

# Candidate Jeromey Sims for Texas House District 91

## Reponses 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?**

School safety statistics reveal that for every school-related shooting, nearly 10,000 violent attacks, including rape, knife or sexual assault, violent harassment, beatings, fights, and robberies, not including millions of bullying incidents each year. **These statistics point to a definite need to secure students against all possibilities.**

Security options, determined by districts through security risk assessments, may include (in order of budgetary priority):

- 1) district safety policy with procedures
- 2) schedule of school safety professional development
- 3) expand presence of hallways, restrooms, and stairwells monitors
- 4) automatic classroom locks and door jams
- 5) limiting outsider access to schools only through double-door bulletproofed vestibule entrances that have cameras and intercoms, and using visitor management ID systems
- 6) School Resource Officers to build relationships with students, monitor gossip and be students' "go-to" about threatened suicides, bullying, or threats to bring a gun or bomb to school.
  - a. District leaders must ensure SROs are properly trained, understand their role, and have the skills and temperament to interact with young people

to de-escalate potentially criminal conflict, not intercede in disciplinary issues

b. Specially trained officers may be authorized to monitor public social media for keywords associated with cyberbullying, suicidal thinking, or criminal activity

7) technology such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, panic buttons and mapping systems

Reasonable school safety measures must be included in Texas school funding budgets. Grants and other local, state and national financial support programs are now available to provide schools with the opportunity to enhance and fund some school safety initiatives.

**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?**

Sims agrees with Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) which opposes A–F ratings and instead “believe that Texas students would be better served by a comprehensive community-based accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes multiple-choice tests to meaningful assessments that have value for students, parents, and teachers, as well as measures what each community deems important in promoting college and career readiness.”

Following are factors related to this position:

- A–F rating systems are based predominantly on once-per-year standardized test scores.
- A–F rating systems have not worked in other states.
- To reduce the many measures of campus and district performance to a single grade, A–F rating systems use pages of complicated rules and calculations.
- A–F systems fail to account for varying socioeconomic conditions that influence performance.

- Grades in an A–F system will align with wealth or poverty and likely punish poor schools for being poor.
- A–F rating systems provide no sense of what campuses and districts must do to improve.
- A community-based accountability system empowers school districts to design their own internal systems of assessment and accountability that, while meeting general state standards, allow districts to innovate and customize curriculum and instruction to meet the unique needs and interests of their communities.

**3. Texas public school revenue per student was \$8,755 for 2017-2018 per the TEA 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?**

The Census Bureau compiles data on education spending per pupil for each state. According to this data, in 2016 \$11,762 per pupil was spent nationally on average for public education; Texas was 43<sup>rd</sup> in per pupil spending. Though significant variation exists across the states, due to factors such as regional cost of living, class sizes and student demographics, Texas’ spending per pupil is not proportional nor reasonable related to the size of our state’s thriving economy and population. Texas’ current public education budget is too low.

Therefore, Texas’ broken school finance system must be remodeled, increasing state funding for public education to provide for Texas’ diverse and rapidly growing student population. State and local school districts must return to at least their previous 50:50 funding partnership for public schools. Corporate real estate tax loopholes must be closed which are now being used to extract funds from our limited state public education budget. Residential property taxes must not be further increased to fund public education. Public dollars must stay in public schools instead of paying for vouchers and private charters.

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

Sims agrees with the four-fold claim made in the documentary *Backpack Full of Cash*:

1) Public schools lose money to charters and vouchers; 2) Charters and vouchers do not serve the student majority; 3) For a large portion of students they serve, charters and vouchers do not provide education better than public schools, with little accountability; 4) Losing money leads to significant strain on public schools and leads to lowering the quality of education.

Further, legislators must empower actual educators, and not politicians and special money interests, to create needed change. While it is apparent that public education is undergoing a transition to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students, here is some summarized food for thought from physics professor Dr. Valentin Voroshilov for addressing the public vs. private/charter conflict:

- The old model of reforming education does not work, but the new model does not exist yet; the new model is a work in progress.
- Proponents of public education, teachers, and their professional organizations need to transition from defending good education as a general right, to proposing specific pathways for providing good public education for all: to show that there is no need for charters or vouchers.
- Proponents of public education, teachers, and their professional organizations—NOT legislators—need to take co-ownership in developing, installing, executing, and advancing the state teacher and school accountability system, making it cheaper, more efficient, and more informative.
- We need a transition from confrontation to consideration, cooperation, collaboration ... and to public education rejuvenation.