#### EANES ISD BOARD OF TRUSTEE VOTER GUIDE May 2022 Local Election

**Eanes for Equity** is proud to present our Eanes ISD (EISD) Board of Trustee Candidate Voter Guide. In this election two seats are on the ballot, Place 6 and Place 7. Each of the **five candidates answered six questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion within Eanes ISD**. The candidates' answers are presented in full and are unedited. We encourage our readers to do their own due diligence as claims have not been independently verified.

We thank the candidates, each of whom readily welcomed the opportunity to answer questions from our community. As Eanes students are the heart center of all of our efforts, this year we invited students to submit questions for their school board candidates to address. We have indicated which questions are student submissions. The last page of Voter Guide contains additional links to candidate campaign pages and voting information.

We encourage you to learn about each candidate and use your voice at the ballot.

**Important Dates:** Early Voting - Monday, 4/25 - Tuesday, 5/3

Election Day - Saturday, 5/7



**Heather Sheffield Place 6 Incumbent** 



Jim Withers
Place 6 Challenger



**Ellen Balthazar Place 7 Incumbent** 



**David Barrutia**Place 7 Challenger



**Jay Lamy**Place 7 Challenger



Eanes for Equity is a parent-led community organization (non-profit 501(c)3) committed to working in partnership with parents, students, teachers, staff, administration, and the EISD Board to create an EISD that interrupts racism and prejudice whenever encountered. We are committed to open and honest dialogue and ground our work in community conversations. Together, we can build a better, safer and more inclusive environment to support each and every Eanes ISD student as they strive for success in Eanes and beyond. To learn more about how to get involved with E4E or for general inquiries, please email info@eanes4equity.org.

WHS Student Question: The noise around DEI efforts seems to be mostly from parents, and a lot of misinformation is being spread about these efforts. How do you intend to ensure that the board hears directly from students {outside of your own children} to help inform decisions made around DEI initiatives and to continue efforts to prepare us {the students} for a world outside of our bubble?

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

As a current board member, it has been obvious to me that the majority of the noise is not reflective of the actual work the district is doing. The district strives to make sure that all of our staff and students feel safe and supported in our schools. I have been fortunate to be a part of three small group discussions at schools regarding DEI with students, parents, community members, and staff. Having the student voice at these meetings has been important and informative for everyone there. It's so important that we continue to listen to the students to know what their experience is because they are why our district exists...to educate students.

If students don't feel safe and supported, they can't learn to the best of their ability. I have a student in high school and a student in middle school so I hear and see a lot of what is happening at those levels. I am committed to continuing to seek the input of our students and will continue to attend more conversations with our community regarding DEI.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

There is no question there has been lots of noise around DEI. Most parents seem unsure of what DEI is and what DEI isn't. Our national media and political landscape has been completely unhelpful. The great news is that here in Eanes our people care and they are smart. I believe if we lock arms as a community and engage many community leaders we can put forward a face of unity. It starts with the parents and then moves to each individual campus. In order to make progress on DEI we must get outside of our direct social bubble. We need individual campus committees to be the tip of the spear in aggregating information and bringing that information back to the district level. Its important for board members to have multiple meetings at each campus to understand each of the micro environments so that can inform policy. The students need to have a seat at every table and at every level of this process.



Q1 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 3.

WHS Student Question: The noise around DEI efforts seems to be mostly from parents, and a lot of misinformation is being spread about these efforts. How do you intend to ensure that the board hears directly from students {outside of your own children} to help inform decisions made around DEI initiatives and to continue efforts to prepare us {the students} for a world outside of our bubble?

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

I have seen two tactics be very powerful in communicating student voice to the Board, specifically as it relates to DEI. One is student participation in multi-generational, multi-function (student, parents, community members, administrators, teachers, board members) small group conversations like those held (about DEI) this spring on each campus. Another, more "private" approach that I believe is a good balance, is for trusted individuals on a campus to conduct focus groups just among students. With consent, these more in-depth conversations may be recorded and confidentially shared with Board members. Recorded or not, the Board should receive an analysis of learnings from these groups from both a student perspective and an adult perspective. As more campus organizations organize around DEI work, it would be helpful to have a combined quarterly update from each group about their progress, issues, and opportunities.

## David Barrutia Place 7

Composed of a group of distinguished community members with expertise across many fields, Envision Eanes is a board-appointed brain trust that is future-focused and tasked-oriented. When we go around the conference table asking each person for ideas, aside from sharing my own thoughts, I always recommend asking children for input, especially for the big ideas. They have the most creativity and imagination, and by including them, they gain more ownership and belonging. I'm not the only one. A colleague always jokes that adults are lame. We must prepare our children for their world, not ours. I will empower our student councils and seek their guidance on all issues, not just DEI. Based on elections, the student council is an example of representative democracy and students should be empowered to exercise their rights and have a voice. Finally, we do not need to look far outside our bubble to be prepared for the world, too. There is so much diversity within our community that goes unnoticed everyday. We don't have to wait for a holiday or heritage week or heritage month to celebrate it. We can celebrate it all the time. How to celebrate? Well, children have the best party ideas.

#### Jay Lamy Place 7

Real DEI efforts and rhetoric has been hijacked by political movements on both sides. If the students present something that is a-political, it deserves to be heard. I have been working in the world outside our bubble for the past 25+ years and can say that I once thought the world cared about what I did in high school and college and can tell you I found out that it doesn't care about yours or my struggles. It does care how you overcame those struggles and how you inspired others to overcome their struggles because that is a great predictor for what you are going to do for them and how you are going to uplift the world outside the bubble. That is the "equity" the world is looking for. The world does need diversity and inclusion because a team that is filled with people of the same or similar perspectives will fail to meet its goals and objectives and create inefficiencies. In addition to staying a-political, students will be heard if they can show positive results on how they have overcome their struggles.

What steps have you taken within the past year to develop your own personal understanding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) within Eanes? 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.

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

Thankfully, our current Board added the goal to "Increase personal growth and learning of trustees...to support DEI" in our board goals and priorities last year and we have begun that work. The board had an opportunity to meet with and learn from Dr. Gooden and we read his book "Five Practices for Equity-Focused Leadership. I just read the book Dream Clock after a neighbor gave it to me. I have taken several continuing education classes on DEI in education and have discussed this in my Leadership TASB class. Most importantly, I've been doing a lot of listening to people in our community.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

I think 12 months ago I didn't know much about DEI. As I began to learn more and speak with community members, I realized we were all mostly agreeing around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Those words were straightforward and great. Who isn't for celebrating diversity? Listening to Dr. Arnett and speaking with people that are leaders in our community around DEI they have beautifully defined Equity as equal opportunity for every student to maximize their potential. Who isn't for inclusion? A label before a child's name should never define the child. Certainly me and my family are all in. I have read some papers and articles but mostly relied on talking and listening to community members that were early and passionate about DEI. Over time I have grown to share their passion. Owning an automotive business over the last 12 years and managing a diverse workforce of employees, I didn't know it at the time but we were utilizing the wonderful concepts around DEI. We created a culture of love, inclusion, and an enjoyment of each other's differences,



Q2 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 5.

What steps have you taken within the past year to develop your own personal understanding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) within Eanes? 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.

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

I have participated in book studies of "White Fragility" and "How to be an Anti-Racist". Both were challenging and thought provoking. I have studied "Five Practices for Equity-Focused School Leadership" in conjunction with professional development for the Board provided by Dr. Gooden (complete on May 9). I am a member of the LBJ Library and they offered a webinar series "Dismantling Systemic Racism in Education". Not only did I participate in the 10 session series, but through Linda Rawlings, extended the invitation to all EISD staff. About 20 staff participated to various degrees and Linda organized several discussion opportunities for us to share perspectives. Through the LBJ School I also accessed Dr. Leonard Moore's podcast, "Teaching Black History to White People". Outside of Eanes, I am vice-president of the National Genealogical Society. Since 2020, I have recruited a DEI Working Group, guided them through identifying action steps and recommendations to the Board, increased the diversity of conference speakers, publication authors and leadership volunteers, collected benchmark data for diversity metrics, and developed protocols for multicultural marketing efforts.

#### David Barrutia Place 7

Since last spring, I have been subbing at EE, FTE, BPE, HCMC, and WHS. Over 2021 summer, I earned a paraprofessional certification from TEA's Region 13. And in fall 2021 I was trained by EISD in Satori Alternatives to Managing Aggression (SAMA) techniques. These trainings and experience working with our students across general education and special education instruction have given me a greater appreciation for the diverse needs of our students, and the inclusion and equity challenges that they face. Last spring, as a board member of Austin Sister Cities, I also organized a video pen pal exchange by Zoom between our 2nd grade Spanish Immersion class at EE and two classes in Peru, one in Lima and another in the Amazon Jungle, chatting in Spanish and sharing customs like popular local dances Macarena and Anaconda. This fall. as an EE parent, I organized a cross-cultural EEPTO socials fundraiser celebrating Dia de Los Muertos. And recently I started doctorate studies at Vanderbilt University Peabody College of Education and Human Development to advance the field of language and culture inclusion in the DEI framework, inspired by the Bible story the Tower of Babel.

### Jay Lamy Place 7

I have personally spent time talking to some of my former teammates of color whom I played football with while in college. I have also talked to organizations that have implemented DEI, like Any Baby Can Executive Director, Veronda Durden. Darshana's podcast with Aaron Silva and the time I spent with Darshana and Kate was enlightening. They highlighted their goal of empowering each individual student to meet their full potential is almost exactly what I would suggest is my goal - discovering, nurturing and maximizing our kid's talents and passions. I believe they employ a positive DEI Initiative similar to one which is promoted by Karith Foster with Inversity. I have recently been given and am reading a book called Dream Clock which highlights a pastor's perspective of DEI. I found from my own organic experience with my diverse peers, forced discussion will not work, but discussion that highlights commonalities as a foundational element will work. This is consistent with what most therapists suggest for dispute resolution among family members. It is best solved by focusing on commonalities and future opportunities both parties can share.

The current EISD Board of Trustees has included DEI as a strategic board priority for the 2022-2023 school year (<u>linked here</u>). Do you (1) support these goals, (2) wish to repeal them, or (3) wish to modify the existing DEI goals? Please explain why.

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

I absolutely support the board goals and priorities because I helped craft and pass them. It's important that we make our schools a safe space for all of our students to learn.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

I truly believe that there are more members of our community willing to engage on these items than I had previously realized. The time is now for our board to engage the members of our district to see these policies come to life. I think Dr. Arnett is ready to lead on these items as well. He is positioned as a compassionate thought leader that works well with multiple constituencies. I believe most of the guidelines are good. There are a few that are more difficult to discern. The 2 I believe that need more clarity are: 1.Develop a system of equity-focused restorative justice in support of all learners 2 Create a shared understanding of DEI through racial equity leadership training to build capacity and support sustainability.



Q3 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 7.

The current EISD Board of Trustees has included DEI as a strategic board priority for the 2022-2023 school year (<u>linked here</u>). Do you (1) support these goals, (2) wish to repeal them, or (3) wish to modify the existing DEI goals? Please explain why.

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

Being a sitting Trustee, I fully support these goals. The efficacy of the work, however, remains in the details of implementation. I look forward to the detailed plans that will emerge through the District Improvement Plan (DIP) and Campus Improvement Plans (CIPs) over the next several months. I will be looking for committed and comparable responses from all campuses.

### David Barrutia Place 7

I would modify the DEI goals by adding (1) Face and come to terms with the inconvenient past of our community's roots, and (2) Strengthen our community's bonds by celebrating our individual diversity. In a recent Eanes Parent Unite podcast, incumbent and head of Eanes History Center, Ellen Balthazar, was asked about the history of racism and segregation when Eanes was founded, a subject that residents are genuinely interested in. However, the conversation sidestepped into another time in history, the founding of Westlake. We need openness. Many residents transplanted their families to our neighborhoods and deserve to know the truth. As a school district of excellence, in a city known for innovation, in a state known for strength, we should not shrink from controversy. We should welcome it, overcome it. Our vision should not stifle our ability for public scrutiny and having hard conversations. Agreement and disagreement are necessary parts of a high functioning democracy. We need leadership to model courage and empathy in order to achieve public understanding and reconciliation, and we can find strength in each other by celebrating our own individual diversity (as mentioned in Q1).

#### Jay Lamy Place 7

Every Board initiative must be absolutely fundamental to the mission of the school and must serve the desire of the customer, the parent, and the shareholder or beneficiary, the student. By definition, every new initiative dilutes any of the former initiatives proposed so any initiative needs to be imperative. The DEI initiatives that are highlighted on the Board website are vague, insignificant and not measurable. If it can not be measured, we can not get an ROI (Return on Investment). We need to do a better job defining DEI as I have found that the definition that excites me when I talk to Darshana and Kate is not evident on the Board's website. We need to go back to the drawing board and expand our definition to make it significant, measurable and specific.

Regardless of your response to Question 3, as a Trustee, how will you support the existing DEI Advisory Committee and Campus Equity committees, especially when it comes to implementing their recommendations?

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

The Eanes ISD DEI initiative isn't/shouldn't be scary. I'm hopeful that the DEI advisory committee and the campus equity committees will help to bring our community together for conversations and allow for a shared understanding of the DEI work. Our community needs to have these conversations so that all stakeholders are aware of what is happening and comfortable in helping to improve our amazing district move forward to better serve and support our students and staff.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

We must lead fast and crisply on DEI. Full support for the DEI committee is important. We must rally around our new Superintendent and the committee. Our time is now to get something meaningful done. I think our community is ready to engage in this process and create a DEI tailored for our Westlake community.



Q4 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 9.

Regardless of your response to Question 3, as a Trustee, how will you support the existing DEI Advisory Committee and Campus Equity committees, especially when it comes to implementing their recommendations?

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

One of the most important things the Board can do is set high expectations and then monitor for accountability. Campuses have been variable in their implementation to date of Campus Equity Teams, an important element in promoting a campus culture of DEI. As we collectively plan for a new school year under Dr. Arnett's fresh leadership, it is a perfect time to reestablish expectations and purpose for the Teams. I have been working with Dr. Gooden and Ms. Rawlings to clarify the charter of the DEI Advisory Committee and develop protocols to fill the current gaps on the Committee. These will be proposed to the full Board in May.

# David Barrutia Place 7

Having served on the Envision Eanes committee for three years, I am familiar with the ups and downs of being on a committee in our school district. We worked closely as a team and spent countless hours creating a report using research, data and pride, but in the end, felt demoralized when it was not adequately honored by the board. As such, I am very grateful and mindful of our district's committees and the number of service hours that they sacrifice to be away from their families in honor of our community. The best way to support the existing DEI Advisory Committee and Campus Equity Committees is to encourage the open and unrestricted publicizing of their recommendations. Give the public what it wants. We do not need to feel obligated to hold up a system of power and authority that does not exist. What we need to hold up is our pillars of democracy — openness, accountability and transparency — and I pledge to do so, keeping you fully informed and knowledgable because only together with you, as an active and well-informed public, can the school district properly function and our community realize its ideal potential in a democratic society.ading

### Jay Lamy Place 7

If there is a ROI, I will support it. If there is a failure to show an ROI, I will not support it. It is that simple. Bring me something that moves the needle. For instance, create a program that is age appropriate for high school and middle school and elementary school that brings in speakers every month to our community who bring diversity into the community and can share how they overcame their struggles. Make it optional for attendance BUT promote it to the community so that we can really get community "buy in". We can also film it with our kids who are in the Westlake production, rate the speakers and put it online so that parents and kids who can not attend for whatever reason, can see the content and potentially "buy in" remotely. Other ideas I have discussed that seem to have some legs with the community: 1. promote adoption to the community to bring diversity to the district; 2. Provide teacher housing on campus or in the community that could potentially save teachers between \$3,000 - \$5,000 per year after tax; 3. Establish a program of community service that dives into all of these issues where problems exist.

Teachers and staff are looking for clear guidance from District administration and the Board especially when sensitive subjects such as race and gender are brought into the classroom. As a Trustee, how will you (1) ensure clear guidance and communication of policy to teachers and staff, and (2) support teachers and staff as they navigate these conversations.

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

The board goals and priorities that were recently approved by the Trustees set the tone for the year. The admin team takes those goals and priorities to create the District and Campus Improvement Plans which serve as roadmaps for our staff while conveying what is most important. I'm grateful to have been a part of the decision to approve Lessoncast. Lessoncast will help us to improve our curriculum to make sure that our teachers have the resources and support they need in a transparent way for parents. We have also provided professional development for our staff and will continue to provide more learning opportunities as needed.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

These topics have been sensitive for many years. Teachers are on the front lines of dealing with these big issues and topics. That's always been true and its why supporting our teachers is so important. They must feel equipped and supported to handle the tough conversations. I think a lot of this starts with the campus counselors and principals. We must continue to provide education and opportunities for these leaders to collaborate and share experiences with peers. I think strong communication with the parents is huge as well. Communication and including parents breaks down walls, I believe communication with parents around these items is vital to building trust.



Q5 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 11.

Teachers and staff are looking for clear guidance from District administration and the Board especially when sensitive subjects such as race and gender are brought into the classroom. As a Trustee, how will you (1) ensure clear guidance and communication of policy to teachers and staff, and (2) support teachers and staff as they navigate these conversations.

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

The Board has contracted with Lessoncast Learning, a "Curriculum Consultant", to provide just this type of support. Lessoncast will work with principals this spring and with campus groups throughout the summer to curate a list of current resources available, develop a scope and sequence for potentially controversial topics, provide guidance for selection of resources representing an array of perspectives and characteristics, provide support for staff, and prepare a plan for communication with parents. We are also fortunate to have several in-house staff members (Allyson Collins, Linda Rawlings, Molly May, Florencio Gonzalez as examples) who are consistently available to problem-solve with teachers and principals as issues arise.

## David Barrutia Place 7

It is the superintendent who is directly responsible for the district's day-to-day operations, not the trustees. For the school board, giving faculty and staff clear guidance and communication, about sensitive issues like race and gender, begins with setting the right tone with the superintendent and holding him accountable. The tone given should be one that standardizes a code of conduct and prioritizes defending the rights and wellbeing of our teachers and staff, during times of controversy. Accountability of the superintendent should be based on direct feedback from teachers and staff, including exit interviews. With clear guidance and accountability, teachers will be able to talk more openly about race and gender. Ideally, the conversations do not need to be over-sensitized, too. Conversations can have a meaningful impact even with simple greetings. For example, as a substitute teacher calling out names when taking attendance, I noticed Hispanic students in our district would look up with surprise when I read their names using a Spanish accent. One student even said that it was the first time a teacher ever pronounced their name correctly. There is so much more we can do.

#### Jay Lamy Place 7

The teachers need to focus on the subject they are teaching. Discussions of race, gender, religion, politics or socio-economics do not belong in the classroom unless it is a class like history where race, politics, religion or socio-economics plays a part of the historical significance associated with the topic. If people identify a certain way, respect them and identify them however the person wishes to be identified, but a discussion on why they identify that way doesn't belong in the classroom. Too many people have differing opinions and math class is not a safe place for that discussion to occur. The math teacher shouldn't have to worry about it and should have the authority to put an end to any conversation or action that doesn't pertain to their class subject matter.

HCMS Student Question: There are many students who are experiencing racism and prejudice in our schools and do not feel like they can report it OR do not feel like there is any action taken when they do. What will you do to ensure that students' concerns are addressed?

#### Heather Sheffield Place 6

We have been working hard to make our schools a safe and inclusive place for all of our students but we still have work to do. As adults, we need to model having respectful discussions and learn from each other in a productive and healthy way. Our kids are watching. I hope that students will find a staff member they trust to report issues to and use the quick report on the website in the instance they don't feel comfortable talking about it. Staff continues to be trained on how to handle these situations. With the expansion of the DEI small groups and campus equity committees, I'm hopeful that more student voices will be heard and valued. Having the student voices at those meetings has been most beneficial in my opinion because they are the reason we are doing this work and because a lot of the community hasn't heard from them. We need to make our schools feel safe and supportive and we need our community to support that and all of our kids.

#### Jim Withers Place 6

This breaks my heart and can not happen in our schools. We need a culture of action on our campuses, racism and prejudice have no place. We need strong and clear disciplinary guidelines. We need to continue to invest in our district wide process for measuring the improvement around these topics. We need to educate our student bodies on what constitutes racism and prejudice and make the steps clear on how to approach counselors, teachers and principles when these issues arise. Additionally we need to work towards a culture of compassion where other students can help identify and report when they hear of these actions. It takes a village to root out hate and we must empower all stakeholders. We need to educate our teachers and campus leaders on how to be more alert around these issues. We cannot rest on this topic until we have removed all types of these behaviors.



Q6 answers by Place 7 candidates continues on page 12.

HCMS Student Question: There are many students who are experiencing racism and prejudice in our schools and do not feel like they can report it OR do not feel like there is any action taken when they do. What will you do to ensure that students' concerns are addressed?

#### Ellen Balthazar Place 7

This goes back to my answer in Question 3. I will be looking to the Campus Improvement Plans to identify how they will foster a campus culture that is confidential, safe, and actionable. The second part of the question – the fear that no action will be taken – is the harder one to address, in my opinion, because recourse taken on an issue can not always be shared (FERPA, HIPPA, personnel, discipline, etc.). Often it takes multiple "baby-steps" before a tipping point is reached and the "action" becomes apparent.

## David Barrutia Place 7

Racism and prejudice exist in Eanes. I have seen it. I have reported it. And it is unacceptable for students to feel like they cannot report it. It is essential for leadership to acknowledge that we have a problem. Public denial impedes our capacity to resolve the issue. I will ensure families have all the information, tools and encouragement to never hesitate reporting racism and prejudice, and I will personally follow up in my oversight role. Children are not born with racism and prejudice. It is learned, so we also need a plan to deal with the root cause, not just the symptoms. In Eanes, we hold up a Green Umbrella of Kindness but adults often fall short of those standards, whether through the culture of fear that teachers feel subjected to, or the smearing during elections. Toxic positivity is the phenomenon that schools around the country describe experiencing when too much emphasis is placed on positivity at the expense of facing and addressing difficult but valid concerns. As a result, more schools are elevating the concept of "dignity" above "positivity". It is worth considering for our community. Treating people with dignity is the basis for treating people with kindness.

### Jay Lamy Place 7

Racism and bully behavior is unacceptable in any way shape or form. The young victim needs to feel heard because the repercussions could be absolutely detrimental to their psyche and esteem and create long term ailments. Any accusations need to be brought to the principal of the school where the occurrence happened. The accused needs to know who his accuser is and what he/she is accused of, so at a minimum they can defend their position. The bully needs to be punished relative to the degree of the prejudice and the intent behind the prejudice so that their behavior can be curbed and they can be reintroduced back into the community. All cases need to be documented and categorized by type of bullying and seriousness of intent so we can track progress over time. Additionally, to ensure student involvement in the process, we could employ a student Discipline Committee the way St. Stephens Episcopal School does.



#### Voting Resources

#### **Ballot Information**

2 Eanes ISD Board seats are on ballot: <a href="http://vote411.org">www.eanesisd.net/board/election</a>
For your custom ballot & voter guide <a href="http://vote411.org">http://vote411.org</a>

#### When & Where to Vote

Early Voting: Mon, April 25, 2022 - Tues, May 3, 2022 Election Day: Saturday, May 7, 2022

**Voting Locations: EISD Admin Building & Riverbend** 

Center

#### **Candidate Websites**

#### Place 6:

Heather Sheffield - <u>Heatherforeanes.com</u> Jim Withers - <u>Jimforeanes.com</u>

#### Place 7:

Ellen Balthazar - <u>Ellenforeanes.com</u>
David Barrutia - <u>davidforeanes.com</u>
Jay Lamy - <u>Jlamyforeanes.com</u>

Eanes for Equity is an all-volunteer organization and we appreciate your support! Please consider donating, signing up for newsletter, and sharing with your friends.

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