



Questions for Candidates for School Board Trustee From the Conservative Coalition of Harris County

This questionnaire has two parts; a short answer section to go onto the Voter's guide and long answer section that will be posted onto the conservative coalition of Harris County website for public viewing.

Candidate Name	Position that Candidate is Running For
Michael Pratt	Tomball ISD Board Trustee Position #2
<p>Thank you for the previous Conservative Coalition of Harris County endorsement!</p> <p>I look forward to our visit to discuss issues in more depth. I like your organization's Core Principles. I am a Conservative with the Right Values exemplified in my conduct as a Husband, Father of students in TISD, a Military Veteran and in my actions and votes as a TISD Board Member.</p>	

Short Answer Question Form: Please indicate your position with the following abbreviations. (SF-Strongly favor, F-Favor, U-Undecided, O-Oppose, SO-Strongly oppose, NR-No Response, or Yes/No)

Question	Answer
Are the district superintendent's salary and benefits in line with their performance?	Yes
Should the school board trustees have term limits?	SF I would add that the most effective members are those with children in the District's schools.
Should the district propose a bond issue for expanding ISD facilities and/or services at this time?	SO Bond 2017 with 74% support is in process
Should any district resources go to parents that home school their children?	SF Home School parents are taxpayers!

Long Answer Question Form. Please give your answer to each of the following questions and please include your rationale with each answer. Please be concise & clear.

1.

Why have you entered this election?
Answer: I am running for the Tomball ISD Board of Trustees because I am passionate that our students be Life-Ready through college, career and/or military readiness. I want to continue to serve like I did in the U.S. Marine Corps. I am a current parent of TISD students, a taxpayer, and I have TISD School Board experience that has contributed to our “A” grade in academics and the best financial stewardship of taxpayer’s dollars.

2.

What are the two main issues facing the district? What is your solution to these problems?
Answer: Managing the highest student enrollment growth (~7% yearly) in the Texas Gulf Coast area is critical as well as decreasing local dependency on taxes for education. I have the experience that our community needs to strike this balance of growth and conservative financial soundness while advocating that our State of Texas Legislators fix the school finance formula.

3.

What can be done to improve the ISD bond ratings? Does the ISD need more funding due to growth or change in demographics?
Answer: In Texas, Tomball is ONE of 16 districts that have an AA+ rating with S&P (<i>out of 1,022 possible school districts</i>). Tomball ISD has the high grade credit quality with Standard & Poor’s AA+ and Moody’s Aa1 financial ratings. These ratings allow TISD to borrow money at a much lower interest rate for construction projects, saving our taxpayers millions of dollars in interest against Bonds where we can invest those Dollars in the classroom. We are in implementation of Bond 2017 to support the growth and I would add that I have decreased our TISD tax rate in my time on the TISD Board.

Reference for Tomball ISD Financial Awards and Recognition:

https://www.tomballisd.net/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=308054&type=d&pREC_ID=710923

4. What good things are happening in the district and should be enhanced or continued?
- Answer:**
- Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment is going really well. Our recent overall TISD "**A**" **Rating** (Exemplary performance in Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps) is a big deal and a direct result of focus through a **5 year strategic plan** and a great teacher and staff partnership. I will **remain vigilant** to maintain "A" with the development of the next 5 year strategic plan.
 - Our District's financial condition is one of the **best in the State of Texas**. High grade bond ratings by S&P and Moody's are the proof while lowering & maintain tax rate. I will remain **vigilant on stewardship of taxpayers' dollars** while managing our high enrollment growth.
 - **Improved school safety and security** measures through security vestibule build-outs, install of controlled access equipment, buzzers and cameras on exterior doors, more assertive identification and questions of visitors, validation and rehearsal of emergency operations as well as better reporting of bullying and safety threats.
 - Our Tomball Community is pleased with our School Districts Academic and Financial health and is seeking **consistency and stability with Michael Pratt**.
5. What is the proper role of TASA and TASB with respect to independent school boards?
- Answer:** TASA and TASB roles are to support Texas Public Schools through training and advocacy. TASB membership includes 1,028 Texas school districts serving 5.3 million students. TASB is dedicated to the preservation of **local control** of public education. **I agree we need more local control**. I would add that I was a large advocate for TISD becoming a **District of Innovation** and our innovation plans are about **local control**.
6. What things can your district superintendent do to improve the ISD?
- Answer:**
- Work with fellow School Board Trustees and Superintendent (*Team of 8*) to develop the next **5 year strategic plan** that improves upon our strong academic and finances as well as manages the student growth of our District.
 - Find **additional revenue sources** for teachers and students in the classroom. Leverage central office talent for more "for fee" training courses to other districts, continue to find grants like HEB Excellence in Education, Tomball Regional Health Foundation and Young Sheldon STEM initiatives (*i.e.* \$230K+)
7. Is your superintendent's compensation in line with job performance? Why or Why not?
- Answer:** Yes, the Superintendent is meeting or exceeding expectations and we have an aligned salary. I would add that when compared to school districts in our geographic region, our Superintendent salary is \$57,000 LESS (*19% lower*) than the region average. *Source: 2017-2018 Texas Association of School Boards Human Resources Survey*

8. Is the current funding allocation within district spending categories (between administration, facilities, teachers, etc.) adequate? Why or Why not? If not, what areas of spending can be changed and how do you propose to correct it?
- Answer:** I believe that we need to **manage taxpayers' money as if it were coming from our own pockets** and it shows in the quality of education we are able to offer due to recent TEA "A" rating and our financial management practices. Current funding allocation for Tomball ISD is 87% for instruction and student support, 3% general administration and 10% non-student support of the \$130M budget.
- Education is people intensive and salaries are a high percentage spend and TISD is ~7% yearly student growth, I have and will continue to scrutinize hiring plans to ensure we are **only hiring what is needed**. I want to see the 10% non-student support mix decrease as a percent. One area that I would like to continue to focus on is lowering the \$11M that TISD spends yearly on Plant Maintenance & Operations. One example for savings that I have identified is **lowered spend on electricity for lights and air conditioning** of buildings outside the main campuses that are not utilized at certain points of day and all weekend.
9. What is your overall view of the operating budget of the district? Does TRE funding need to be increased or decreased? What items need to be expanded or cut from the operating budget?
- Answer:** I have been advocating for Teachers and their retirement protection through our Board advocacy efforts. In Texas, 95 percent of school district employees have not paid into Social Security, which means they rely on TRS annuity checks as their only source of retirement income.
- Financial instability and premium increases have forced a record high number of retired Texas teachers to leave TRS-Care. Fewer retirees paying into the program has only made the deficit worse. State legislators need to continue to address as our teachers work incredibly hard for decades to educate Tomball's youth and they deserve a retirement free of financial stress and retirement plan instability.
- What I want and will advocate for...the State to **fix TRS-Care's long-term structural deficit**.

10. What can be done to save money and/or eliminate waste within the school district? Can any services / positions / etc. are you committed to transfer from the district to the private sector to save ISD funds?
- Answer:** I agree with Governor Abbott that we need to **reduce the burden of increasing local property taxes** for education and advocate in Austin for alternative state funding.
- With **local taxpayers already shouldering 85%** of the cost of educating TISD students, the district is now among the so-called “Chapter 41” districts that must share the wealth through recapture, which means the Tomball community is **sending millions of Tomball dollars collected from local taxpayers back to the state** to distribute to other school districts (*\$1.45M in 2016/2017 school year*). I want to **save that money** for our District and for our classroom. I am open to alternatives and we just need to get the right model in place.
- On outsourcing and saving taxpayer money for Bond 2017, I am committed to **permanent elimination of the TISD “Construction Department”** and outsource the people and effort to a professional program management agency that will yield \$ savings and better program manage the delivery construction projects to exceed scope, schedule, and budget.
11. What is your long-term strategy or strategies for improving the quality of education and keeping pace with student growth within the district?
- Answer:** I stand behind TISD’s educational results because we deliver for students. Our recent overall TISD **"A" Rating** (*Exemplary performance in Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps*) is proof that the district typically performs well on state standardized tests and accountability measures.
- Texas’ focus on high-stakes, standardized testing has forced teachers, students and schools to spend precious instruction time drilling students for multiple-choice tests at the expense of activities that demand creativity and critical thinking.
- What I want and I will advocate for:
- **Hold all schools funded with state dollars to the same statewide standards.**
 - **Dial back testing with a reasonable reduction in the number of state assessments.**
12. Is student performance adequate within your district? What can be done to improve overall student performance?
- Answer:** Yes but we must never stop efforts for continuous improvements in curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- Tomball ISD achieved “A” Rating** in TEA 2017-18 Accountability Ratings
- “Straight A’s” in each Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps
 - 47 Distinctions earned with 15 Campuses earned “A” Rating (*including ALL THREE high schools*)
- Great performance, but now to **work on the details within grade level as well as campus results by grade.**

13. Is teacher performance adequate within your district? Are teacher's salaries adequate given current state budget condition? What can be done to improve overall teacher performance?

Answer: Again, great performance and kudos to our teachers and staff for the TISD achievement of "A" Rating in TEA 2017-18 Accountability Ratings. We need to recognize this effort yet work on the details within campus results by grade. We need to make sure that we are continuously improving curriculum, instruction and assessment as well as enabling our teachers more professional development. I agree with Governor Abbott that we need to pay our best teachers more and prioritize spending in the classroom and reduce the burden of skyrocketing property taxes. I join the Governor in advocacy that the State of Texas will have to provide more and adequate funding.

14. What type of teacher evaluation system and administrator evaluation system do you support?

Answer: I support the current Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Support Systems (*T-TESS and T-P ESS*). For teachers, T-TESS captures the holistic nature of teaching via a feedback loop between teachers and students and measures the effectiveness of teachers. The T-TESS process requires a steady focus on student's response to teacher's instructional practices. Components include goal setting and a professional development plan, evaluation and student growth measures. For Principals, T-P ESS is designed to support principals in their professional development and enable growth and improvement as their school and instructional leader. Components include capturing the effective practices of high-performing principals, progress in achieving goals and initiatives and student growth.

I would add that in TISD, we enhance T-TESS and P-TESS because we have the distinction of being a **District of Innovation**. While we use the Texas evaluation and support system, we also **leverage best practices to develop local instruments and process** that fits the needs of TISD. The locally developed teacher and principal appraisal practices reflect the strengths, areas of concern and goals for TISD.

15. What role should/will the internet, visual classrooms and technology play in the development of future curriculum for the district?
- Answer:** Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment drives Technology! Technology is a supporting tool for teachers and students. Use of technology can enhance students' learnings. I am a proponent of use of technology like my recent classroom observations at the Elementary level where teachers & librarians use videoconference to bring in guest speakers and incorporates video and audio technology to enhance the learnings. I have recently observed middle school and high school teachers using multi-media classroom presentations including clips from the Internet, video, audio, and news archive footage. Curriculum delivered via technology (devices like iPads) are greatly assisting our special needs children greatly. The learning can come alive for students using technology but I also believe that we need to be balanced as a teacher's opinion or story telling remains effective.
- The pace of technology is very high and our students can be slowed down in their use if our teachers and staff are not comfortable with use in a classroom setting. In order to be more successful, TISD needs to make sure that we are continuing our efforts to enhance the skills of our teachers and staff through technology professional development.
- I would add that with technology there is responsibility by the District and the Students. For me, it is essential that students, parents and staff understand Internet safety and digital citizenship and the rules of safe and purposeful online communication. To this end TISD, I have sponsored the establishment of an Acceptable Use Policy and Digital Citizenship to address these areas of concern while utilizing technology resources at school. Further, we are educating our stakeholders with resources to help ensure that our students, parents, and staff (to include low cost Internet service) can increase their chances of having a safe, positive, and rewarding online experience outside of school.
16. Do you support reduction of school district ESL funding? Why or why not?
- Answer:** Around two-thirds of Texas residents speak solely English while balance speak other languages. I want to limit any excessive spending. However, we have a Federal obligation to educate children that legally enroll in our District. My focus with the Superintendent is on accelerating use of English via the proper application of curriculum, instruction and assessment to achieve that outcome. My goal is to ensure college, career and military readiness for our students...I want them to be Life Ready and in the United States English is an important to that end.

17. What role should the federal government play in local schools? Should the district move toward common core standards to gain more federal monies?

Answer: Despite dwindling financial support, the state and federal governments continue to pass laws or issue regulations that impact TISD’s bottom line, without supplying the funding needed for implementation.

These laws or regulations include onerous testing requirements, data reporting and adding personnel, supplies, or trainings for staff. While many of the mandates are well intentioned, they are often redundant and overly proscriptive. Every year the list grows while school district budgets often stagnate or shrink. The issue is not whether these mandates are made in good faith or whether the government has a right to impose them. The issue is the increasing strain they place upon thinning school budgets. As much as the district would like to meet every requirement and provide extra services, it’s very difficult with no additional money.

School Lunch: **I voted “NO” for price increases** driven by a Federal mandate to dictate school lunch menu and prices.

What I want: **If lawmakers or bureaucrats feel the need to issue mandates that impact school district budgets, they should allocate the funds to implement them.**

18. Would you support replacing the property tax system of financing public schools? What would your ideal replacement revenue source consist of?

Answer: With local taxpayers already shouldering most of the cost of educating Tomball ISD students, the district is now among the so-called Chapter 41 districts that must share the wealth through recapture, which means sending millions of dollars collected from Tomball taxpayers back to the state to distribute to other school districts. I am open to alternatives like use of “Rainy Day” funds...we just need to get the right model in place. Amount TISD paid in recapture fees in 2016-2017 was \$1.45M.

What I want:

- **Adequately fund the entire public school system** with a “top-to-bottom transformation.”
- **Fix funding formulas** to provide equitably for all students and adjust fairly for educationally disadvantaged students, English language learners, and others who need more support.
- Allow **local school boards more flexibility** to raise and lower taxes within a voter-approved limit.

19. What is your strategy to handle the growing and changing demographics of the student population in the district?
- Answer:** One of the top discussions that occurs with the TISD Board and the Superintendent & Staff is about TISD being a destination district and our need to manage the ~ 7% yearly growth (one of the highest growth Districts in the 50+ Gulf Coast area School Districts). We actively are monitoring development and housing starts and tweaking the family size expectations that translates to future enrollment. We are also managing Limited Open Enrollment to assist our funding. We are also working to ensure understanding the social and economic patterns and planning for changing enrollment patterns. As part of our next 5 year strategic planning effort that includes educators, parents, students, and the business community, we will be studying and planning for population distribution, as well as economic and social patterns. It is critical for TISD to rapidly serve our changing community.
- What I want is to stop using Eminent Domain when governments need land and there are alternatives.
- I voted “No” for use of Eminent Domain** in August 2018 despite the recent School Board approved use to acquire a long time farming family’s land when TISD had other land alternatives. Vote was 4 to 2 with an abstain.
- Eminent Domain is government overreach. I fundamentally respect ownership and private property rights. Seizure of private property by the government (*with compensation to the owner*) when there are alternatives is wrong.**
20. What are your opinions regarding bathroom privacy policies?
- Answer:** The Tomball Community expects boundaries between genders and I support that bathroom use should match the sex listed on the birth certificate.
21. What steps would you take to ensure public notice, access and input on the trustees' approval of instructional materials to cover 100% of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills?
- Answer:** This question should be directed to a State Board of Education candidate but I will weigh in that the SBOE should absolutely be holding public hearings on instructional materials under consideration for adoption and heavily utilize public input as part of the selection process.

Supporting documentation for my answer to “Why have you entered this election?”

Sharing an unsolicited Facebook post by a parent to me on September 24, 2018. Wow!



BY RETURNING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, THE CANDIDATE ASSUMES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. THE ANSWERS ON THE FOREGOING REFLECT THE CANDIDATE'S BEST EFFORTS TO ANSWER THIS QUESTIONNAIRE HONESTLY AND DIRECTLY.

Once this questionnaire has been completed, please email it to: alex@cchc-pac.org.

Please note: You must return your questionnaire from the email address to which it was sent. Questionnaires returned from any other email address will be considered fraudulent and will not be recorded and no answers will be published in the voter's guide. CCHC deems a return from the proper email address as authentication of the correct respondent.