do this. So I'm running on three big issues and platforms. I'm running on educational equity. And so a lot of times we see these high level presentations and I'd like to start seeing some disaggregated data so that we can know how we're serving our marginalized populations of students including black and brown students, english Learners, special education students, students receiving dyslexia services and more. I believe that we do have the financial and personnel resources to address this in Round Rock ISD. As a note this is a nonpartisan race, and I'd like to say that children are not red or blue and so we need to serve each and every child well. I'm also running on a platform of community engagement. I've attended nearly every board meeting for the last three and a half years. And while there what I've noted is that they're the same types of issues that come up every time in public comment, and I believe that we owe it to our community to be responsive and transparent and accountable and making sure that every student has what they need and every family is well supported in Round Rock ISD. I'm happy to be here tonight. I have an MBA from Baylor University and undergraduate degree from Baylor University, and I'm happy to be running for Place six. Thank you so much.

Thank you Ms Harrison. Next up to speak is candidate David G Smith. Mr. Schmidt, Would you like to give your opening statement?

Yes, thank you. Good evening. My name is David G Schmidt and I'm running for Place 6 in the special election to finish the unexpired term of trustee Stephen Math. I'd like to thank trustee Math for his service to the community and wish him well in his new position. I'm running to serve all the students in the district and I want to stress the word all. I have a background that's prepared me for this position. I was a member of the United States military for over 20 years. In the Air Force Integrity first, service before self, and excellent and all we do, was the motto. I bring these values to the board. I was a non-commissioned officer and I understand the responsibilities that come with leadership. I was a classroom teacher for more than 30 years. I always taught in remarkably diverse and pardon me in a remarkably diverse environment. I taught in multiple school districts and I always put my students first. I was their advocate. One of my accomplishments as a teacher was to bring a program from the electronics department to a local high school, teaching college level classes to high school students brought unique challenges. We didn't bring the students to the college. We brought the college to the students. I also spent time in a school district as a manager. I was part of the team that was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the schools at District level. I'm a dad with two girls in the district schools. I volunteer as a watchdog at Cactus Ranch. I volunteer as a Walsh dad. I attended my first board meeting in April of 2017 and I haven't missed many since. I was selected to serve in leadership on the 2018 citizen Bond committee. My role was to chair the subcommittee on elementary growth. I also participated in the Strategic plan refresh. I understand the time commitment required for a trustee. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Schmidt. And finally we have Christina Gándara. Ms Gándara the floor is yours. You have two minutes.

You know, I want to thank the Council of PTA for inviting me here. And I appreciate the fact that you want to give all the candidates the platform to express our thoughts and our ideas for a better Round Rock ISD. A little bit of background on me. I was raised by a single mom in the inner city of New Jersey. I was what you would call a high risk student, and yes, I did drop out of high school. I am where I am today with a successful career, college degree, wonderful husband and six beautiful kids because of my hard work and by taking advantage of the opportunities that were given to me. What our district needs now are people who are results oriented, data driven and a person that can see all sides and able to work together with subject matter experts in and out of Round Rock ISD and I am that person. My concentration is on the individual needs of all students and I want to focus on equitable issues that Round Rock ISD is not addressing. Well, like why do we still have students of all demographics not being able to read or write or do math on grade level? And how are we excelling all of our students, even our top performers and why is it that parents have to fight so desperately to get the needed services for their children and most importantly, why do we not have a dedicated CTE High School in our district? I want to focus on these issues because all of our main goal should be the success of our students, getting our students ready after graduation to enter the workforce and give back to our community, continue on to a college or a trade school or enter the military. Voters are interested in ensuring that all children are successful because when all of the students of Round Rock ISD are successful the community in a whole is successful. Now more than ever we need board members who are going to work together to ensure metrics are in place in order to hold people accountable and we

need to ensure we're being transparent with our parents and community members. I am that person. Thank you.

Thank you. And thank you all. Let's get on with the questions from the community. The first question is for all of our candidates, of course. What three areas does the district excel in and one of the top three priorities for improvement during this term? Ms Harrison we will start with you.

Wonderful. Thank you. You could say that I'm biased as a career in technical education teacher, but I believe that students do really well in Round Rock ISD with all that we have to offer. And we have a diverse set of opportunities that are expansive across the district. What I'd like to see improved there is more access to Career and Technical education in middle school and I would like to see increased enrollment in advanced math in middle school as well because that determines really the learning pathway for students in high school. So whether they're able to get into those stem or health science pathways. I also think we have very strong Fine Arts systems and we have incredible educators that are passionate and caring. I would like to see us focus on continuing to support our educators and making sure that we are a destination district for educators to come and work and feel supported in Round Rock ISD. That's how we're going to give the best support to our students. COVID-19 is a pressing issue right now and that's something that needs to be in the forefront and this next two-year term. Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt?

We excel at the school level that my first experience with Round Rock ISD was Cactus Ranch Elementary one of the finest elementary schools in the district. As a watchdog, I got to observe first hand the activities that went on that school, the specials program, music, choir. It was just it was an amazing experience. We need to provide a safe learning environment and I think that we're doing a pretty good job of that. The COVID has you know thrown all of us a loop. I currently have my two girls attending school. I think we'll just stop there. Thank you.

Thank you. How did you respond, Ms Gándara?

Yes, thank you. I think what we're doing great and we're doing awesome in our Fine Arts and our Sports and we are doing great in our academic programs that we give to our students like our dual credit, um classes that we provide to our students. What I think we do need a little bit more advancement on it is definitely vocational and CTE CTE program. We need to expand that, because once we expand that program, um, we have statistics have shown that we have more kids that are high risk that graduate. They're eight to ten times more likely to graduate when they're in a CTE or vocational program than their counterparts. Thank you.

Thank you. Mr. Collins, would you like to answer?

I think that the number one strength of our district is the professional educators we have working in the district. Our teaching staff are number two to no one. They're very dedicated, loving and extremely qualified. I think that our facilities are almost second to none in terms of we're doing new buildings. We're putting up things that directly address some of the needs of our schools. The third one I'd have to come up with something for number three, but but I think those two take up the primary things that we excel at the things that we need to work on, the COVID crisis has invaded every aspect of our lives and

most certainly those of our special education students. We've got to figure out a way to safely get those kids back into school, into classrooms, all of them so that their needs can be addressed directly. I think second of all we need to be moving money away from situations like equity offices and into more staff for instance special education teachers and others. I see that I've got the red card, so I will say finally we need to just continue on some of the courses that we're doing in terms of Vocational and Technical education. So if we've got to have a path for students aren't going to college

Mr. Collins. Thank you. The second question we will start with Mr. Schmidt. Share with us your thoughts about virtual learning including whether or not it should continue once the COVID crisis is resolved.

My thoughts on virtual learning I've got mixed emotions because I have two kids in district schools. Um, my youngest excels no matter where she's at. My older one would prefer in classroom teaching. I think it's a tremendous opportunity for a lot of the students in our in our in our district because it gives them access to everything all the time. The problem that we're running into was related to you know, technological issues that have been corrected. And as far as when we go back to school I can't, It's one-on-one, pardon, Its face to face with the teacher in the classroom is the best environment for our students.

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt. Ms Gandara?

Yes, thank you. I believe our virtual environment is good for some students. And those are the students that are excelling well at home. For the majority of students it is it's not going well. And that's what we need to address that inequities that are happening and children not receiving their necessary services according to their 504s or IEPs. So we need to address those issues before we can continue virtual learning throughout this year and on to next year and so forth. So, I believe our platform needs to be more robust. So it meets the needs of all students but more importantly we need to get these students back into the classroom where they can have one-on-one time with their teachers and they can get the much-needed services that they deserve and that they are entitled to

Thank you. How did you answer Ms Harrison?

Well, I have hands-on experience in this arena. Every student is different and I think virtual learning has been great for some students and not great for others. So I think that parents and students need choice. I would like to see the school district maintain virtual learning pass covid-19 because it has proven to be an excellent option. However teachers need time to plan and understand systems. When we ended school in the spring early and abruptly what we were doing was triage virtual learning and even as we returned now, there's been eight days of training for educators on a system that normally is implemented in an entire year. So if we are going to continue virtual learning, I would like to see more time for preparation and support for educators so that we can better support students and I would like to see a landscape analysis of the needs of parents and students so that we can make sure that we are providing adequately for in school and person schooling as well. And so that we can provide teachers that are doing one or the other and not both, because that is an exceptional challenge to actually teaching and learning.

Okay, if you could start us with the following question, Ms Gandara. Round Rock ISD is projected to lose up to 17 million dollars in state school funding this year due to the drop in District enrollment. What are the measures you suggest to offset this loss?

Well first I think we I think we need to figure out using the data that we have why are these students leaving and why are these parents not trusting and believing in Round Rock ISD? There are many reasons why parents have chose to leave, one for job, others may be because they don't like what is happening during Covid. They don't like the in person virtual learning that we're doing in the classrooms or they just don't like the virtual learning. Um, what I would like to see is I would like to see a community members and subject matter experts all come to the table and solve this issue. Because not keep allowing students to leave the district because that's going to hurt us in the long run. So we need to address what is happening and then we need to stop the bleeding and solve the problem.

Thank you. Mr. Collins. Would you like to reply?

I think that the one of the things you're saying in the in the loss of revenue and the loss of attendees is a direct reaction to the ad hoc nature of the way we've addressed the COVID crisis. We aren't giving it enough training time. We're putting things together on the run and quite frankly, I'm not sure that we dedicated enough time during the summer to address the concerns that we're rightfully expressed by the teachers in the spring. We need to move forward. We're going to have to do some belt tightening. There's going to have to be some cutting involved to meet the budget requirements that we have before us. But at the same time, the idea that we can we can somehow force these people back is Is not going to work. The fact is we've got a situation where this, you know, virtual learning is sort of like kissing your wife through a scarf. The idea is not bad, but it's quite unsatisfying. But we need to get forward, get these kids back in school, get people plugged in and the longer we take to do that the more people we're going to see flee the district or flee to Charter Schools. Thank you.

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

We are seeing the rise of Charters around Round Rock ISD. And the reason why is because they're able to better meet the needs of many students with diverse needs and they don't accept all students, right, they have choice in their students and the role of public education is to serve each and every student well. So we need to be responsive to the request of our community and we need to be less afraid of true feedback. One thing that I know is that teachers were never truly surveyed about the return to campus and return to learning what virtual learning could look like. And I think that that's such a huge demographic of our community in terms of Round Rock ISD that was not able to give their best shot to solving the problems that we're now facing. And with Community engagement that means listening to parents when they actually speak and making sure that all stakeholders have a seat at the table for planning purposes moving forward. If we can serve all students well, I don't think we'll see the loss of students or the loss of revenue that we're seeing now.

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt, surely you would like to respond?

Sure. The emphasis I think is first is to figure out why we've lost these students. The 17 million dollars is a lot of money, but the district is blessed to have an exceptionally large fund balance and so we can weather the storm. We can also advocate the legislature that will be in in session for some assistance. Several years ago the district did an efficiency study of our schools and our, I'm trying to Quick blank

here, our schools and our facilities and that study was never implemented. We also need to do is probably do an efficiency study of administration. If there's cuts that need to be made the students should be the last ones impacted. Thank you.

Thank you. Mr. Collins, Let's start this question with you. Please share with us your thoughts on gender equality and lgbtq+ issues in terms of equity at ISD.

As far as I'm concerned gender equality, I mean our entire culture is already embracing gender equality. I don't know of anyone who tells any young lady and I'm the father of a daughter, I have three sons and a daughter who all went through the Round Rock ISD all graduated now and and I don't know of anyone that's telling any young lady that she can't succeed because she's a girl. I don't know of anyone who's saying that you you can't do one thing or another because of your sex or your gender. I think that we've already, That we have achieve that, we were already in a place that we need to be in terms of urging people. We've got more female lawyers and more female Engineers more and more we're seeing those ladies take their place with us, those strong women doing what they can do to contribute to our society. In terms of lgbtq issues. I don't know that much. I mean, I've got some great gay friends. I've got some people that I know that are involved in that. I I'm really not certain. What we can offer those people in terms of maybe some additional counseling or anything, but I'm not sure that I completely agree that lgbtq is a normal part of our society

Mr. Collins. Thank you, that's your time. Mr. Schmidt, do you have thoughts on the issue?

Well as an instructor for more than 32 years, I've had to work with students From from every race color creed background and orientation. We need as a district to make sure that we are adequately meeting the needs of the students. Students need to be our number one Focus. It's that simple. They're You know, I've been to the board meeting so and I'm trying to remember all of the conversation that we're had that we had and I'm kind of drawing a blank on it right now. But as as a trustee, we have to set policy to make sure that we're not discriminating against those students.

Thank you. Would you like to respond, Ms Gandara?

Yes, thank you. I think we need to embrace all of our students doesn't matter your race color creed. All of our students should be welcome at the table and we should educate our educators and our community leaders on the differences and the diversity of students we have here in Round Rock ISD because we simply don't know what we don't know. So if we don't understand we need to be able to educate everybody on all of the differences.

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

I'm not a science teacher, but I'm gonna get a little science-y on us here. What we know is when kids feel safe their amygdala is at rest ,they're not experiencing amygdala hijack, which means that that triggers the fight, flight or the freeze response. So you might have a student that's in class and is present but because we have done something either intentionally or unintentionally to signify that their learning environment is not safe. They may be inhibited from learning. I feel that this is an experience for many lgbtqia+ students in our district. And I think that is important that we embrace students in their full Humanities so that they can feel safe and so that they can learn. Part of this is policy and practice and part of this is the work of the equity task force reviewing that policy to see where we may be biased

in our policy and how we're rolling out that policy. Every single student deserves to be safe. And in terms of gender Equity, we need to really be looking at our enrollment especially in our stem science and math courses. What we know from research is that enrollment for girls drops off in these upper level courses in middle school and we need to name that and address that.

Okay, Ms. Harrison, and we'll start a fifth question with you. What is your opinion on maintaining and expanding existing high schools versus spending additional funding to build new schools?

So we definitely have an East-West divide and we really need to work on that. Every school in Round Rock is it is a good school, something to know about CTE. There's academies every single school. Our offering for Career and Technical education is expansive. There are needs for growth. So there is a need for a sixth high school and we need to be judicious with what we already have to make sure that we're making the facility updates to make sure that students can not be overcrowded. At Round Rock high school we have 3,600 kids and growing in our school. And that's really it doesn't say it's over capacity according to you know, the investigations and the district looking into it, but it's truly over capacity. So my answer is yes, and. We need to make sure that we're maintaining our current facilities and we need to look ahead to make sure that we're responsibly building new facilities for growth.

Thank you. Can you share with us your thoughts Ms Gandara?.

Yes, I do agree that there is. We are Becoming as we are growing as a community Round Rock ISD is Round Rock in general. We see more and more parents and students moving to the district. I would take this one step further. So yes, our high schools are being are getting overpopulated. What I would like to see is I would like to see a new high school maybe more of our higher risk areas where the demographics in our entitlement, around our Title One schools and make that a high school a CTE dedicated or a vocational school dedicated in those areas to address our high-risk student population.

Thank you. And Mr. Schmidt?

CTE. I was a Career Technical education instructor. The district is a hundred and ten square miles. It's just not feasible for us to build a Career Technical High School. It was turned down in 2017 on the bond issue. It was also not recommended by the 2018 citizens Bond committee. As far as high school six goes, we already have it. They opted to build a brand new High School in front of the existing Round Rock High School. Capacity of Round Rock High School is actually 5200. I think students that we had to work on the district to get them to actually admit those numbers. Yes. It's a crowd of school, but that was a choice that was made the the we have to live with it. There's expansion going on at Westwood High School. There's expansion going at McNeil high school. And so we are gonna have some large schools. One of the issues that you have to pay attention to is as we are growing in certain areas, we're losing students and others. I believe that cedar Cedar Ridge High School or Cedar Valley pardon me,. Yeah, Cedar Valley High School. Is is not going to grow. it's decline. Actually, I think I saw the numbers is actually declining in enrollment or staying stable.

Thank you Mr Schmidt. Mr. Collins would like to answer?

I think it's it's true to say that the the Round Rock High School project is the the project that never ends. It's the great amoeba that's expanding over that entire campus and it's it's serving students well. I think there's no doubt that we need an additional High School. It not only could it serve as an opportunity to

show off some of our new technologies both in terms of learning and presentation, but also in energy efficiency and recycling the ability to show that we can build well and we can build green and that it can be done in a fashion that gives us perhaps a model for remodeling some of our other campuses to make them use less energy to maintain their air conditioning, their physical plant, their heating. This gives us a chance to maybe set us our sides on a situation where we could be much less energy consumers over the next 10, 20, 30 years. These are the technologies that we need to be looking at and our construction industry is poised but those people are ready to get out there and build it. If we just point them in the right direction and show them what we want to do. Thanks

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt, the community would like to know what steps do you propose to bring all the schools in our district back to TEA A rating, and what are your suggestions for improving our lower performing schools?

You know one of the issues that we have in a forum like this, is that we haven't been able to educate the public on the role of a trustee. We have a superintendent who was in charge of the day-to-day operation the school and the responsibility of correcting those issues is his. the TEA has a program called Lone Star governance and it's an evaluation process to look at our schools and to look at solving certain issues at those schools. As a board member, we can allocate the resources to correct the facilities and the Shortcomings. Thank you.

Thank you. Ms Harrison, would you like to respond?

I'd love to respond. It's really hard to fix what we don't reckon with and what we don't name. So that's part of the disaggregation of data. That's really important with the equity task force. So at all schools, we need to know what populations of students are struggling and we need to know how we can provide targeted, targeted support to make sure that they have what they need. This is part of the equity conversation. Equality means that everyone gets the same thing, Equity means that people get what they need and schools get what they need to be supported. So at some of these schools that are lower performing we need to make sure that they have the additional funding and resources which may require additional personnel units. So additional teachers, additional funding for specialized programming. Yes. I understand that it is the role of the superintendent and it is the role of supportive board members to make sure that we're providing the funds and the accountability needed. Again, if we don't look at the root cause of the issue and name what the issues are in terms of the breakdown of how students are performing. How can we expect to fix it?

Thank you. Mr. Collins?

One of the things that we've got to look at is this nonsense regarding equity and equality. The fact is the equity task force is a waste of time and finances. What we need to be doing is get into those schools that are underperforming, take a look at what's happening and begin to do some things personnel wise. For instance, it may be appropriate regardless of their job performance to go ahead and say we are going to take five teachers every year and release them from their contracts. Bring in New Blood. Let those lower or lowest performing teachers go and do the same thing perhaps with some of the executives in the situation. So the worry we're constantly changing things. We're trying to address those items. But the idea that somehow these poor babies aren't getting every little thing that they need is nonsense. We just need to get them in the classroom, get the materials to them and they

need to learn. And then it's not whether they're their idea of their identity is threatened or some equity. It's just nonsense. Thank you.

Ms Gandara, How did you reply?

Just like this is such a great question because over this time that I've been running I've really been digging into the numbers into the data. And what I've seen is that right now in Round Rock ISD, we have 15 schools that are deemed to be targeted support according to the TEA data. What is really interesting is out of those 15 schools, we see that the economically disadvantaged is a very high population we have from all the way from 27% all the way up to the highest is 75%. So I think we really we really need to dig into the poverty issue that is surrounding these schools. And we need to give we need to give added resources not only to the students but to the parents, how do we bring the parents to the table? Because when the parents are engaged in their child's education the child succeeds at a much faster pace than their counterparts.

Thank you going back to you again Ms. Gandara. When is your vision of an equity based approach to education in Round Rock ISD and what barriers to equity exist now? How will you work to improve equity initiatives in the district?

Again, it's a great question. So I would work with not only our chief of police, not only our mental health professionals. I would work with administrators and the chief of the equity task force once him and her on board because I believe this issue needs to be addressed from all angles. And we need to bring everybody to the table because it's not just you know, when people hear about Equity they automatically think oh, it's the african-american students and that's not true. Equity for all is for all of our kids no matter if white, black, hispanic, indian, asian or your 504, you're SPED, we really need to bring all of our subject matter experts together at the table and we need to create policies and procedures that are going to ensure that there is equity for all of our students across the board. No matter who you are.

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt, your thoughts?

Yeah, the difference between equity and equality is the difference between measuring outcomes versus opportunity. Equality provides the same opportunity to all the resources to all, while equity assumes that people do not start at the same place. And that fairness requires resources and be distributed based on need with the goal to achieve similar outcomes for all. And there's a cartoon illustrating this it's a it's a tall and a medium short, man. That are going over a fence looking at a ball game. And if the short person is given a box he can see over the fence and so that represents equity and therefore. Everybody can watch the game.

Thank you. Can you share with us your response, Ms Harrison?

Of course, I'm happy to. So I am a co-chair of the district's equity task force and I also worked with the safety and security task force as a co-chair for the central component subcommittee. And so I'm not telling you what I'm going to do. I'm telling you what I have been doing. And in order to work effectively in this arena we need to understand clearly what the issues are, which mean upon hiring a chief equity officer the district really needs to invest in an equity audit. I think it's best that the audit comes from outside of the district that way we don't have competing interests and really sensitive subject matter to

determine what areas across the district need support. I also believe in building strong coalitions of people that are knowledgeable around equity so you can already see that with the policy work that's in place around racial equity for the police department. We have many Community organizations and partners that are strong in this area coming together to help build our practice and our practice and our policy around equity and I think that's very important moving forward.

Thank you. Mr. Collins?

I think they've touched on some important things here, the idea obviously I've already told you what I think of equity. What we have is a poverty problem in this district. We've got poor students that aren't learning as well as some of the other students. In addition, we've got a situation where we need to do some parental education. We need to get in there, this entire educational paradigm sits upon a three-legged stool of professional educators, students and parents, and I don't think that there's a problem with the professional Educators. I think that we've got a situation where, number one we have to get more performance out of the students, and number two we've got to educate these these, some of these lower income parents on what they need to do. That may be the only thing that is come positive out of this COVID crisis, which is the idea that parents are having to look around over their kids shoulders or find out, did you do the assignment today? And instead of just being able to say, yes Mommy I did it, their parents are able to verify on the screen that yes or no they have an in fact done it. And in fact, what we're finding often is they're still saying, yes I did it, and they've got seven zeros in the Gradebook.

Thank you, Mr. Collins

educate these people.

Thank you.

Now for a question about priorities for you. Based on your observations of our current board. What are some of the biggest challenges they face besides COVID? And what would be your priorities to overcome these obstacles?

I have found in some of my conversations with some of the board members, some of which I can't, that I don't feel comfortable relating in a public forum without their permission. But what I found is a terrible lack of fiscal responsibility and what I mean by that is you know, once there was a congressman that said, you know a billion here a billion there before long you get into some real money. The fact is I have had specific people talk about to me from the board specifically say idiotic things like well, you know, it's just 1.2 billion. That's really not very much money. The fact is we're a billion and a half dollars in debt. We're spending 460 somewhat million dollars a year and we need to control that. We need to get a hold of that. We need to quantify what we're getting for that, and what we want to be getting For that. I think there's a lot of efficiencies that we can accomplish to get that job done.

Thank you. Miss Harrison, Would you like to give a response?

I would love to. So I've watched many many board meetings in the past three and a half years and I have to say that at times our board is divided. And I think that one thing that can unite a board is a focus on improving student outcomes, which is something that can be done through the Lone Star

government continuous improvement model that has been put into place. I would like to see that be put into place with Fidelity. There's a lot of fluff to board meetings. So there's no way a board meeting is accessible when it's five to seven hours long. That doesn't mean that Trustees make a good decisions. Who makes really good decisions after midnight, right? So trustees are unable to make good and clear decisions that late into the evening. And parents and community members aren't able to be aware of what is happening. So if we can recenter and shift our focus to be around student outcomes that will drive how we spend our money, how we use our resources and that should bring some commonality to the decisions that are being made and remove some of those political leanings. If we're focusing on a shared goal of improving student outcomes.

Thank you. Ms Gandara, How would you answer?

Yes, thank you. I think I see I see a couple issues that are happening with the board. One is cohesiveness, communication and just that the teamwork coming together. And I think we lose focus because like Tiffany said when you have a five hour board meeting or six hour board meeting people go off on tangents and you kind of lose focus in that area. Um, we we need to bring it back to the students, because we really we're elected because of the students. The parents, the community members are electing us to be a voice. We have a platform for their students. So I think we need to bring it back to what's best for the students because again once our students are successful, our community is going to be successful.

Thank you. A reply, Mr. Schmidt?

Yeah, well, first of all, I'd like to thank Ms. Harrison. I think that she touched on this very well. The priority needs to be safe schools for students and staff. Students have to come first in everything. We need to increase the percentage of students who are college and career ready. We need to promote equity by improving academic outcomes at the lower performing schools, prioritizing spending at those lower performing schools. With the 440 million dollar budget, there should be adequate resources. to take care of all of issues

Thank you. Ms Harrison, I'd like for you to start off the next round of questions. What should transparency look like as a Round Rock ISD board of trustee? Ror example in the areas of finance, student academics, or operations?

I love this question. So the first arm of transparency is people actually being able to have access to the information and the access being clear. So easily accessible clear information. I find that and I touched on it earlier, perhaps because of those seven hour board meetings where you're just exhausted watching and participating, people don't necessarily know what's going on. I would really like to see the community be able to receive bite size bits of this information, so that they know how their tax dollars are being spent. Trustee Cory Vessa has done a beautiful job of being transparent with the community and letting people know what is going on, how their money is being spent. So transparency really just means telling the truth. And if I had to pick an area that Round Rock ISD needs to improve upon, I think sometimes we have a problem telling the truth about where money is going, and you really can't fix a problem if you don't acknowledge the problem and if you're not truthful about the problem. And as a trustee, I am prepared to make sure that I'm asking those questions from the district and also sharing that information with the community and easily accessible ways.

Thank you. Can you share with us your reply Mr. Collins?

Yes. Thank you. I think that the opposite of transparency is also fluff. And it is correctly been said that there's a lot of fluff that occurs in some of these meetings. I think that we need to be sure that we minimize the amount of executive session time that we take and keep things as straightforward as possible. There aren't many things, I believe that the legislatively have to be handled in executive session. And that can be misused to hide the truth in some things. If we can't spell it out in a couple of sentences what the actual expenditure is for, perhaps that's something we should be discussing a little more.. The other side is, we hire a professional Superintendent to manage. Let the managers manage. Get away from micromanagement. We're not here to talk about what brand of computer. We notice we'll talk about what brand of paper clips or copier paper we use. Cut down the time by cutting down on micromanagement. Let the board do what the board is supposed to do, let the superintendent manage what he's supposed to do.

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt?

Well, I want to thank Mr. Collins for touching on the superintendent. Trustees can't micromanage the superintendent, the superintendent reports the trustees. As far as transparency goes, I think that's probably one of the greatest issues that got me involved in the policy, so the district was the lack of transparency. I'm gonna use an example. If you put an open reference request in and there's a student information involved, the districts allowed to basically withhold that information per FERPA. But however, if students not involved often, the district will go to the attorney general asking an opinion and then you would have to get into a communication with the attorney general and eventually get your data. Trusty Vessa has done an incredible job of posting and letting the community know what the activities are in the board. With what Russ has said too much is going on behind closed doors. They're limited legally by what they can do behind closed doors. Student information, safety and property purchases.

Thank you. Ms Gandara, would you like to give a response?

Yes, thank you. Um first off I want to say that I have read the budget. I looked over the budget and coming from an outside community member perspective, there are a lot of areas in there that are not as transparent and you don't go into much detail about it, you just see this very big number and there's no detail about it. Um, we need data that's easily, readily available for our community members and our parents. But most importantly we are giving money to areas where data isn't even being kept. So how can we keep, how can we know that services and programs are working if you are not even addressing that they keep data for us to be able to pull and hold them accountable. So, one, I would say that we need to be transparent, but two, we also need to ensure that we are keeping and we are obtaining that data as we go along so we can hold people accountable and be transparent to our community.

For our last question Mr. Schmidt, What are your ideas for tools and guidelines to support children of all ages, now and going forward, who are currently struggling with mental health in our learning environment due to the pandemic?

The district's recently contracted with Bluebonnet for mental health assistance and those students need to be identified and the resources need to be directed towards them. Once again, it's difficult to fix a problem unless you know exactly where it's coming from. Outreach has to be it has to be made. I've

been to too many board meetings where parents are coming up and addressing the board, sharing their concerns and at a board meeting the board cannot react to the parent because part of the board policy is there's no back and forth dialogue. They just have to listen. But when they hear it then we have to find out what happens behind the scenes and whether those issues are being addressed. Thank you.

Thank you. Ms Gandara, would you like to respond to this question?

Yes, some some ideas and tools I have spoken with the chief of police Mr. Yarbrough and I have spoken with Dr. Amy Grosso and they have an amazing program that they are putting together. And not only are is the mental health part so important especially during COVID, I mean I'm dealing I have three teenagers in my house. So I know that it has impacted them from just a school and teenage level. But more importantly how, what are we gonna do when these students get back to school and school is in full force and I believe that's where you know, Dr. Grosso and her team of mental health professionals can really lead the way in that. So I I don't I don't know everything. I don't claim to know everything. But I know that there are subject matter experts that can help us and give us the tools and resources that we need. So all of our kids are successful and that we deal with the transition, getting It's school in a healthy way.

I will restate the question one more time. What are your ideas for tools and guidelines, and this is for you, Mr. Collins. What are your ideas for tools and guidelines to support children of all ages, now and going forward, who are currently struggling with mental health in our learning environment due to the pandemic?

You know, it's it's funny. Yeah, I actually it's not funny. I've been contacted by so many parents. So many people concerned about these, some of our most vulnerable students in the system. People that are reaching out for help, who are asking for support. And you know like, I think until we get to everyone back in the classroom, it's going to be very difficult to meet those needs. I do think that if we set milestone,s we set goals and hold ourselves to those goals, regardless of the specific tools that we take, we will be able to measure our progress and know whether we're in fact making progress. The most important thing that we can be doing right now is talking about those high needs students, those children, our children, our kids who are out there needing help so badly. Special education, dyslexia mental health issues. We've got to come up with a way. Those are the kids that are falling through the cracks and if we don't take care of business reasonably quickly. They're going to be falling through those cracks.

Thank you and Miss Harrison, how would you answer?

I think one of the unfortunate things about COVID 19 is that it's also, I don't know, I think it's leveled the playing field. All students are coming back to us with some level of trauma likely from an Abrupt ending to a school year and an unprecedented time. So I'm really grateful that this board has invested 1.2 million dollars into social workers. I want to be clear as a classroom educator, what I know is that yes, our vulnerable populations of students are struggling, but really I'm seeing all students struggle right now with wrapping their mind around what this new world, different world looks like. So having those services, having educators that understand trauma-informed learning and perspectives, some of the behavior that we're seeing now in classes whether virtually are in person is in relation to what students have experienced during this time that they've been out of the classroom. So it's really important that we're preparing educators to best their students and that we're continuing to support the work of Dr.

Amy Grosso in the mental and Behavioral Health Department. I don't necessarily believe that 15 social workers is enough so we may need to increase investment.

Thank you candidates for answering those tough questions from across our learning communities. We're now going to have a minute and a half for your closing statements. We will hold up the same yellow card at 30 seconds remaining and the red card to ask you to stop. We're going to start with Ms Gandara. Ms Gandara, you get the first closing statement.

Thank you. And again I want to thank the candidates running for Place six and also PTA and Council for holding for holding this forum. I am a mother of six, one with autism and two with ADHD. I'm a wife of an incredible Round Rock ISD teacher and a coach and I am a volunteer and advocate and a mentor. I see and I hear the frustrations and successes from both the student, teacher and community member perspective. If elected to the board, yes, I will advocate for all students and parents. I will listen I will work with teachers, administrators and community members to make Round Rock ISD the best that it can be. I will hold our superintendent accountable for metrics set forth and I will be transparent to the community. My grandma always told me one quote that it still stays with me to this day and I do have six kids, so I take that quote to heart. She told me it takes a village to raise a child and I believe that wholeheartedly. We, all of us, are that village for our students of Round Rock ISD, I would be honored and grateful to have your vote. Vote for Gandara, place six. Thank you.

Thank you, Ms Gandara. Mr. Schmidt, would you like to close?

Sure, thank you. Since I mentioned trustee Math earlier, I think it's only fair to mention the other trustees that will be departing us in November. I'd like to thank Trustee Nikki Gonzalez for her service to the community. She served for six years. Thank you, Trustee Gonzalez. I wish you the best of luck in your upcoming election. I want to send a special thank you to trustee Charles Chadwell. I want to thank Trustee Chadwell for always being willing to listen. Chad made himself available to anyone who asked for his time and was always willing to share his thoughts on issues facing the district. Trustee Chadwell was a champion for the students and staff. He will be missed. Thank you trustee Chadwell for your 12 years of service. Trusty Mason Moses will be ending his four-year term as trustee. I want to thank trustee Moses for setting a new bar for a school board candidate and a trustee. I don't have the time to share all of trustee Moses' accomplishments here, but I will post them on my candidate web page dgs4rrisd.org. Thank you trustee Moses. I served my country and now will be an honor and privilege to serve my community the needs of our children must be met. Safe schools, equality in learning, equity and resources. My emphasis as the trustee will always be, students and teachers before glitter and glass. Fancy buildings are nice, but they don't educate our kids. Remember to vote, David G Schmidt, RRISD Place 6.

Thank you. Mr. Schmidt. Please share with us your closing statement, Ms Harrison.

Happy to. I'm so happy to be here tonight has been lovely to hear from the other candidates and my race, there have been so many salient points made and so I'm grateful to hear from you. Thank you PTA. What I want you to know is that I'm not telling you what I'm going to do in a way that I'm promising things I haven't already done. I believe that my history speaks for itself as an educational advocate, as a lover and supporter of all children and Round Rock ISD and as a dedicated Community member. So I've heard you parents of special education students speaking up at every board meeting. I've heard you dyslexia parents speaking up at every board meeting. I've heard you sustainability speaking up at

every board meeting and advocating for your needs, your child's needs, our communities needs. My guarantee is that I hear you and I plan to take action and listen. Where you don't believe that we don't agree, please reach out. I'm happy to talk to anyone and my platform is not a political one. My platform is one that centers the needs of students and makes sure that we can use all that we have, and the blessings that we have in Round Rock ISD to support students and to support educators and to build a stronger community. You can look for me at the www.tiffanie4rrisd.com and please vote for me, the candidate that has receipts. Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Harrison. Mr. Collins for floor is yours for your closing statement.

First I want to thank the PTA and the board. I it's been such an honor to be able to address you in this forum. And it has been my honor to be able to speak to you and to appear with these other candidates. My intention is to be the voice for that great silent majority out there to speak for those who revere the founding fathers vision of our country. To revere our great, Texas traditions of patriotism, reverence, honesty and color blindness in our institutions. We need to put our students, our beloved kids, first. Not some ideology that tells them that they are weak, oppressed, powerless. We need education and hard work to be taught as the keys to the success for that next generation. Please please please hang in there to the end of the ballot. We're depending on you, please vote Russell Winston Collins for Place 6. Thank you. Again, PTA. It was my honor to speak.

Thank you to our willing candidates, Mr. Collins, Ms Harrison, Mr. Schmidt and Ms Gandara for their participation in this voter event. The PTA applauds your willingness to serve the community, schools, parents, teachers, administrators and students of Round Rock ISD. Please remember that early voting starts on Tuesday, October 13th. And election day is Tuesday, November 3rd. This forum will be posted on the Round Rock Council of PTAs website. That's RRISDPTA.ORG and on the Round Rock ISD Council PTA social media along with the other place forums as they occur. Candidate bio information will also be posted, and following the forums, the candidates will have the opportunity to answer the questions posed to the other place forums in written form. Thank you candidates and good night.