

HPISD SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEE, JAE ELLIS

ON READING/LITERACY INSTRUCTION

On March 31, HPISD's ELA subcommittee announced the results of its months-long evaluation of literacy instruction methods and materials. It recommended that HPISD remove Lucy Calkins Units of Study and align literacy instruction with the Science of Reading.

Leading up to the subcommittee's announcement, I shared the concerns raised by many in our community, and I applaud the diligence with which the subcommittee and administration researched, investigated, and now have addressed those concerns. At the April 19 School Board meeting, **I plan to vote to remove Lucy Calkins Units of Study and align literacy instruction with the Science of Reading, and I expect for Lucy Calkins to be phased out and replaced.**

Although I understand that many parents were frustrated because the process took a long time, I am reassured that **the deliberate and thoughtful process worked.** This is a significant change, and no school district should make such changes without thorough reflection and study. I am confident that the result of the process will be substantial change to provide better literacy instruction for all HPISD students.

While the subcommittee was performing its independent evaluation for many months, I spoke and met multiple times with leaders of the Literacy Coalition and other concerned parents and community members. I participated in dozens of hours of phone conversations with concerned parents and community members, attended multiple discussion sessions and presentations, watched video presentations, and studied hundreds of pages of correspondence, reports, articles, and other information prepared and shared by experts, concerned parents, and educators. I cannot commend the Literacy Coalition enough for their thoughtfulness, respect, and collaborative approach.

During these conversations, I heard from the parents of many HPISD students who struggled with the district's balanced literacy approach, and also from many parents whose children have required private tutoring in attempts to accomplish success with basic reading skills. It became clear that **under the balanced literacy approach and through workshop model, too many HPISD students were falling behind.**

The research I received and read convincingly demonstrated that our district must deliver a structured approach to literacy, including code based, explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction in order to foster successful development of reading skills for the vast majority of students.

HPISD leadership has a process that works. And that process worked here. It started with appointment of a subcommittee to investigate the concerns and potential solutions. School Board President Tom Sharpe appointed Trustees Maryjane Bonfield, Stacy Kelly, and Bryce Benson as the three Trustees to serve on the subcommittee. (By law, the other three Trustees and I were prohibited from attending or participating in the subcommittee's meetings. Therefore, the four of us who were not members of the subcommittee could only learn about its progress when the subcommittee reported back to the board, periodically, during public board meetings.)

Throughout the subcommittee's evaluation of HPISD's approaches to literacy instruction, I consistently and continually assured the concerned parents with whom I spoke that I understood and shared their concerns and that I had confidence in the district's process for evaluating and improving literacy instruction.

I am extremely thankful to the many people who worked together to achieve this great result. Although I worked behind the scenes communicating with community members and providing support, leadership, and oversight, **I do not personally claim credit for the positive result** of the ELA subcommittee's months-long evaluation of literacy instruction methods and materials.

It would be disingenuous and insulting to the dedicated people who worked so hard to make this change for any political candidate to wrongly try to claim credit for their hard work, especially when the Literacy Coalition expressly disavowed any connection to any candidate or group.

- I am thankful for the leaders of the Literacy Coalition for all of their research, advocacy, and other hard work. I am also thankful that they remained cooperative and diplomatic throughout a long process of advocating for substantial change within our school district.
- I am thankful for the numerous parents and community members who enthusiastically shared their concerns and experiences with district leadership in a collaborative manner without ever trying to tear down our school district or our community.
- I am thankful for the 3 Trustees and 2 Administrators who served on the ELA subcommittee (and the numerous teachers, Principals, and other school district staff) who spent hundreds of hours working on the task of determining whether to replace the district's balanced literacy framework.

All of these people are great examples of why HPISD has been, is, and will continue to be, the best public school district in the state – because **our community members care so much about always improving our schools, and because they are committed to working in ways that unify, rather than divide, our community.**