



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Human Rights Commission

Recommendation Number: 20191125-003b: Race and Equity within Austin Independent School District's School Closures and Consolidations Plan

WHEREAS, on November 18, 2019, the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees approved (in a 6-3 vote) a plan to close, consolidate and repurpose four elementary school campuses: Brooke Elementary School, Metz Elementary School, Pease Elementary School and Sims Elementary School; and

WHEREAS, Brooke E.S., Metz E.S., and Sims E.S. (3 out of the 4 schools that were approved for closure) are disproportionately placed in the city's historically segregated East Austin neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, nearly 95% of the students at each of the three aforementioned campuses identify as being either Hispanic and/or African-American students, and nearly 90% or more of the students at each of these campuses identify as being economically disadvantaged; and

WHEREAS, Austin ISD has previously closed historically Black and Hispanic schools (Old L.C. Anderson, Kealing Junior High School, Pearce Middle School, etc.) that have been identified as “bonding agents for the community”; and

WHEREAS, particularly communities of color, and communities in East Austin, have been vocal about their mistrust of Austin ISD due to its history of segregation, discrimination, and a lack of robust and authentic community engagement; and

WHEREAS, the Austin ISD Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Stephanie Hawley, stated moments before the Board of Trustees decision to approve the ‘School Changes’: Closures and Consolidations plan that, “...the map that you have of the [school] closures, is a map of what 21st Century racism looks like...,” “Our process for selecting schools was flawed and it was inequitable...,” and “I can't find any documentation of how those selections were made, and I talked to all of our staff.”; and

WHEREAS, Austin City Council Members Natasha Harper-Madison, Leslie Pool, and Kathie Tovo all publicly joined forces with other state representatives, county commissioners and local community leaders by asking Austin ISD to postpone its vote for more consideration;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Human Rights Commission recommends that the members of Austin City Council submit a request for the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees and/or the Superintendent to:

1. Publicly issue a letter of apology to the four school communities with students that may be negatively affected by the school closures and consolidations plan that included a “map of what 21st century racism looks like” and for disregarding the public statement by the district’s very own well-qualified Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Stephanie Hawley; and

2. A strategic plan of action (that is co-created with the district's Chief Equity Officer) and will be utilized by the district in order to correct the Board of Trustee's decision to proceed forward with school closures and consolidations while using a "21st century map of racism," and disproportionately closing schools with extremely high percentages of African-American, Hispanic, and low-socioeconomic student populations.

Date of Approval: November 25, 2019

Record of the vote: 7-0. Motion to adopt by Commissioner Breckenridge, Commissioner Jamarr Brown second. Voting in favor were Chair Davis, Commissioner Breckenridge, Commissioner Garry Brown, Commissioner Jamarr Brown, Commissioner Casas, Commissioner Griffith, and Commissioner Santana. Vice Chair Caballero, Commissioner Museitif, Commissioner Weigel, and Commissioner White were absent.

Attest: Jonathan Babiak

Jonathan Babiak
Staff Liaison, Human Rights Commission