

**Candidate Mica Ringo for Texas House of Representatives District 98
Responses to Keller ISD Council of PTAs 2018 Candidate Questionnaire**

Please respond with answers no more than 250 words:

1. Recent events have put a focus on school safety and security. If elected, what criteria would you use to prioritize safety recommendations? What will be the funding source for these measures?

The mass slaughter of children in our schools is NOT inevitable. It can be stopped and it must be stopped by taking proactive, not just reactive measures.

It costs nothing to immediately require background checks on 100% of gun purchases including through private sellers online or at a gun show. That is the first step.

Second, we need to increase the amount of mental health counselors in our schools so that kids who show potential signs of violence can be treated well before they escalate. Expanding Medicaid would help with the costs of providing these counselors. Adding a tax to gun or ammunition purchases could also be a revenue source to pay for mental health counselors.

Third, we need to examine the types of guns we allow in civilian life. Handguns, rifles and shotguns are an important part of our hunting and self-defense culture and should continue to be protected by the second amendment. However, weapons of war that were designed only to inflict mass casualties with minimal reloading time should not be in our streets, schools or churches.

These types of weapons should be either outlawed for civilian purchase or restricted to shooting ranges only. I would propose a bill that requires that these weapons, like the AR-15, be stored and used only at shooting ranges. That way, gun enthusiasts still have access to them without endangering the public. Getting these weapons off our streets will go a long way towards reducing casualties.

I oppose arming teachers who already have a full plate and should not be expected to serve double duty as a police presence.

2. The A-F campus and school district rating systems are complex as well as controversial. How do you respond to the critics of this system? Elementary, Intermediate, and Middle Schools rating are based solely on the STAAR exam. What changes would you make to the rating system and the STAAR exam? What other indicators do you think are relevant to evaluate a campus or a school district?

High stakes testing is strangling education. The STAAR test takes the joy out of learning for our students and it takes the joy out of teaching for our teachers. Does testing create life-long learners or just test takers? I recommend eliminating the end of course STAAR tests and moving only to federally mandated minimum testing (which is still 17 tests). In addition to the

astronomical costs, STAAR tests have been fraught with technical problems and reliability issues. The STAAR test does not benefit students, parents or teachers but it does line the pockets of the testing companies and the politicians they support. Moving to a diagnostic assessment of a child's performance allows the teacher to note and fill learning gaps instead of the current test and punish model.

One of my greatest concerns is recruiting and retaining excellent teachers. I would like to see the average years of experience of a school's teachers including in a rating. We are losing experienced teachers every year, while younger teachers are also leaving the profession after only a few years. Teachers that have decades of experience are invaluable to a school community and should be recognized as such.

3. Texas public school revenue per student was \$8,755 for 2017-2018 according to the Texas Education Agency's PEIMS Budgeted Financial Data. Do you think this is sufficient for Texas's 5.3 million students? What changes do you think should be made to the current tax structure to fund public schools?

Over the last decade, the state has slashed the education budget. Instead of providing 50% of funding, they now provide only 38%. I recommend two specific fixes to increase revenue for school funding.

First, all of the property tax dollars collected for education should be spent on education. That is currently not the case. Even our Robin Hood money, which is supposed to go to poorer school districts is put into the general budget where it is used as a piggy bank for legislators wish lists. The first bill I would propose would be a transparency bill that requires every dollar collected for education be spent on education and not diverted to other budget items.

Second, we need to close the property tax loophole for corporations. The "Equal and Uniform" provision authored 20 years ago was supposed to protect homeowners from overzealous appraisers, but it was poorly worded and created a loophole that large businesses have been exploiting ever since. The law allows big business to claim that their properties outside of the city or state are comparable appraisals. For example, giant retailers like Whole Foods can slash their property tax bill by claiming that their swanky Uptown Dallas store is a comparable value to a different Whole Foods in a run down area of Detroit.

If we close this loophole and return to the days of big business paying their fair share of property taxes, we can relieve the burden on homeowners while generating more revenue for schools. Studies show that closing this loophole would generate at least \$5 billion dollars per year.

4. What is your position on vouchers and other methods to use tax revenue to fund private education?

I am staunchly against vouchers or any other methods that take money out of our public schools to give to unaccountable private entities.