

The Book-Loving Texan's Guide to the November 2025 School Board Elections

(This is a mobilization tool. Use it to volunteer, donate, and organize in your community.)

Election Day: Tuesday, November 4

Early Voting: October 20 - October 31

Contact: booklovingtexanvotes@gmail.com

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How to Use This Guide & Color-Coded Designations:

I designed this document as a mobilization tool. In other words, while I hope you find it informative, what really matters is that we use the information here to act. Specifically, I hope this document can help people:

- 1) *Support school board candidates who resist book bans and stand up for all students in their district.*
- 2) *Connect like-minded voters with each other and with groups already working in each district.*
- 3) *Tie extremist candidates to their extreme positions.*

To use this document:

- **Collaborate.** This is a working document, and I want to add updates from people closer to the action than I am. If you know something that should be added, please email me: booklovingtexanvotes@gmail.com.
- **Check back.** Information is going to come in quickly, so check back often!
- **Start with groups on the ground.** One of the most important sections on each page is the “Contacts on the ground” box—these are people who either know a lot about what’s going on in a district or have already been working to prop up good candidates and challenge powerful PACs. If you want to organize in a district, start by contacting them.
- **Share.** The more people who see this and use it, the better.

Terminology & Designations:

Candidates highlighted in red are either members of pro-censorship groups (Moms for Liberty, local PACs) or have the support of such groups.

Candidates highlighted in orange echo pro-censorship talking points but don’t have documented links to those groups.

Candidates highlighted in green either have a record of standing up for academic freedom, diversity and inclusion *or* have been targeted by pro-censorship groups and thus need support. This is not necessarily an endorsement—in races with multiple candidates, there may be more than one candidate worthy of this designation.

Candidates not highlighted could be great, or awful, or somewhere in between. As I get more information on them I’ll add it in the notes and change their designations if necessary.

“Contacts on the Ground” are local resources for organizing and information. If this is you, please let me add your name/group here!

Introduction

November 2025 Overview: School Boards are Essential for Protecting the Right to Read

Two recent stories from Texas schools illustrate just how important school boards are for preserving students’ access to books and educational opportunities. In Lamar Consolidated ISD, administrators operating under a new policy implemented by the Board of Trustees to comply with 2023’s House Bill 900 [removed more than 700 books from district shelves](#), including Victoria and Elizabeth Kann’s *Pinkalicious*. A few weeks later, Leander ISD [“paused” the use of forty books](#) for classroom instruction or choice reading—including *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The House on Mango Street*, and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The justification? Senate Bill 12, an anti-“DEI” bill that was passed this May. Apparently an administrator used AI to remove books that potentially violated the law by emphasizing “identity-related content” or “overrepresenting racial or ethnic hardships or struggles tied to systemic discrimination or racism.”

Both stories caused national, even international embarrassment for the districts. In both cases, the districts were reacting to recent laws in ways that seem to fly in the face of common sense. In both cases, the districts made decisions that took from their students obviously beneficial reading opportunities. The

difference? Leander ISD has a board majority that cares about the right to read, while Lamar CISD is led by a group of trustees who campaigned on promises to remove books from district shelves.

Within days, Leander ISD trustees spoke out against the removals in their district, and both listened to and acknowledged the public outcry those removals caused. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The House on Mango Street*, and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* were all returned to classrooms.

Pinkalicious remains banned in Lamar CISD.

Texas lawmakers have spent the past three legislative sessions passing laws with the intent of restricting student learning and taking books out of schools. But the implementation of those laws varies by district. Some districts have forced teachers to remove classroom libraries, taken maximalist interpretations of legal restrictions on student books, and even gone beyond what reasonable interpretations of the law might require. Other districts have not.

In other words: School boards matter.

This is the eighth edition of the Book-Loving Texan's Guide to School Board Elections. November guides are always short, since most Texas school board elections take place in May. But this cycle has some crucial races. For example:

- In Cy-Fair ISD (116,000 students), control of the board is once again up for grabs after book banners took over the board in 2023. This year, three strong, pro-book and pro-public-ed candidates are fighting for seats on a board that has in recent years gone so far as to [turn off chapters in online science textbooks](#) dealing with topics such as climate change and vaccines.
- In Granbury ISD, one of the state's [most outspoken Christian Nationalists](#) is leading a slate of candidates who hope to push the already conservative board even further to the right.
- In Princeton ISD, two candidates with [connections](#) to voucher-loving billionaire Monty Bennett are running for re-election after decimating the district's libraries and shutting down classroom collections.

Those are three of the five races that lead this cycle's edition of The Book-Loving Texan's Guide. They illustrate why November's results will shape the education of hundreds of thousands of Texas students.

Basic Background: The Way to Win

The rules for defeating pro-censorship candidates are simple: organize and inform. Banning books and attacking vulnerable students are unpopular positions, but candidates who support those positions have won too many races for three reasons: 1) pro-censorship forces have a massive organization and fundraising advantage; 2) voters don't know who the book-banning candidates are; and (to a lesser extent), 3) pro-censorship forces have been able to activate partisan instincts in red districts by turning non-partisan school board elections into a fight between Democrats and Republicans.

So what do we do? In the second edition of this guide, I called the path to victory the Eanes/Richardson playbook because of the great groups in those districts that have effectively fought off well-funded slates of pro-censorship candidates. But recent elections have given us many more examples of outstanding community groups doing great work to combat the better-funded, more-established PACs on the anti-inclusion side. Two very different but similarly effective groups that deserve mention are [Access Education Round Rock ISD](#) and the “StandUp” groups in the Houston suburbs [Tomball](#), [Klein](#), and [Conroe](#). If there’s a group like that in your community, join it now. If there’s not, start one. Reach out to the leaders of successful groups to learn how.

Those groups can help you with the “organize” part of the job. But organization depends on information, and that’s where this document comes in. Share what you see here; make it your goal that every voter going to the polls in May knows exactly who wants to ban books from and attack students in your district’s schools.

Guiding Principles & Methodology

A few principles guided the construction of this document:

1. Education requires free inquiry and the exploration of diverse topics and perspectives.
2. Educators have a responsibility to the truth.
3. The classroom should be a welcoming environment for all students.
4. Educators are accountable to *all* students and to the parents of all students in a classroom—not just the loudest parents or the ones that comprise the majority.
5. We can and should consider age-appropriateness when selecting texts for libraries and classrooms, but that’s not the same thing as calling award-winning literature “pornography” or accusing teachers and librarians of being pedophiles who are “grooming” or “sexualizing” students.

With those guiding principles in mind, I looked for information on candidates’ positions on academic freedom, on LGBTQ acceptance in the classroom, and on honest discussions of American history and race relations. I tried to find out: Which candidates are trying to protect academic freedom and which ones are trying to remove books and ideas from schools? Which candidates are scaremongering about “critical race theory” or “porn in schools”? Which candidates are supporting inclusive classrooms and which ones are sending the message that some students are unwelcome in the district?

For each of the contested races in a district, I went through these steps:

1. I looked at the language on hot-button issues on candidates’ campaign websites or Facebook pages. If candidates listed endorsements, I took note of any high-profile supporters.
2. I checked the social media of each candidate (though many have scrubbed or locked their personal accounts).
3. I checked to see what PACs are dedicated to hot-button issues in each district. I tried to discern if PACs have endorsed any candidates yet (not usually) or spent any money to support or attack anyone in the race. When possible, I checked their donor list and membership rolls, and looked at their social media pages to see if any candidates have been active there or have attended their events.

4. Where possible, I tried to determine if each candidate is a member of a Moms for Liberty Facebook group (or a similar group) and, if so, if they are an active member—commenting, sharing, liking, etc.
5. I went through minutes and videos of school board meetings in the district over the past year to see if any candidates have spoken during public comment periods and, if so, what they’ve said.
6. Finally, I checked to see what candidates are saying on local media (local news articles, podcasts, radio hits) or what’s being said about them.

Scope:

I’m from North Texas (Fort Worth), live in Central Texas (Austin), and started my teaching career in Houston (Spring Branch ISD). A lot of book challenges and attacks on educators have taken place in suburban and exurban districts surrounding those places. So, just by focusing on the areas I know best, I’ve been well situated to report on some of the most explosive school district battles in the state.

But the war on education is spreading through the whole state. I will expand this list to include as many districts as I can (prioritizing the most contentious elections), but I’ll need help. If you have information or know of a district that you think needs to be on this list, please email me at booklovingtexanvotes@gmail.com.

Also note: I’ve only looked at contested school board races. Some of the best (or worst) candidates may be running unopposed.

Finally: What if I don’t live in any of these districts?

This is still your fight! I’m a teacher in Austin, and I’m forbidden by law from assigning any essay or poem from the Pulitzer Prize-winning *1619 Project*, even as a part of a balanced collection of perspectives on race in the US. Why? I’d argue it’s a direct result of what has happened in school board meetings and elections since 2021.

In other words: *What happens in these districts doesn’t stay in these districts*. As long as politicians perceive that bullying trans kids, protecting white innocence, or accusing teachers of “grooming” is a winning political issue, they will continue to do it.

So adopt a race and see how you can help. Can you plan a road trip to knock doors? Can you donate to a candidate or a group doing the work on the ground? Can you support great statewide groups like [Mothers for Democracy](#) and [Safe Schools for All](#)? Can you amplify good voices and call out bad actors online?

We need your help!

National and Statewide Resources

- [#FReadom Fighters](#)
- [Book Ban Busters](#) (Red Wine & Blue)
- [Dr. Tasslyn Magnusson’s Book Censorship Database](#) (EveryLibrary Institute)

- [Mothers for Democracy](#)
- [TxLEADSEd](#)
- [Pastors for Texas Children](#)
- [Texas Educators Vote](#)
- [Texans for the Right to Read](#)
- [We Make the Future](#)
- [Book Riot](#) (includes weekly roundup of censorship news)
- [Texas Blue Action](#)
- [Blue Horizon Texas](#)
- [Children's Defense Fund Texas](#)
- [Students Engaged in Advancing Texas](#)
- [Authors Against Book Bans](#)

NEW (ish)!

In December of 2023, I joined a group of Texas parents to launch the [Texas Freedom to Read Project](#). We uncover and publicize information regarding book removals in schools and public libraries, inform voters about elections that affect the freedom to read, train and organize parents to speak up at school board meetings and legislative committees, and amplify the voices of those affected by book bans. [Check us out!](#)

DISTRICTS

Carroll ISD

Notes: I've got nothing but bad news for folks in Carroll ISD who care about inclusive classrooms or keeping books in their schools. Carroll ISD is, of course, one of the early epicenters of the movement to restrict ideas and ban books from schools in Texas, and also the original home of the ultra-divisive, big money trustee campaigns that spread through North Texas via Patriot Mobile and other ...

In this year's special election to fill Place 3, both candidates are running as "conservative Christians" while paradoxically promising to "keep partisan agendas out" of the district. **Mandy Reece** gets the red highlight because she has the support of the entire hyper-partisan and pro-restriction board, along with extremists Tim O'Hare and Patriot Mobile leader Leigh Wambsganss. But that doesn't mean her opponent is any less extreme. If anything, **Scott Martindale** seems to be emphasizing his anti-LGBTQ, anti-book bonafides in response to Reece's high-profile endorsements.

Contested Races	Candidates
Place 3 (Special Election)	Mandy Reece Scott Martindale
Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)	
Place 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandy Reece's campaign announcement on Facebook was cheered by Patriot Mobile magnate Leigh Wambsganss and book-banning trustees Cameron Bryan and Andrew Yeager. Bryan and Yeager have officially endorsed her (along with the entirety of the current board), as has Tarrant County Judge Tim O'Hare. • She also has been endorsed by True Texas Project. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scott Martindale describes himself as a “business and ministry founder” and leads Sevn Therapy, which focuses on “biblical and practical therapy,” as well as Sevn Workforce Solutions, which helps place teachers in educational jobs. • The positions on Martindale’s website seem designed to frame him as unthinkingly “anti-woke” as possible. He says he opposes “boys in girls’ sports or locker rooms,” “Critical Race Theory,” and “divisive DEI programs.” It’s all very 2021, but more to the point, it’s not an attempt to bridge the gap between the current board and the people it has hurt; it reads instead as an attempt to ape or even outdo the board’s positions. To show, in other words, that he is one of them. • Martindale also sits on the board of XO Marriage, a Christian marriage therapy organization whose positions on LGBTQ identities are certainly troubling.
Alternative Candidate(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. Sorry, Southlake.
Contacts on the Ground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southlake Anti-Racism Coalition • Southlake Together
Organizing steps/upcoming events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLEASE CONTACT ME TO ADD—Canvasses, organizing meetings, other events!

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Cy-Fair ISD

Notes: Like two years ago, Cy-Fair ISD is the headline race in this year’s November slate. Once again control of the board is at stake, and once again the difference between the opposing sides could not be starker. On one side, sort-of-incumbent **Natalie Blasingame** has spearheaded the district’s book removals and attempts to censor district textbooks to remove references to climate change, vaccines, and the value of diversity. Blasingame is running alongside **Radele Walker** and **George Edwards, Jr.**, two candidates who match her ideological pitch.

On the other side, candidates **Lesley Guilmart, Cleveland Lane, Jr.**, and **Kendra Camarena** have vocally opposed those measures and consistently stood up for all of the district’s students.

In 2023, book banners won 3 of the 4 seats up for election, in part because their opponents’ votes were split among multiple candidates in two of those races. This year the fracturing seems to be going the other way: Rather than running for re-election in her current position, for example, Blasingame decided to run for fellow extremist **Scott Henry**’s spot in Position 6—and the contest between the two has been acrimonious and ugly. Meanwhile, a bipartisan coalition of commonsense, pro-public school groups,

including [Cypress Families for Public Schools](#) and [Cy-Fair Strong Schools](#), have lined up behind Guilmart, Lane, and Camarena.

Contested Races	Candidates
Position 5	Terrance Edmond Lesley Guilmart Radele Walker
Position 6	Natalie Blasingame (I*) Scott Henry (I) Cleveland Lane, Jr.
Position 7	Kendra Camarena George Edwards, Jr. Elecia Jones
*Blasingame is the incumbent in Position 5. For some reason, she has decided to run for the Position 6 seat this cycle.	
Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)	
<p>Position 5, 6, & 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While I normally sort candidates by position, Radele Walker (Position 5), Natalie Blasingame (Position 6) and George Edwards, Jr. (Position 7) are running so closely together that they share a website. The first issue listed on that website is “books,” and (spoiler alert!) they’re against them. The three claim their insistence on removing books from schools “isn’t about book banning.” They also say that they want to take bias and cultural division out of CFISD schools. Those are questionable assertions from a slate led by incumbent Blasingame, who has set herself squarely at the center of the cultural (and social) divisions in the district, as well as its attempts to restrict student learning. Blasingame, Walker, and Edwards have significant financial backing from CyFair 4 Liberty PAC. One of its largest contributors is hyper-conservative Texas Senator Mayes Middleton, who is currently running to replace Ken Paxton as Attorney General. Blasingame (Position 6) has been a strife magnet in CFISD, even alienating herself from former allies. After ultra-conservative Position 6 trustee Scott Henry voted against adding chaplains to the district, Blasingame decided to run for his seat rather than her own. It was the start of a slew of high-profile spats involving Blasingame and her community. In August, the <i>Houston Press</i> reported on a wild story—Blasingame had secretly recorded and blackmailed community members, including the politically connected wife of one of her fellow trustees. While the Harris County GOP had endorsed Blasingame (and her slate) as soon as filing ended, the <i>Press</i> reported that the party circulated a petition to consider rescinding that endorsement. Walker (Position 5) has held a variety of positions in the district, including bus driver, special education paraprofessional, and assistant principal. Edwards (Position 7) is a retired accountant. In his 2023 campaign for the board, he was endorsed by anti-public school PAC Texans for Educational Freedom. This year, he has been 	

[endorsed by Moms for Liberty-Harris County.](#)

- In 2021, incumbent **Scott Henry** (Position 6) campaigned for his seat on the board against “critical race theory” and district diversity initiatives. After taking his seat, Henry made headlines for the racist implications of [comments he made](#) opposing a district plan to hire more Black teachers. Henry objected to the way his comments were characterized, saying, “Any suggestion that I said ‘More Black teachers leads to worse student outcomes’ is a lie, and those spreading it should be ashamed of themselves.” But it’s hard to read his words as suggesting anything else.
- On the board, Henry has voted to censor chapters from district science and education textbooks.
- Henry’s [30-day campaign finance report](#) shows that he is paying CAZ Consulting, the anti-public school firm led by Christopher Zook that has supported Christian Nationalist candidates throughout the state. The report also shows that Henry has received contributions from fellow trustee Todd LeCompte and from the wife of another trustee, who also is [the leading book-challenger](#) in the district.
- **Elecia Jones** (Position 7) describes herself as an accounting professional in her [district questionnaire](#).
- In a district where hundreds of books have been removed from libraries, teachers and librarians have been slandered as “groomers,” and ideas have been stricken from textbooks, Jones [has said](#) of parents objecting that “acting as though certain books being removed is to the detriment of the students is unfounded and highly sensationalized.” Instead, Jones says she is “actually more concerned about parents who have no clue what’s available fighting to keep everything available to their child.”

Alternative Candidate(s)

Position 5

- Terrance J. Edmond’s application says he is the founder of The Owner School, which the Houston Press describes as a “tech company.” The organization doesn’t have much of an online presence but its [Instagram page](#) says it is “Helping creators launch learning academies” and “Merging education, Web3 & the metaverse.”
- In his [district candidate survey](#), Edmond says, “I am a businessperson. I am an educator first,” and writes that, “I have taught business education at every level: public high school, public charter school, and college.”
- Edmond does not seem to have a campaign website or current Facebook page.
- **Lesley Guilmart** is a former CFISD English teacher and administrator with a master’s degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from the University of Houston. Guilmart’s [website](#) also describes her as “mom of two CFISD students, and proud wife of a CFISD teacher.”
- Guilmart is running alongside Cleveland Lane, Jr. and Kendra Camarena, whom she describes as “both dedicated educators and CFISD parents.” She writes, “All three of us know how to give students what they need on a shoe-string budget and a ticking clock. Together, we will get CFISD back on track with a common-sense, pro-public education approach to leadership.”
- Guilmart, Lane, and Camarena have the support of [Cypress Families for Public Schools](#), as well as [CFISD Advocates for Public Ed](#) and [Cy-Fair Strong Schools](#).
- [Donate to or volunteer for Lesley Guilmart.](#)

Position 6

- **Cleveland O. Lane, Jr.** is an Associate Professor at Prairie View A&M University with a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from A&M. Lane has 26 years of experience in education, and has volunteered for a number of district outreach groups.
- Lane, along with Lesley Guilmart and Kendra Camarena, have the support of [Cypress Families for Public Schools](#), [CFISD Advocates for Public Ed](#) and [Cy-Fair Strong Schools](#).
- [Volunteer for or donate to Cleveland O. Lane, Jr.](#)

Position 7

- **Kendra Camarena** is a former teacher and instructional coach with more than 15 years of experience in education.
- Camarena [says](#) that one of her priorities is to help retain teachers by fostering “a culture of appreciation,” something that has been lacking under the current board.
- Camarena has the support of [Cypress Families for Public Schools](#), [CFISD Advocates for Public Ed](#) and [Cy-Fair Strong Schools](#).
- [Volunteer for or donate to Kendra Camarena.](#)

Contacts on the Ground

If you’re looking for a way to help out in CFISD, these two groups are an excellent place to start:

- Cypress Families for Public Schools is a nonpartisan group dedicated to protecting the district’s public schools. In the interest of informing district voters about trustees’ positions and experience, they have hosted a candidate forums and they are organizing volunteers behind the slate of strong candidates.
- [Donate to or volunteer for Cypress Families for Public Schools.](#)
- Cy-Fair Strong Schools is another great nonpartisan CFISD group working hard to protect and improve CFISD schools. Make sure not to miss the PAC’s [informative blog](#).
- [Donate to or volunteer for Cy-Fair Strong Schools.](#)

If you’re looking for information about the district, you can’t do better than [Bryan J. Henry’s Medium page](#).

Organizing steps/upcoming events

- PLEASE CONTACT ME TO ADD–Canvasses, organizing meetings, other events!

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Granbury ISD

Notes: Granbury ISD, in reliably red Hood County, has settled into an uneasy status quo in the last couple of election cycles. Trustees and voters, horrified by book banners and Christian Nationalists trying to take over the board, have united to hold off the area’s most extreme elements. It’s not a good place for the

district to be: the “moderate” coalition that is hanging onto its spots on the board is made up of folks who ushered in mass book removals a few years ago. (Local expert [Mendi Tackett](#) is indispensable reading on this topic.) But it is far, far better than it could be.

If you’ve listened to NBC’s podcast *Grapevine* or watched the documentary *The Librarians*, you’ve heard about Granbury. [One compelling story](#) in the district involves trustee Courtney Gore, who ran for the board promising to get CRT, indoctrination, and “grooming” out of schools only to discover once she made it to the board that those accusations were off base and that the district is full of dedicated, hardworking, and decent educators.

But you’ve also likely heard of **Monica Brown**, the fundamentalist homeschool mom who has [led the district’s book removal efforts](#), dominating board meetings with her demands that LGBTQ books be removed from libraries and that control over the district’s books be ceded to a local pastor. This year Brown is running for a spot on the board.

Contested Races	Candidates
Place 5	Dr. Calvin Lawrence Monica Brown
Place 6	Barbara Townsend (I) David Rogers
Place 7	Jessica Wark Stuart Neal
Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)	
<p>Place 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no school board candidate in the state of Texas with a bigger collection of red flags than Monica Brown. Watch the trailer for <i>The Librarians</i>. Did you watch it? Okay: the woman who called the cops on GISD librarians for having books like <i>The Bluest Eye</i> on their shelves was Brown, a homeschool mom who regularly appears at GISD board meetings demanding the removal of books. Besides filing a police report (with current trustee Karen Lowery) on GISD libraries, Brown has insisted that the district should let a local pastor vet books for the schools. Again, Brown has homeschooled all of her kids. Her son, Weston Brown, courageously spoke up at a 2022 board meeting about the damage her information-restrictive and anti-LGBTQ did to him growing up. Weston, a gay man, said, “It was one thing when my parents’ beliefs were causing this rift between us and it was just a family matter,” Weston said. “But seeing now that she’s applying those same views to public activism, at a time when so many basic rights are being challenged, I couldn’t stay quiet about that.” Brown has the endorsement of the extremist group True Texas Project. <p>Place 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While all three members of Monica Brown’s slate have been endorsed by the extremist group True Texas Project, David Rogers is most closely aligned with the group. In the last legislative session, Rogers traveled to the Capitol with TTP leaders Julie McCarty and Fran Rhodes to 	

register support for a variety of bad bills, including [Senate Bill 12](#), which [has been used to remove](#) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The House on Mango Street*, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Hear my Cry*, and other books from some Texas schools. Rogers also [endorsed](#) Senate Bill 13, which has been used to [empty classroom libraries around the state](#) and remove books from school libraries.

Place 7

- Information about **Jessica Wark** is hard to come by online. She is a GISD parent and has volunteered in the district quite a bit—including as a library book committee member. She ran for the board in [2023](#) and earned “no rating” from me. This time, though, she has thrown in her lot with Brown and Rogers, which is more than enough to earn a red flag.

Alternative Candidate(s)

Place 5

- Calvin Lawrence has a doctorate in education from Baylor and a master’s degree from Texas Christian University.
- Lawrence’s [website](#) says that he has been an educator for more than 40 years, “including roles as a teacher, coach, principal, assistant professor, and college dean.”
- Lawrence is running on an anti-extremist slate with fellow candidates Barbara Townsend and Stuart Neal. After extremists in the district referred to Lawrence, Townsend, and Neal as “[DEI school board candidates](#),” Lawrence wrote a [defense of the value of diversity](#) that said, in part: “Diversity includes underrepresented people and students with special needs and differing gifts and abilities. In public schools, by law, we do not have the right to exclude or withhold entry based on any of the differences I have previously mentioned. I might not agree with your beliefs, but I will uphold and respect your individual right to practice them. I think that is what makes America the greatest nation on earth.”
- [Donate to or volunteer for Dr. Calvin Lawrence.](#)

Place 6

- Incumbent Barbara Townsend earned an orange highlight from me when she ran for re-election in 2022. Earlier that year, after then-Superintendent Jeremy Glenn ordered LGBTQ-themed books removed from school libraries, board president Townsend said she was 100% behind the superintendent.
- It’s a sign of how dire things remain in Granbury that I’m including her here as an obviously better choice than David Rogers. But she clearly is, and her slate will absolutely help protect the whole of GISD’s student body and resist the politicization of the schools that the area’s most extreme actors hope to accelerate.
- Townsend has been on the board since 2015, and has earned the Master Trustee designation. Her website highlights her experience, fiscal responsibility, and the results she’s brought to the district—STAAR scores have risen for 3 straight years and the board has lowered tax rates.
- [Donate to or volunteer for Barbara Townsend.](#)

Place 7

- Stuart Neal is a Granbury ISD parent and an Assistant District Attorney for Tarrant County. Specifically, he leads the Juvenile Unit of the district attorney’s office. Previously, he worked as Granbury’s City Attorney.
- On his [website](#), Neal writes, “If elected, I will work every day to make sure that every child,

<p>regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic situation will have access to the very best educational opportunities possible.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donate to or volunteer for Stuart Neal.
Contacts on the Ground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adrienne Quinn Martin has been courageous in speaking up for Granbury students at board meetings, and has also been a key source of information on district happenings. She has also become a perpetual gadfly to Monica Brown, who is incapable of being normal about critics. • Martin’s Instagram page cannot be missed. • Former Granbury ISD trustee Chris and Mendi Tackett have been documenting the district’s slide into Christian Nationalism for years. The two are tenacious and absolutely worth following on social media and Substack for information on GISD.
Organizing steps/upcoming events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLEASE CONTACT ME TO ADD–Canvasses, organizing meetings, other events!

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Houston ISD

Notes: The state takeover of Houston ISD will [continue until at least 2027](#). While the district did show some test score gains in 2024, *Texas Monthly* [reported this summer](#) that those were a mirage, since the district “inflated test scores by forcing thousands of students at struggling schools to take STAAR exams a year later than their peers at higher-performing campuses.”

Meanwhile, district parents, teachers, and students continue to express their frustration with the way the district is being run. Libraries have been shut down, teacher autonomy has been squelched, and students report that their schooldays have become joyless slogs focused entirely on test preparation.

Under the state takeover, the HISD board still exists; it just doesn’t have any power outside of an advisory capacity. But the takeover will (presumably) end at some point, and when it does, the candidates elected this year will (presumably) regain their duties and responsibilities. So this election is more than symbolic.

But symbolism matters, too! There is real value in continuing to send a message to the state’s leadership that the direction of a community’s schools needs to be left to members of that community.

Contested Races	Candidates
District 5	Maria Benzon Robbie McDonough

District 6	<div>Kendall Baker (I)</div> <div>Michael McDonough</div>
District 7	<div>Audrey Nath</div> <div>Bridget Wade (I)</div>
Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)	
<p>District 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robbie McDonough is an attorney. Previously, he worked in the oil and gas industry for ten years. McDonough describes himself as “pretty center of the road on things” and says that he’s running to be the sort of trustee whom TEA Commissioner Mike Morath will allow onto the board when the HISD takeover ends. Community Voices for Public Education is pretty wary of McDonough, writing that he “was in favor of the takeover at the outset when it negatively impacted ‘those schools’ in poorer neighborhoods with closed libraries, error-ridden lock step curriculum and massive teacher turnover. He became an opponent of the takeover at the end of the first year as soon as Miles’ dystopian policies impacted his own family.” It’s not enough for an orange or red highlight yet, but it is a big concern from a great group that has done a lot of work to bring community control (and libraries) back to HISD. <p>District 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservative incumbent <div>Kendall Baker</div> described himself as “extremely ecstatic” over the state’s hamfisted takeover of HISD. “Exterminate the place, find the bodies, and head over back to us,” he said. A perennial candidate in Houston area politics, Baker won his spot on the board in 2021, campaigning in opposition to so-called “critical race theory.” <p>District 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incumbent <div>Bridget Wade</div> has been a cheerleader for the state takeover. In her previous election, Wade was endorsed by Houston-area conservative groups for being “strongly against Critical Race Theory in HISD.” 	
Alternative Candidate(s)	
<p>District 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <div>Maria Benzon</div> describes herself as a “certified teacher and administrator with over 25 years of experience as a teacher, district specialist, assistant principal, and professor with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology.” Benzon says that “smart spending” in the district will prioritize “libraries, wraparound services, and teacher pay.” Maria Benzon has the endorsement of Community Voices for Public Education. They write of Benzon that “she will fight for strong schools, support teachers, and ensure parents are partners.” Benzon has also been endorsed by Students Need Libraries, a group dedicated to restoring student access to libraries in HISD. Donate to or volunteer for Maria Benzon. 	

District 6

- **Michael McDonough** is a former high-school and middle-school math teacher who became a principal at several HISD schools. His wife is also a longtime district employee, and his two daughters are HISD graduates.
- McDonough mentions libraries in describing the importance of “whole-child education” as one of his [top issues](#). He writes:

Every student is a unique individual with their own strengths, interests, and needs—and our schools should reflect that. **A whole-child approach means we don’t just teach to a test; we build environments where students feel safe, supported, and inspired to grow.** That includes strong arts programs, time to move and play, welcoming, well-staffed libraries, and opportunities to build critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

- Michael McDonough has the [endorsement](#) of Community Voices for Public Education, who describe him as “a longtime principal of successful schools who knows how to get HISD back on track.” McDonough has also been [endorsed by Students Need Libraries](#).
- [Donate to or volunteer for Michael McDonough](#).

District 7

- **Audrey Nath** introduced her campaign for the District 7 spot by [saying](#), “I’m a neurologist and HISD mom who supports libraries in every school and a return to local control.”
- In fact, Nath lists “Keep libraries alive!” as one of her [top issues](#). She writes:

Throughout my K-12 years, college and medical school, libraries have been critical for getting to where I am today. And, librarians do so much more than checking out books—they help teachers craft a unique reading curriculum for the classroom. Librarians have also helped my own son with dyslexia as his reading level continues to change every week!

Instead of turning [libraries into detention centers](#), we need to prioritize having certified librarians in every HISD school.

- Nath is a Rice grad with an MD and PhD in Neuroscience from UT-Houston. Inclusion and special education support are a special cause for her, and she has [worked hard](#) to try to preserve wraparound services for students needing extra support.
- Community Voices for Public Education has [endorsed](#) Nath, saying, “She knows how children learn, especially students with disabilities, and will fight for every student.”
- Nath has also been [endorsed by Students Need Libraries](#).
- [Donate to or volunteer for Audrey Nath](#).

Contacts on the Ground

- [Houston Community Voices for Public Education](#) is a group that “unites parents, educators, students, and community members of all identities to advocate for strong and equitable public schools.”
- HCVPE has been organizing resistance to the state takeover, holding “block walks for public education” as well as providing information on board meetings, district events, etc.
- [Volunteer for or donate to Houston Community Voices for Public Education](#).

- Charles Kuffner’s website [Off the Kuff](#) (“Texas’ longest running progressive political blog”) is a rich source of information on Houston ISD elections and Houston politics in general. In particular, do not miss his interviews of HISD candidates.
- One more: [Students Need Libraries in HISD](#).

Organizing steps/upcoming events

- PLEASE CONTACT ME TO ADD–Canvasses, organizing meetings, other events!

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Princeton ISD

Notes: Books are playing a significant role in the race for the two open at-large seats on the Princeton ISD board. The district is one of several around the state that has reacted to the passage of Senate Bill 13 by demanding that all of its teachers remove their classroom libraries. Several weeks into the year, the board approved a small list of books (only 39 at the high school level) that could be used to supplement classroom instruction, but not be checked out or taken home by students. Teachers, understandably, have been distraught at the level of restriction they’re facing, and have been speaking up. One 6th-grade ELA teacher had her students write board members to beg for the reinstatement of classroom libraries.

Seven candidates are competing for those two spots this November. The incumbents, John Campbell and Julia Schmoker, were part of the wave of book banners who swept into office in 2022 with the help of big money from pro-voucher, anti-book billionaire money. Specifically, Campbell and Schmoker received [substantial donations from Monty Bennett](#); after their election, they supported Bennett’s scheme to run a voucher-like program through the district. Their election also created deep division on the board—including over book removals. In early 2024, the district removed 148 books from its libraries [at the apparent behest of Christian Nationalist group Citizens Defending Freedom](#). The removals caught some board members by surprise. “We make decisions as a board,” objected trustee Carlos Cuellar.

This year, Campbell and Schmoker have a trio of great challengers in Melissa Ait Benaïd, Sonia Ledezma, and Charlotte Wilson—all of whom are teachers or former teachers.

Contested Races	Candidates
Two at-large trustees will be elected from the field of seven.	Melissa Ait Benaïd John Campbell (I) Sonia Ledezma Patricia McLaughlin Samuel Nevarez Julia Schmoker (I) Charlotte Wilson

Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)

- Incumbent **John Campbell** is a retiree.
- In 2022, he received a large donation from pro-voucher billionaire Monty Bennett and, while on the board, [voted for a crazy voucher scheme](#) backed by Bennette's Texas Foundation for Education Rights, which would allow families around the state to attend private schools on public money through a Princeton ISD school. After the vote, former Princeton trustee Bob Lovelady threw shade: "I don't know how you run for a public school board position and say you're for public schools but want to send your taxpayer money somewhere else."
- Like Campbell, incumbent **Julia Schmoker**'s 2022 campaign was funded by anti-public school billionaire Monty Bennett and, like Campbell, she voted in favor of a [strange, district-centered voucher scheme](#).
- Schmoker [declares](#) that she and fellow incumbent John Campbell are "leading the way in school security, ahead of state laws and cleaning up the libraries." (In fact, as a result of the board's book-banning majority, classroom libraries in the district have been shut down.)
- *Texas Scorecard* reporter Erin Anderson gave Schmoker a [personal shoutout](#) for her efforts in getting 148 books removed from district libraries at [the command of extremist group Citizens Defending Freedom](#) and over the objections of community members and even fellow trustees.
- At a recent candidate forum, Schmoker framed her reason for running for the board as based on a desire to censor ideas and target individual teachers. "I want to protect my kid and all kids from dangerous ideologies that continue to permeate the classroom whether through individual teachers, players in the community, whatever. I'm here to stand against those things," she said.
- Schmoker doubled down on the removal of hundreds of books from district classrooms: "These books that are in libraries all across America, these books were prurient in nature, which means designed to sexually elicit a response from a minor," she said. "There is a reason that law existed in the first place and it is because some teachers somewhere decided to violate the basic rights of children by providing them with sexually explicit material." The books she's referring to were taken from a list that includes the [graphic adaptation of Anne Frank's diary](#), along with classic works such as Richard Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son*.
- Schmoker is a member of the Facebook group for the anti-book group [Families Engaged for Effective Education](#).

Alternative Candidate(s)

- **Melissa Ait Belaid** had a [powerful response](#) after the district banned classroom libraries in response to Senate Bill 13. She lamented:

My own first grader tells me she feels the effects of losing a classroom library, telling me it makes her "sick to her stomach," because she "loves reading." When I asked another PISD teacher about this book banning effort, which is our own local interpretation of Senate Bill 13, she asked "How am I supposed to teach kids how to read without books?"
- Ait Belaid's support for the freedom to read has been consistent. She ran for the board in 2023, and had a great answer to the [League of Women Voters' question](#) on school book bans, stating: "I am committed to maintaining free access to books and educational materials aligned with student curiosity and developmental stage, including access to books and other educational materials that allow students to explore topics outside of prescribed curriculum."
- Ait Belaid has worked as an educator and instructional coach for more than fifteen years.
- [Donate to or volunteer for Melissa Ait Belaid](#).

- **Sonia Ledezma** is a former PISD teacher with a Master's in Counseling with a focus on Student Affairs.
- Ledezma made a strong [statement](#) in response to PISD's ban on classroom libraries: "I believe classroom libraries are essential—not just for academics, but for helping students develop a lifelong love of reading. Books should be accessible, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of the students we serve."
- [Donate to or volunteer for Sonia Ledezma.](#)
- **Charlotte Wilson** is a former Princeton ISD teacher who [says](#) she is running for trustee because "I've seen what happens when people stay silent. I've watched students with special needs fall through the cracks. I've seen bilingual learners treated like an afterthought. I've seen teachers intimidated into compliance. I've lived it—as a teacher, as a parent, and as someone who refused to look the other way."
- Wilson names her [campaign priorities](#) as "equity across campuses, real bilingual education, SPED accountability, and transparency."
- Wilson got fiery in a recent candidate forum over the vague, anodyne responses the incumbents gave over how to support district teachers. "The best way to support our teachers is to tell the truth," she started. "Censorship in the classroom disguised as protecting from dangerous ideologies makes no sense when you're stripping libraries," she continued. Her whole response is worth watching. So is her response to the question about the district's book removals. "You know what that tells me?" she asked. "You don't trust our teachers. You don't trust your neighbors and your community members." She continued: "We have read the history books—the ones that aren't banned yet—and we know what this leads to. Parents, you've got to step up. Our libraries are safe. They never were dangerous."
- I haven't found a website for Wilson yet, but here is her [campaign Facebook page](#).
- Kay McLaughlin lists her occupation as "rehabilitation counselor" on her [application for candidacy](#).
- Though she voted in the general election in 2024, 2018, and 2016, she has not voted in either a Republican or Democratic primary since 2012.
- I have not found a website or campaign social media page for McLaughlin yet. Will update if that changes.
- Samuel Nevarez describes himself as a small business owner on his [application for candidacy](#).
- The website for Nevarez's campaign is unobjectionable but also doesn't say much. Nevarez [says](#) he is running "because parents deserve a strong voice, teachers need real support, and students must always come first."
- [Donate to or volunteer for Samuel Nevarez.](#)

Contacts on the Ground

- TBD

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UP NEXT:

Klein ISD, Lake Worth ISD