

Jon Raj Destin for Albany School Board
Green Party Questionnaire for Albany School Board

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Occupation: Small Business Owner

1. Please briefly summarize your background, qualifications, and reasons for wanting to serve on the Albany Unified School District Board of Education.

Four years ago, I moved with my son, then a kindergartener to Albany because of the excellent schools and the community. As a gay dad, I wanted my son to have access to quality education and to be surrounded by nurturing and accepting people.

As a former public school teacher, I recognize that parents, educators, and students working together are key to academic achievement and success. Moreover, diversity--celebrating all people and perspectives--is vital for a well-rounded education.

My experience with education began 25 years ago when I was a Teach for America Corps member in one of Houston's most under-resourced middle schools. After teaching I went on to serve as the organization's marketing director, recruiting top teaching talent. Once in the private sector, I continued my work in the classroom by engaging business people as volunteers in high school classrooms in order to inspire future generations of leaders.

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I believe we are much stronger as a community than we are as individuals. At this critical juncture, with the passage of bond measures B&E, strong leadership is needed to ensure that our vision for Albany's children to access high-quality education remains a reality.

My leadership and experience in both education and as an entrepreneur give me a unique perspective so that together, we will achieve our goals.

I look forward to earning your support and your vote on election day.

2. What ideas do you have for addressing overcrowding in Albany schools? How can we protect class size reduction for all levels? What are your views on inter-district transfers and what priority do you feel should be given to children of teachers and other district employees who live outside of Albany?

Overcrowding in our schools is a real issue—one that I encountered first hand when my son was in first grade. I was a part of a coalition of concerned parents and teachers that worked with the Board of Education to find a solution. Through dialogue and compromise, the Board was able to reallocate funds in order to lessen the load on teachers.

Such planning is an example of a reactive solution. I believe there are also proactive solutions to overcrowded classrooms. We must do a better job being prepared for these challenges—conducting demographic surveys as well as monitoring community growth and pre-school patterns. While these methods do not represent an exact science, they anticipate and mitigate challenges.

As long as our schools face overcrowding, I am not in favor of inter-district transfers—with certain exceptions. I do believe that AUSD teachers and AUSD employees should be able to enroll their children in our system.

Teachers are the heart of our school system and we must continue to attract the most talented education professionals. I truly believe that having their children in the district serves as an incentive for the recruitment and retention of top-tier educators. When a teacher's children attend AUSD schools, their ties and commitment to the community are multi-layered.

3. How can the district best serve the needs of our diverse range of students, some of whom are ready for AP or honors classes, some of whom are not college bound, and some of whom have disabilities or other difficulties that can make learning a challenge?

Many schools districts including Albany struggle with finding the best way to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Recognizing the intrinsic diversity of the AUSD student body is a preliminary step to best meeting all students' needs. Precisely, the district, all schools, administrators, teachers and support staff must recognize the difference between the concepts of equity and equality, ensuring that each student receives the tools she or he needs.

Our goal should be to produce well-rounded individuals. Students may excel in various subjects, be it math, science or music. Differentiated instruction is a key whereby teachers work with students to be a part of a team where their students' unique talents come through and are valued—And in turn create higher contributors with higher self-esteem and greater openness to learning.

4. How should the district balance the need to attract and retain high quality teachers by offering competitive salary, security and health

benefits with the need for enhanced programming for students?

Teachers are the driving force making Albany schools so great. As a community, we should do whatever it takes to retain the best educators. Recruitment and retention are extremely challenging because of the national teacher shortage and we are competing with other districts for talent. But the bottom-line is: our schools are only as good as our teachers. Once we continue to attract the best talent, we all work together along with the community and school foundations to find ways of enhancing programming for students.

5. Four-part question on Measures B&E, both passed by Albany voters in June:

a. How do you intend to improve the quality of the design and sustainability features of the new school construction projects, now that voters have approved this funding?

Improving the quality of the design and sustainability features of the new school construction projects is critical. I understand that the current Board is reviewing the process and we must maintain that momentum with the new Board. We have an opportunity to construct highly innovative, state-of-the-art learning environments for the 21st century student. Such environments teach sustainability simply through their existence. Sustainability needs to be a top priority and a lens that we all look through as we build our classrooms of the future.

b. What is your position regarding the school district pursuing solar power, and what other measures do you propose to cut the District's power bill (which was reported at a recent Sustainability Committee meeting to be highest in the summer when school is not in session)?

Alternative energy sources are an essential part of creating these schools of the future and such sources need to be a part of the designs from the project's commencement. I have not been privy to the specifics that are being ironed out right now but as a board member I would certainly support putting all options on the table including solar power as I am fully committed to delivering power saving solutions for our environmentally conscious community.

c. What opportunities do you see to turn the school buildings and campuses themselves into teaching tools and laboratories?

We have a responsibility as we construct four new structures including two completely new elementary schools, to ensure that every piece of the process is a learning opportunity. We need to ensure that we are involving students in the caring and running of the school to show how they are part of the school and the community at large.

d. Would you propose that new construction and modernization projects within AUSD participate in the Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) program or seek Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Living Building Challenge or other green building certification?

As a very environmentally conscience candidate those are all issues near and dear to my heart. Most recently I discussed with a current board member the implementation of CHPS and I was told that it was a priority and the Board supported such important measures. Certainly if elected, I will help to ensure that these are all implemented.

6. What is your vision for Albany's 21st-century schools and how would you as a Board of Education member assist the transition of AUSD towards a 21st-century model?

There are many significant challenges facing our schools both in Albany and nationally. We live in a time with of constant change and for many that can be unsettling. We need to give our students the tools today for jobs that may not even exist yet.

When I was a teacher in a middle school, I understood the importance of innovation and creativity and critical thinking. My commitment was such that I created an alternative curriculum focusing on these issues. My focus was not on memorizing answers or looking something up but rather solving problems. If we can instill in our students the need to think more critically we can better prepare them for a world that may look very different once they hit the workforce.

Students today need to know all the traditional fundamentals. Moreover, they need to have a good handle on better understanding cultural issues, problem solving, creativity, civic engagement and innovation so they may be active citizens in a new global economy.

The key will be to help students become the best version of themselves and graduate as well rounded, resilient young adults who take calculated risks and are not afraid to make mistakes and who are ultimately engaged citizens.

7. Three-part question on alternative instructional approaches:

a. What alternative instructional programs do you support (e.g., "blended" curriculums, flexible and open learning environments, technology-based learning, and project-based learning? What is your understanding of these instructional methods?

One of the most important lessons that I learned during my tenure as a teacher relates to the very diverse ways that different children learn. Trends come and go but there are some key tenants that remain the same. If the student is interested, or sees the value, or can relate to the content then there is an "in" and an opportunity. There is value to all

the alternative methods listed above and they have all worked well for some students. I am not sure there is any silver bullet that will be the answer for every child.

I have seen the success of "blended" curriculums or technology based learning with some children and the failure of the same methods with other children. For instance, in a district with plenty of resources where the students are constantly connected to technology at school and in their homes such curriculums may feel like overkill and not be as effective as the teacher had hoped.

I see many benefits of project-based learning as it allows students to be more collaborative. Such learning can also set students up to take on responsibilities in fields in which they can excel—building confidence and greater self esteem. In fact, project based learning allows the student to take risks and fail in a safe environment. All children have their talents but it takes a great teachers to help them uncover those talents and utilize them in a classroom or "work" environment—in order to find their best selves.

b. Are there other changes in the current schedule, such as a later start time, for which you would advocate, and, if so, what is your reasoning for supporting these changes?

I am in favor of later start times as many studies documented the enormous benefits, especially for middle and high school students.

In addition, early start times in particular have been shown to reduce performance for some disadvantaged students—and we want to give all students the best chance at success.

c. Are you familiar with the Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org>) and what is your view regarding the role of this type of resource in Albany?

Children learn in different ways and as teachers and parents we need to be very cognizant of that. If there are resources that help students learn, or build their confidence, or moves them forward, then I support such resources.

Specifically regarding the Khan Academy, I have seen many students find great success. It can be a great complimentary tool for educators, parents and kids (inside and outside of the classroom), but not a replacement for high quality face-to-face instruction from great Albany teachers.

8. Who has endorsed you or is supporting your candidacy? Who are you endorsing, from President all the way down ballot to local races? Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

The Albany Board of Education race is non-partisan and as such I choose to not delve deep into partisan politics. That being said, I am committed to ensuring Donald Trump is not elected President.

If you are interested in my views I would ask that you check out my web site (<<http://Destin4AlbanySchools.com>>Destin4AlbanySchools.com) or even reach out to me directly for more information at <<mailto:jon@destin4AlbanySchools.com>>jon@destin4AlbanySchools.com.

9. Do you support amending the Constitution to end corporate Constitutional rights and getting money out of politics? Have you Taken the Pledge to Amend? (<https://movetoamend.org/take-pledge-amend>)

I am completely in favor of getting big money out of politics as I see it as a cancer. Big money in politics is one issue that truly worries me and I hope that we all come together to put an end to this insanity.

10. The following are the 10 Key Values of the Green Party (more details available at <http://www.cagreens.org/platform/10k.shtml>). In view of these values, why do you feel your candidacy merits Green Party endorsement?

Green Party 10 Key Values

- 1) Ecological wisdom
- 2) Social Justice
- 3) Non violence
- 4) Grassroots democracy
- 5) Decentralization
- 6) Community based economics
- 7) Feminism
- 8) Respect for diversity
- 9) Personal and global responsibility
- 10) Sustainability

I cannot tell you if my candidacy merits a Green Party endorsement but I can say that our values are well aligned. I appreciate the good work that Green Party is doing and I am humbled to have been asked to participate in this questionnaire.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with any further questions or clarifications.