

EISD BOARD OF TRUSTEES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Presented by Eanes for Equity (E4E) & Chaps for an Anti-Racist Eanes (CARE)
May 2021 Election

What is this?

We are pleased to present you with the unedited responses from all four Board Candidates who answered our six questions about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Eanes ISD. We thank the Candidates for engaging in these conversations that are vital to a brighter Eanes future.

All of the Candidates' complete answers are presented in full. The Candidates were informed in their invitation that their responses would be shared publicly. We do not vouch for the veracity of any claims and encourage voters to do their own due diligence. We encourage you to read each Candidate's responses.

Who are we?

E4E is a parent-led community organization that prioritizes equity and inclusion in Eanes, and interrupts racism, prejudice, and inequities whenever encountered. We are committed to open and honest dialogue and ground our work in community conversations. C.A.R.E is an independent group of students, alumni, families, and community members advocating for Eanes ISD to be actively anti-racist, ensuring that all students and families are able to pursue an excellent education. Together we planned a joint Candidate forum, which was canceled due to a lack of full participation from the Candidates. We developed this Questionnaire in the spirit of transparency and our desire to provide you, the EISD voters, insight into your Candidates' views on DEI issues.

When does voting take place?

Early Voting runs from Monday, April 19th to Tuesday, April 27th. Election day is Saturday, May 1st. We thank you for investing the time to learn about your school board Candidates.



James Spradley
Place 4 Candidate



Nigel Stout
Place 4 Candidate



Jennifer Champagne
Place 5 Candidate



Jen Stevens
Place 5 Candidate

**"NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS FACED CAN BE CHANGED, BUT
NOTHING CAN BE CHANGED UNTIL IT IS FACED" - JAMES BALDWIN**

Q1

What steps have you taken within the past year to develop your own personal understanding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)? Please cite any books read, podcasts listened to, training, etc. If you have taken concrete steps in your professional careers and within community organizations, please mention them here.

**James
Spradley**
Place 4

I have to admit that I'm new to formal DEI work. I grew up in east Austin in a very diverse community with a makeup that was vastly different from what one sees in Eanes ISD. Even with this background, I have a lot to learn. I'm a visual learner and an avid YouTube viewer. I have searched for and watched videos to help me start with a high level and then deep dive on a few topics. Obviously, I have a lot of room to grow my understanding. I have "Miss Muriel & Other Stories" by Ann Petry on my upcoming reading list. I mostly read and study history and feel strongly about applying lessons from the past to today's issues. This book would not have normally popped up on my reading list, so I have made it a point to expand into new book categories. I am proud to work for a company that puts a strong focus on diversity. I've joined in diversity groups and participated in several activities through diversity networks including Amigos@Apple, Black@Apple, and Apple Asian Association.

**Nigel
Stout**
Place 4

I have studied the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Bible, Mark 12:31 and John 13:34 comes to mind. The Civil Rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King was a unifying and powerful period in our Country and that we should make sure all our children study and understand. A lesson we can learn by Civil Rights Leaders, such as Dr. King and Robert Woodson, emphasized that each person is unique and who they are is not defined by what they look like or where they came from. New York DEI programs designed by consultants like Dr. Gooden treat people of color as if they are all the same and assume that their skin color is in some way inferior. I have spoken to many of my friends and supporters of color and they have emphasized to me that DEI programs, like those in California and New York, are hurtful and demeaning to them and their kids. What they want is to be treated as equal individuals, not as members of an identity group.

I have listened to Dr Gooden, the New York \$170K plus consultant that the District hired with no bid last year.* I have read articles and publications on line around these issues. I have many life experiences growing up and attending Los Angeles Unified School District, one of the most diverse districts in the Country. I have received training through work and through youth football programs. Can you point me to any studies that have been done on similar school districts that clearly explain the cost of such DEI initiatives in terms of time and monetary allocation verses the measurable success of DEI in said district that also includes an increase in overall improvement in academic excellence?

Editorial notes:

** E4E + C.A.R.E are not in possession of Dr. Gooden's contract, but it can be accessed through an open records request. Dr. Gooden's 2/25/21 update on his work with EISD can be found here: www.eanesisd.net/dei/pres*

Q1

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**Jennifer
Champagne**
Place 5

I've done some reading in the past year including White Fragility. I enjoyed the podcast Nice White Parents and its look at the New York education system. Professionally I completed a course offered by my company which was a 21-Day Journey to Awareness and Empathy. I have also joined my company's Employee Resource Group on Allyship so that I can learn to be a more effective ally for my colleagues and those volunteers I serve.

In 2019 my for my Leadership TASB class I chose equity my area of study along with several of my peers. Two books we read were fantastic. Savage Inequalities is about 30 years old, but the similarities to current day are haunting. Dream Hoarders is an eye opening look at the distribution of resources in education.

**Jen
Stevens**
Place 5

The Civil Rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King was a powerful time in our Country that I have studied and that we should ensure our children study. One of the important lessons that Civil Rights Leaders such as Dr. King and Robert Woodson emphasized was that each person is unique and defined by their character. We don't need a New York DEI program. I have spoken to many of my friends and supporters of color, and they have emphasized to me that DEI programs like those in New York are demeaning and hurtful to them and their children.

I have spent a great deal of time studying the work of the Woodson Center including reading their newsletters and other publications and watching their videos. I met with friends of diverse nationalities/religions/abilities, the parents of disabled children, and grandparents of disabled children. Eanes is a loving community that supports, encourages, and accepts each other. Of course there are challenges but there is also a desire to solve those together the Eanes way and not with a New York consultant importing failed ideas.

I also met with my pastor to understand how my own Christian faith can guide my heart and mind as I talk to my children and community members about our opportunities to teach The Golden Rule and respect for others while not succumbing to the radical political agenda being advanced under the guise of DEI. As a member of the board of the Center for Child Protection, we recently voted unanimously to create a diversity and inclusion committee of the board to be sure our board and staff are reflective of the clients we serve. And, as a community volunteer I spent the past two years volunteering as a fundraiser and advisor to create the African American Leadership Institute (AALI) which is modeled after Leadership Austin. <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/african-american-leadership-institute-builds-stronger-black-community-in-austin/>

Q2

What specific efforts have you made to understand the needs of students experiencing racism in Eanes and address their concerns (outside of talking to your own children)?

**James
Spradley**
Place 4

I've spoken to my sons about their experiences in Eanes. Both of my sons were victims of bullying based on religion while in Eanes and were quick to give me examples of what they experienced. I was shocked to find this out because they have never discussed this with me in the past. This was close to my heart and allowed me to see a different perspective as I read through the social media reports of events that had happened to kids while at Eanes. Hearing one or two reports like this might allow one to write it off as isolated incidents. However, the number and scope of the reports that were made provided clear evidence of a problem. I came to the simple realization that there's a big difference between being safe and feeling safe. One can be safe without feeling safe. We need to ensure that our kids are not just safe, but that they feel safe. This means they need to be free from threats. We can do better.

**Nigel
Stout**
Place 4

I don't subscribe to the fact that EISD is systemically racist. I have spoken with many families of color, and they also agree. I know EISD is not perfect and there are cases that happen. I believe that every student has the same worth and rights as any other, no more no less. These incidents should be dealt with immediately and become a learning experience for all that were involved. We already have policies in place in the student and employee handbook in EISD. We just need to enforce these rules.

**Jennifer
Champagne**
Place 5

I have spoken with numerous families who have shared their experiences with racism in Westlake which has been directed to either their children, or their family. I've spoken with students about their concerns, experiences and desire for change. I have met with members of both CARES and E4E to discuss ways in which our district and community can improve.

**Jen
Stevens**
Place 5

see above.*

Editorial note: *Candidate refers readers to her Question 1 response.

Q3

The current board recently made DEI a strategic priority for our district. As a board member, what concrete steps will you take to create an inclusive environment for Eanes students who are LGBTQ+, African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Neurodiverse, from various religions, etc.?

**James
Spradley**
Place 4

Kids need to know they are not alone and that Eanes cares about them. I feel strongly that kids need to have a group.

This is easier in lower grades where kids are forced into groups, and more difficult in higher grades where kids are more on their own. I will help ensure we have campus leadership that embraces the establishment of different groups so kids can find a home and support.

We need staff members who can quickly identify and properly identify bullying and address it quickly and directly.

We also need staff members to know how to ensure all students feel safe to express their individualism in an environment that is free from peer judgement.

**Nigel
Stout**
Place 4

Once again, I do not subscribe to the fact that EISD is systemically racist and not a safe and healthy environment for our children. The board made a decision to hire a New York consultant, no bid, at more than \$170,000+ per year without knowing 1) if there was a real problem in the District, 2) if so, to what extent said problem exists, 3) set goals to obtain success and 4) pick which solution that would most effectively address the issues if it really existed or not. Because of very vocal and mobilized groups, like this one, pushed the board to hire a consultant in the middle of a Global Pandemic all the while we were trying to get our children safely back in-class.*

We should focus on uniting us in our common interests, celebrate differences and move toward academic excellence for all students. As I have asked your organization before, what does Eanes For Equity believe the curriculum should be in terms of gender identity, should biological boys be allowed in biological girl's restrooms and competing in biological girl's sports? Should the "Call Me Max" book be taught to 3rd and 4th graders? I have received no answers from E4E.**

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** E4E responded to Mr. Stout's questions on the same day of his request, 3/22/21, with an offer to meet and directly answer his questions. That invitation has not been acknowledged.

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Q3

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**Jennifer
Champagne
Place 5**

As a board member I will do several things. First, we will need to examine our policy to look for areas of weakness that may need improvement when it comes to DEI. I will ensure that DEI remain a priority for the district in future years, so that we can continue to make progress toward providing a safe and effective learning environment for all students. I will also ensure that our budget is reflective of our priorities and ensure that DEI has the necessary resources to be successful particularly with regard to professional development.

**Jen
Stevens
Place 5**

I do not believe Eanes is systematically racist. I don't believe we have an enormous, sweeping problem engulfing our district. Can we do better? Of course and we should. We should hold ourselves to a standard of excellence in everything we do. If you care about DEI, you should be appalled at the way the board has fumbled our efforts. We hired Dr. Gooden to come in and define our problem, rather than us identifying where we need help. There was nothing done to show areas where we can improve. We hired a New York consultant with NO BID and subsequently have NO work product to show for the investment. We have no needs assessment, no measures of success. We have nothing.

This DEI consultant gets paid \$3000 for meeting with parent groups (E4E as an example), \$4000 for community webinars, royalties for his book and survey he created for EISD AND a \$170,000 fee*. Let's also remember the expense of time and money related to Linda Rawlings and other members of Eanes staff devoted to his efforts. But why did we do this at all? Eanes current student and employee handbook outlines on page 6 and beyond the rules of conduct and discipline actions around discrimination, why not enforce rules we already have? (<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1597761274/eanesisdnet/y526ytidkngxo8o0fhi7/SCOCFinal.pdf>) This district created a DEI committee that is anything but diverse. You can't achieve change and promote unity while acting through division and exclusion. It won't work. I will oppose any effort to bring Critical Race Theory into Eanes. This is a path to destruction of a quality education. As a board member I will work to prevent politics in the classroom and would insist we start over and tackle DEI the Eanes way. We will start from a place of love and a focus on teaching The Golden Rule and to respect and appreciate differences. We can do better. This failed consultant was the lazy way and our community deserves more. We will not promote extreme political social issues in our classrooms. We will respect the role of parents in a child's life. We will respect our teachers and not ask them to tackle sensitive subjects without proper training and parental engagement. Teachers, parents, and students need to be on the same team and empowered to raise concerns and opinions without fearing retribution. Differing opinions and collaborative debate always achieve the best outcomes.

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Q4

How will you support the DEI advisory committee, especially when it comes to implementing their recommendations?

**James
Spradley**
Place 4

Having helped select this committee, I am looking forward to seeing the fruits of their labor. When I first heard how large this committee was going to be, I was afraid they would never be able to come to an agreement, let alone come up with recommendations. I've heard, however, that the committee is working well together and I have no doubt they will do great things. I will work as a board member to fully review and understand all recommendations that are made by the committee. I will consider many perspectives as well as concerns from the committee and the community. Then I will support implementing those items that have committee, community, and administration support. Most of all, I will listen, learn, and act.

**Nigel
Stout**
Place 4

We need to start over with the DEI committee and ensure that it is diverse and represents all stakeholders in the community. How can you take any recommendations from any committee that is not diverse in the first place? Parents will feel that this is being forced on them if you don't have buy-in from all the EISD community.

**Jennifer
Champagne**
Place 5

Usually with committee work we see opportunities for immediate implementation of some recommendations which can be addressed with small changes at the campus or district level. I would work with the administration to encourage those steps are taken quickly. For loftier goals I would work with the administration and the board to plan a timeline for implementation to allow for any needed resources to be obtained.

**Jen
Stevens**
Place 5

We need to start over with the DEI committee and make sure we have a committee that is diverse. We currently do not and alienating a large part of our community will prevent any achievements. Further, the board needs to examine the role of the Envision Eanes committee in this effort. Envision Eanes was created over two years ago to help guide the board in tackling our biggest challenges and yet has been excluded from the DEI discussion. Why? Further, the board should distinguish the role of the DEI committee from various parent groups and create and communicate a structure for how recommended content will be considered/approved/shared with parents and then provided to teachers. There must be a transparent structure/process before anything beyond core state curriculum is distributed to our teachers.

Q5

How would you support comprehensive annual training for teachers on how to address students who commit racist, homophobic or other forms of bullying targeted towards students belonging to marginalized groups?

**James
Spradley**
Place 4

I was shocked by the story of the children playing “kill the Asians” on the playground. After my initial shock and sorrow for the experience of the children, I was immediately struck with the thought, “How did the teacher handle that?” I don’t think that should be my first thought. I should have confidence that our teachers know exactly how to coach those kids and explain why that’s wrong. We need our teachers to be trained to help students in these situation, not just write it off as kids being kids. I’m mindful that our teachers’ schedules are pretty full right now, but I think we have to find a way to add in annual training on how to address these important topics.

**Nigel
Stout**
Place 4

I am in support of teachers continued education opportunities to be better equipped particularly to deal with bullying.

**Jennifer
Champagne**
Place 5

A district’s budget needs to be a reflection of its priorities. This is why it is important that DEI remain a priority for Eanes ISD. We already have budgeted items for professional development, and DEI as a priority will be incorporated there. I believe we need to continue some form of a contract with Dr. Gooden for another year, with the goal of becoming self sufficient in providing our own training and support to staff.

**Jen
Stevens**
Place 5

I will support teachers having access to continuing education opportunities against all bullying.

Q6

Eanes teachers are highly trained professionals that will grow in their content knowledge and expertise as DEI work moves forward in the district. As a board member how will you ensure they are supported and their professional expertise is valued?

James Spradley
Place 4

I'm not sure I completely understand the question. I fully support our teachers in building expertise through continuing education and professional development.

Nigel Stout
Place 4

I agree, EISD teachers are highly trained. The EISD School Board's most sacred duty is to ensure that all children in the District are given an Equal Opportunity to be successful in life through academic excellence. We can do that by ensuring EISD has the best Teachers possible and then allowing those teachers to connect with and educate each student. We can't do that if our District is divided and our teachers are forced to play the role of activist instead of educator. Existing school board members that use children, parents and teachers as pawns in pursuit of their political objectives should not be involved in educating our children period.

Jennifer Champagne
Place 5

Eanes ISD is blessed with highly qualified educators. I have some concerns over the way some teachers have been treated by members of our community. I would like the board to examine the codes of conduct for parents, and ensure those are in line with the same expectations we have for staff and students.

Jen Stevens
Place 5

We have a morale problem in our district. The recent Envision Eanes report documented that a large portion of our teachers fear retribution and don't feel safe in our district. This is unacceptable. I will work to make Eanes a safe place for all viewpoints so that our teachers and families feel valued. We should have diverse teacher representation on the DEI committee. The expenses outlined above for the New York consultant were paid in the same budget year where the board fired ten teachers. No wonder we have a morale problem. The Eanes School Board's duty is to ensure that all children in the Eanes district are given an equal opportunity to be successful in life through academic excellence. We can do that by ensuring Eanes attracts and retains best teachers possible and then allowing those teachers to connect with and educate each child. We can't do that if our District is divided, and our teachers are asked to play the role of activist instead of educator.