

An analysis of the 2024 NEISD Board Candidates

The information below is prepared, maintained and updated by booklovingtexanvotes@gmail.com, which is tracking several school board races across Texas. Read about the author and the research methodology.

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.








Please contact booklovingtexanvotes@gmail.com for more information and a digital copy of this document.

Notes: North East ISD has been at the center of Moms for Liberty's San Antonio activity, and this election has the potential to define the board's approach to crucial issues for years. Five seats are up for election—four are part of the regular election cycle, and one is open after the death of District 2 trustee Terri Williams. The board as a whole has been a site of contention, much of it fostered by a Moms-for-Liberty-connected PAC ironically named [Parents United for Freedom](#), which claims it advocates for “parental rights” and aims “to reclaim our schools from any harmful agendas being promoted.” The PAC [has announced](#) the slate it's supporting: Michael Gurwitz, Dick Rasmussen, and Steve Hilliard. The group will likely also endorse Moms for Liberty leader Jacqueline Klein, whom they have supported in the past.

HOW TO READ THIS CHART

Candidates highlighted with this symbol:  are red-flagged as either members of pro-censorship groups (Moms for Liberty, Parents United for Freedom (PUFF), local PACs) or have the support of such groups.

Candidates highlighted in **BOLD** 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 an endorsement, and in races with multiple candidates, there may be more than one candidate worthy of this designation.

Contested Races	Candidates
District 1	Michael Gurwitz  Lisa Thompson
District 2	Tracie Shelton Rhonda Rowland  Jacqueline Klein 
District 4	David Beyer Jack Hoyle 
District 5	Melinda Cox Chris Evans  Dick Rasmussen 
District 6	Steve Hilliard 

Notes on Red Flag Candidate(s)

District 1

Former math teacher Michael Gurwitz is backed by PUFF (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02iV18t1MoezxuwMLF2E9hnH5ACbYUq9zAcEc9q1T99rCfZMotdv9HqfDi7nzvc8cl&id=61555770432171), which aligns him with Moms for Liberty leader Jacqueline Klein and trustee Steve Hilliard. (For more on Moms for Liberty and Klein and Hilliard, see below.)

District 2

Jacqueline Klein is a leader of the Bexar County chapter of Moms for Liberty, which is described in Wikipedia as “Moms for Liberty is an American conservative political organization that advocates against school curricula that mention LGBT rights, race and ethnicity, critical race theory, and discrimination. Multiple chapters have also campaigned to ban books that address gender and sexuality from school libraries. Founded in January 2021, the group began by campaigning against COVID-19 responses in schools such as mask and vaccine mandates.

In 2023, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that tracks extremists, termed Moms for Liberty a far-right extremist organization. Moms for Liberty has been criticized for harassment, for deepening divisions among parents, for making students' education more difficult, and for having close ties to the Republican Party rather than being a genuine grassroots effort.

- Jacqueline Klein accuses district leadership of refusing “to remove pornographic books in our libraries” and she shares anti-LGBTQ, especially transphobic, content, complaining for example that a school in a nearby district has “a female who believes she is a man teaching theater.”
- When three trustees advocated appointing her as a replacement for Williams, trustees David Beyer and Sandy Hughey [questioned her](https://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/neisd-board-hopefuls-take-turns-hot-seat-18445455.php) (<https://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/neisd-board-hopefuls-take-turns-hot-seat-18445455.php>) over now-deleted “social media posts in which Klein was ‘very unkind to teachers,’ accusing them of promoting critical race theory and ‘grooming’ kids.” Klein [responded on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Klein4NEISD/posts/pfbid0baXVFhFQn1KwZ7iughYV8YKLeVqfJCcgPjjDBsyBE3cBz68wvZyc973GAcseCiKJl) (<https://www.facebook.com/Klein4NEISD/posts/pfbid0baXVFhFQn1KwZ7iughYV8YKLeVqfJCcgPjjDBsyBE3cBz68wvZyc973GAcseCiKJl>) by sharing an article about a teacher arrested in a different part of the state for abusing a student and saying, “Hughey called me crazy for saying there are people in these systems who would groom children.”
- In general, her [campaign Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Klein4NEISD) (<https://www.facebook.com/Klein4NEISD>) is full of combative and partisan posts on an array of culture war hot topics, from migrant students (“our already struggling school systems are being inundated”) to vouchers (“parents want choice”).

Rhonda Rowland has a doctorate in educational leadership and more than 30 years of experience in education. A group called [Texas Family Action](https://www.texasfamilyaction.com/) (affiliated with the San Antonio Family Association PAC) (<https://www.texasfamilyaction.com/>) shared a [campaign video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_4YHS8x1ns) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_4YHS8x1ns) from Rowland last year and praised Rowland for “Protecting Children's Virtue” and “Respecting Parent's Rights” and said that she “Intends to help STOP NEISD - Critical Race Theory (CRT), Classroom Activism, Sexual Grooming (Graphic SexEd).”

District 5

Dick ‘Raz’ Rasmussen is a donor to PUFF, and in turn has been [endorsed by the PAC](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02iV18t1MoezxuwMLF2E9hnH5ACbYUq9zAcEc9q1T99rCfZMotdv9HqfDi7nzvc8cl&id=61555770432171) (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02iV18t1MoezxuwMLF2E9hnH5ACbYUq9zAcEc9q1T99rCfZMotdv9HqfDi7nzvc8cl&id=61555770432171). On his website, he describes himself as an “American patriot, and life-long conservative.”

- Rasmussen’s [campaign website](https://www.raz4neisd.com/) (<https://www.raz4neisd.com/>) reflects culture war paranoia. Among his concerns about contemporary education, he lists “less parental choice, increasing C.R.T. curricula, a push for

the 1619 Project, emphasis on climate change, and a focus on Diversity Equity & Inclusion (D.E.I.) instead of merit-based solutions and performance.”

🚩 Chris Evans is a district parent and sales representative for a construction equipment store, and his wife is a district principal with more than 25 years of experience in education. He doesn't have a website yet (that I've found), and the priorities listed on his [campaign Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/chris.evans.for.neisd/posts/pfbid0Z6NasHkoUF4uGbQHRod2TdZtnKipx4mTeJtkxWuYaghfHHhJefdzVqJ4sghg3Okel) (<https://www.facebook.com/chris.evans.for.neisd/posts/pfbid0Z6NasHkoUF4uGbQHRod2TdZtnKipx4mTeJtkxWuYaghfHHhJefdzVqJ4sghg3Okel>) are pretty vague and anodyne (accountability, rebuilding trust, transparent communication). He did “like” a comment that wished him a resounding victory and lamented that watching the district “succumb in recent years to the liberal, woke agenda.” That’s not enough for an orange highlight, but it’s not great.

District 6

🚩 Steve Hilliard, a retired Air Force officer, has been [endorsed by PUFF](#). In 2019, Hilliard [filed a grievance](https://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/neisd-candidates-board-political-18691654.php) (<https://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/neisd-candidates-board-political-18691654.php>) against the board protesting the district’s sex ed program, which he and his wife claimed does not emphasize abstinence enough.

- Hilliard’s wife has donated to PUFF, and is also a member of the Facebook group of the Moms for Liberty chapter for Bexar County. That’s especially relevant because Paula Hilliard is a frequent commenter and presenter at NEISD board meetings, and Hilliard [has described](#) policies he has introduced for board consideration as having been written in a “collaborative process” with his wife.

Alternative Candidate(s) to the Red Flag Candidates

District 1

Lisa Thompson is a district parent and former elementary school teacher who has also served as an educational coach and PTA president.

- Thompson has won a number of awards for her service to the district, including
- Encouragingly, the *San Antonio Express-News* [reports](#) that Thompson says that families who opt-in to sex education “need medically accurate information” and that history should be taught “the way that history happened.”

District 2

Tracie Shelton is a business advisor who has been endorsed by local teacher’s unions and [has been recommended](#) by the North East Bexar County Democrats (<https://www.facebook.com/NEBCD/posts/pfbid031Rtp81ySyyE9mjLVH2EmEN8V19bUq4KBbS82dFTR35hHQy8omirnZqbTZKVxnqVkl>).

- Shelton’s campaign website yet is <https://www.tracielsheltonforneisd2.com/>.

District 4

Incumbent David Beyer, a landscape architect, has served on the board since 2019. He has come under attack from members of Moms for Liberty and Parents United for Freedom, often for his clashes with the trustees they have worked to elect to the board.

- I haven’t found a website for Beyer yet (here is his [campaign Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Beyer4NEISD) is <https://www.facebook.com/Beyer4NEISD>). Will update as that changes.

I haven’t found much information about Beyer’s challenger Jack Hoyle. I’ll update as that changes.

District 5

Melinda Cox is a parent and longtime volunteer in the district who founded the district's Smart Driving Club to increase student road safety. As she puts it, "This initiative was not only about creating safer roads but also empowering young drivers to assert their right to safety. I strongly believe that at its core, school board members share a parallel responsibility – collaborating with our district to ensure students have a voice and the means to express it effectively."

- Among standard trustee priorities (fiscal responsibility, strengthening engagement with families), Cox [lists some goals](#) (<https://www.melinda4thefuture.com/>) that—unfortunately—take a bit of courage to mention in today's fraught culture-war environment. She promises to embrace diversity ("ensure board decisions represent the diverse student population") and empower student voices ("recognize and prioritize student perspectives in decision-making").

District 6

Terri Chidgey is a former teacher, principal, and district administrator who worked in NEISD for more than 40 years. She now supervises student teachers at University of the Incarnate Word.

- Chidgey's campaign is pushing back against the fear-based, divisive politics that have riven the board over the past three years. She told the San Antonio *Express News* (<https://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/neisd-candidates-board-political-18691654.php>), "We don't want educators to talk about mental health or social-emotional learning because we want the parents to do that — and do the parents need to do that? Absolutely, but there are also teachable moments in the classroom or on the playground." And she hopes to return the board to a time when members could be "respectful and collaborative even when they didn't agree."