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News

Abilene ISD Q&A 3. How good a job is the Abilene school district doing in using technology in the classroom?

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PLACE 1

Charles Byrn: I believe improvement is needed to upgrade technology in the school district. Schools such as ATEMS and Holland have much better technology than Reagan and Fannin elementaries. We need our kids to become familiar with the newest technology, because of the [Texas Education Agency \(TEA\)](#) projections based on the 2012-2013 technology TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) put in place by the State Board of Education.

Robert Laird: We are working diligently within our budget restrictions to upgrade and improve our technology in the classroom. We could do better. We need to continue to look at funding options, federal, state and private to improve this access. Technology is just one of many tools however, and we must also make sure these tools are right for our programs and teachers.

PLACE 2

Samuel Garcia: Our teachers and staff do an outstanding job of using technology as a tool in the classroom. The issue we must deal with is the lack of funding for technology. I have fought for more technology funding all four years of my first term. Our board was making progress by recognizing that technology is an ongoing expense in our general budget. A decrease in funding by the state was our only setback. On top of a line in the general budget for technology, I would like to see some designation of AISD's fund balance for technology.

Randy Piersall: Considering the funding, Abilene ISD has a strong technology program being implemented K-12. With the amount of money that is allocated, we have a state of the art network system. Administrators have better software to help them track student progress, behavior, attendance and test scores. Resources such as Promethean boards, projection devices, graphing calculators, and Internet connections in all the classrooms strengthen student involvement. Teachers also have access to software and programs to complete their tasks and monitor student and class progress more efficiently and effectively. Unfortunately, the limited allotment for replacing out-of-date technology such as computers, software and memory capability can make us lag behind in providing the most current technology available. Also, with the rapid development of new and updated software, continual training for the teachers is necessary for successful implementation.

PLACE 7

Shane Davidson: This is very difficult to measure. So much of the technology on our Title I campuses is a direct result of federal funding. Technology has a place in the classroom, but a student must still be able to read, write and calculate. I tie technology to the individual; technology platforms must be an extension of the individual - the teacher or student. If it's not comfortable for the teacher, it will not be engaging; if it's not comfortable for the student, it will not be effective. Technology is not a one size fits all or a "be all, end all" for that matter. Technology should never replace the human element in the learning process. Technology is a platform; the teacher still is the delivery system.

Charlie Wolfe: AISD has a ceiling mounted projector in 1,000 of its 1,200 classrooms, with projectors on carts for the remainder. Of those classrooms, 750 also are equipped with interactive white boards. By this fall, we will have upgraded all the district's computers to the latest Windows Operating System and Microsoft Office. We have established a cycle for replacing our oldest computers each year so we stay current. Our infrastructure is being upgraded by leveraging E-Rate grants, getting \$9 million in work for only \$2.5 million. This allows us to add additional computers in the classroom. We implemented **iStation** at our elementary schools thus saving our teachers hundreds of hours of assessment time so they can invest more time on instruction. Our greatest challenge continues: Provide the training and technical support to the teachers and principals to make more effective use of the technology.

4. Are Abilene ISD students prepared for a successful college or technical education after graduation?

PLACE 1

Charles Byrn: We need to continue the Advanced Placement program, which has been a rising success in the school district. We need to provide more AP classes to students. In regards to technical education, I would say that we need to use the standard set by Midland-Odessa, where there is one academic high school and one trade high school.

Robert Laird: As well as any other student in a public school. Our placement rates in colleges and universities and technical programs are good but could be better. As a board member, I would continue to work for improving our graduation rates. I want us to expand our dual credit courses, where the student can earn college credit for classes taken at high school, expand our career programs so students have an opportunity to earn a living while they pursue education options after high school. Not every student will go to college, but every student should have the ability to continue their education in whatever area interests them.

PLACE 2

Samuel Garcia: I believe a large majority of our students are prepared for a successful college or technical education and an even larger number are prepared to enter the workplace. We cannot be satisfied until we can say all our students are prepared to be successful after graduation. One of the reasons I am seeking a second term is to continue the efforts we have made to eliminate the achievement gap in our district.

Randy Piersall: Given the size of Abilene ISD, opportunities for all students are offered that contribute to the success in the workforce or in post secondary education. Students who choose to come to school, be in the classes, and actively participate in the learning process are prepared to be college bound or pursue any technical education they would like. This requires the involvement of parents, teachers, administrators and support personnel working together to achieve that goal. Abilene ISD provides the environment and the resources for any student to receive a rich opportunity to learn. I do feel like we should look to continue to improve our offerings. I would love to see us match our technical skills training with the current job needs of the community so that when a student graduates, they have a greater likelihood of being employed.

PLACE 7

Shane Davidson: Generalizing to the total student population ... no. Two major obstacles at the secondary level prevent students from being successful at the postsecondary level: One, teaching to the test; and, two, the "redo" option when a student unsuccessfully negotiates a test or assignment. Both of these obstacles prevent strong study skills necessary for postsecondary achievement. However, despite these obstacles, students succeed every year and go on to successful postsecondary careers and education. Why? Two reasons: engaged teachers and engaged parents. Student engagement experts Tinto and Kuh remind us that the greatest predictor of student success is parental involvement. The district needs to continue to support the College Prep Initiative, continue to partner with local universities to expand the dual-credit early college program, and we must expand our career and technical opportunities for students.

Charlie Wolfe: AISD's Advanced Placement and pre-AP programs are some of the best in the nation - starting in sixth grade and finishing with a choice of 25 AP classes in our high schools. Along with that, 31 dual credit courses are offered by our local universities at rates discounted 90 percent below their normal rates. ATEMS engineering and computer science high school is benefiting from sharing a campus with TSTC, providing both an outstanding facility and cost savings which allows us to afford such a unique, project based learning experience with 1-to-1 computer ratio. Holland Medical High School is a collaborative partnership with HSU located on their campus. Students can enroll in upper-level health science courses and earn industry certifications, creating the possibility for them to attain higher paying health care jobs.

5. What are future facility needs that need to be addressed by the Abilene ISD?

PLACE 1

Charles Byrn: Future facility needs include building a whole new Bowie elementary. I am encouraged by the renovations going on right now, but I feel a lot more needs to be done. Cameras also need to be installed at every school, not just for a select few. When I was substituting at Abilene High, I noticed a lot of empty classrooms and buildings not being used during certain times. We could be using those rooms for other purposes.

Robert Laird: Our youngest students attend our oldest schools. We need to continue to improve our long range facility plan of maintenance, renovation and replacement. Martinez Elementary School is a good example of how that plan can work. The two elementary schools replaced by the Martinez school were beyond their economic lives. It was less expensive in the long term to replace them rather than continue to restore and maintain the older buildings. We must evaluate all our schools on a regular schedule, improve where we can and replace when we must. For example, the Bowie addition will eventually need to be part of a complete replacement of that school. Preparing for that replacement now will allow us to budget appropriately.

PLACE 2

Samuel Garcia: We are in the process of developing a facilities needs plan, which will guide this district for years to come. This plan will allow the district to know what our needs are in future and not continue to just put out fires. One of my top priorities will be the completion of a new campus at Bowie Elementary.

Randy Piersall: With the closing of multiple schools and funding cuts, we have a problem of space in many classrooms. Elementary rooms are set for no more than 22 students. We are putting more than 22 in many classrooms and physically there is not enough space for the desks and students in each room. Two of our middle schools are aging and need renovation, and both high schools are over 50 years old. We have patched these buildings, but they need serious renovations just to be safe for our students. I would like to see AISD be more proactive about maintaining existing facilities. We should have an active program that monitors and makes timely repairs on the new buildings we have. I believe it is very important to employ a program to regularly monitor, assess and repair facilities to help the district avoid extensive capital expenses at any one point in time.

PLACE 7

Shane Davidson: Excluding Holland, the youngest high school is 50 years old. ATEMS is leasing space at the local technical college. Our baseball and softball fields need lights. Parking at the baseball and softball complexes is inadequate. Stage and auditorium space at three of our four middle schools need significant enhancements. And the district desperately needs a career and technical high school facility. The district needs a long range, comprehensive facilities master plan for repair and replacement of its facilities. K-12 facilities affect educational outcomes. I realize school buildings are only a piece of the education reform puzzle, but they may be a more important piece than we have understood in the past. The quality of the learning environment is known to affect behavior and attitude toward teaching and learning.

Charlie Wolfe: With the help of some effectively zero interest-rate bonds, AISD is in the process of completing the last of several smaller projects that needed to be addressed without another bond election nor raising taxes. The 2004 bond remodeling projects are getting near completion, and we are on schedule to sell as many as 20 of our oldest portables this year and sell four old obsolete facilities. Currently, AISD has the least amount of deferred maintenance projects than at any other time in the last several decades! We already have earmarked in next year's budget funds to get a long term facilities study done that will help keep our schools in good repair and serve our future needs.

6. What are three priorities you have set for the Abilene ISD?

PLACE 1

Charles Byrn:

The three main priorities I will set for the AISD when I am elected are:

- Technology. We need to develop better technology for the classroom. We are using 10-year-old technology that desperately needs to be updated.
- Getting parents more involved. Getting parents more involved is good for the kids as well as the parents when it comes to our kids' education.
- Being fiscally responsible for the taxpayers' money. We also need a contingency plan set in place in case of emergencies.

Robert Laird:

- We must continue to attract and encourage excellent teachers and staff. We have the best and I want to maintain that attitude of excellence.
- I want to continue to raise our standards and expectations for all, students, staff, parents and school board. It is better to set high standards and fall a little short than set low standards and easily meet them. The latter may look good on paper, but only striving to be the best will have real meaning.
- I would continue to be a good steward of the taxpayers' money. Prioritizing expenditures, looking under every rock for all available funds and working with the Legislature to improve school funding equity is part of that stewardship. It is not just the money you have, but the way you use that money that makes the difference.

PLACE 2

Samuel Garcia:

- Continue the development of programs that address the achievement gap among our students.
- Additional funding resources for technology.
- Providing all with support and resources for teacher and administrator development.

Randy Piersall:

- I believe in an education that sets every child on a path to success. Focusing on the basic skills and knowledge necessary for every child to graduate and succeed in whatever endeavor they choose is priority.
- I think it is important to retain great teachers, librarians and principals. I would like to see a formalized mentoring program for new staff members to share talents and experience to shorten the learning curve and help them have a successful, enjoyable first year in AISD.

- I would like to work with parents, teachers, students, business leaders and other community organizations to make education a priority in Abilene. Communication between schools and the community is vital. Also, AISD students accomplish great things, and I would like to see those highlighted. In addition, I would like to strengthen the local business/education partnership and see more involvement from community members.

PLACE 7

Shane Davidson:

- We must be committed to smaller class sizes, especially at our Title 1 campuses. Small classes are more engaging places for students because they are able to have a more personal connection with teachers, simply by virtue of the fact that there are fewer kids in the classroom competing for that teacher's attention.
- With the needs and diversity of our student population, the district needs to commit the necessary resources to special education, gifted and talented, and ESL.
- All teachers, not just those in STAAR/EOC subjects, must be held accountable at the same level and expectation of those in STAAR/EOC subjects. The net benefits of these priorities will impact test scores, graduation rates and college/workforce readiness.

Charlie Wolfe:

- Complete the development and implementation of a long term facility plan.
- Continue to improve the quality of our graduates to be better prepared for additional education and the workforce.
- Continue our goals from good to great for all aspects of AISD, in every operational and academic area.

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