

Hannah Smith, Candidate for CISD School Board, Place 5

1. What is your experience with gifted education?

I am the mother of three Dragons who are in the Gifted and Talented Program—one in Quest at Walnut Grove Elementary and two in G/T classes at Durham Intermediate and Carroll Middle Schools.

2. How well do you think Carroll ISD is serving our G/T and academically advanced population, overall and in the DVA or hybrid models?

Our family has had a great experience with G/T services. My three G/T Dragons are in-person learners this year and have really enjoyed their teachers, classes, and fellow G/T classmates.

For the elementary grades, the Quest program pulls G/T students out for advanced learning that is truly excellent. But, I am concerned that elementary G/T students may not be challenged sufficiently in the rest of their classes. Great teachers stretch all their students, and there are many ways to address this concern: (1) reduce the amount of on-level work G/T students must do since they take less time to master it; (2) increase the pace of lessons to allow G/T students time for independent work, and (3) adjust the content so it extends further for G/T students.

For the upper grades, we need to rethink the District's approach to DVA. Our District should create a real distance learning academy (rather than merely putting cameras in classrooms) and dedicate staff to such an academy. A real distance learning academy could benefit our G/T learners by giving them an opportunity to learn at their own pace and participate in more advanced studies.

3. Given that some of our G/T classes currently hold 30+ students, do you believe unique issues surface in a class this size composed entirely of G/T students and what are your thoughts on class size as it pertains to hiring additional faculty?

Low student-to-teacher ratios should be a priority for all of our classes. But, especially in G/T classes, low student-to-teacher ratios are critical because they result in more individualized attention, increased flexibility with curriculum to enhance intellectual investigation, and a more supportive environment due to increased engagement of G/T learners together. We need to focus on bringing down these ratios.

4. With 23% of the CISD student population being identified as GT, how do you anticipate the recently proposed changes in funding at the state level and potential CISD budget changes to affect programs serving G/T and advanced academics programs?

We have been through a year of the most challenging environment of our students' and teachers' lives. The learning loss sustained by our students during the Covid-19 pandemic has yet to be fully assessed. Our District needs to prepare to help our students recoup learning losses so that their future educational prospects continue to be bright. CISD's budget needs to reflect this reality. Protecting our district's G/T and advanced academics programs will be a top priority for me on the School Board.

5. Please share any additional comments to clarify your position on key educational issues.

From Boston to New York to Seattle, G/T programs are being cancelled because of CCAP-like policies that focus on demoting merit and promoting something else instead, mislabeled by its proponents as "equity." In CISD's draft CCAP, the word equity is used over 100 times, but it is not defined. The Oxford American dictionary defines equity as "the quality of being fair and impartial." Equality of opportunity allows students to qualify for programs based on test scores and academic achievement. That is fair and impartial. But proponents of CCAP-like activism believe that "equity" should be redefined to mean equality of outcomes for students. In other words, G/T programs should be cancelled if "too many" white, Asian, and Southeast Asian students qualify for them. I disagree. CISD should continue to provide equality of opportunity to qualify through objective measures for G/T programs. Merit, not identity politics, should remain the organizing principle of the classroom generally, and G/T programs especially.

6. Please tell our members how to find more information about your candidacy.

Please visit my website at www.hannahsmith4cisd.com and join my campaign by clicking on the "Join Me" button.