

Dear McAllen ISD School Board Candidate,

As the founders of RGV PUEDE (Parents United for Excellent Dual Education / Padres Unidos para la Educación Dual Excelente), we are emailing each 2021 McAllen School Board candidate. Our McAllen PUEDE members would like to know your answers to these two questions:

1. **What is your vision for Dual Language Education in McAllen ISD?**
2. **Practically speaking, what would you do for MISD's Dual Language Program if elected?**

As a chapter of RGV PUEDE, McAllen PUEDE is a parent-led grassroots organization. We are not affiliated with any political party. We have no plans to officially endorse or oppose candidates. Our goal is simply to inform the community by sharing each McAllen ISD School Board Candidate's answers with our email list. **Please reply with your responses to the two questions above within the next week (by April 1st).** If you are willing and able to provide your responses in both English and in Spanish, we would appreciate it. If not, we will provide a translation so that all our members have equal access to your position.

Roughly 400 parents and community members are currently subscribed to RGV PUEDE's email list; over 200 of us are based in McAllen. My wife and I are also McAllen parents, with two boys (ages 6 and 8) enrolled in the Dual Language Program at Sanchez Elementary for the upcoming school year.

As you may already know, McAllen ISD currently offers Dual Language at seven elementary schools (Fields, Gonzalez, Jackson, McAuliffe, Milam, Perez, and Sanchez) and one middle school (Fossum). MISD's publicly available [Strategic Plan](#) indicates the district's commitment to "increase the percentage of students participating in dual language programs" and "expand the dual language program into middle schools and high school." McAllen PUEDE supports these goals and is looking for MISD Board Members to do three things in particular:

1. Ensure the quality of the Dual Language program on the campuses where it is already offered, while following the district's strategic plan to increase the number of students participating in the program. (Only around 1,500 or 7% of all MISD students currently participate in dual language, whereas a full-scale dual language program could serve roughly 50% of all MISD students and receive over \$2.5 million dollars per year in additional state funding thanks to [HB3](#)).
2. Increase district-wide equity by extending the Dual Language program to more campuses, especially in South McAllen, which is grossly underserved in this regard. (Largely because of this inequity, only 22% of the roughly 7,000 students classified as "English Learners" currently participate in dual language even though it has been empirically shown to lead to more success for English Learners than the early exit programs in place at most South McAllen campuses).
3. Remain steadfastly committed to the goal of expanding the Dual Language program into high school by 2021-2022 (see page 40 of MISD's Strategic Plan).

Since 2016, PUEDE has been working with both UTRGV and McAllen ISD to support, improve, and extend Dual Language programs from Pre-K to 12th. You can read more about our work on our [website](#) and in the news: [Dual-language program is making McAllen's Sanchez Elementary very popular](#) [UTRGV professors recognized for their work in bilingual education](#)

On behalf of McAllen PUEDE, we look forward to our continuing partnership with McAllen ISD and its School Board. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions or concerns. And good luck in the election!

Sincerely,
Alex Stehn & Mariana Alessandri

Place 3: Debbie Crane Aliseda vs. Lucia Regalado

Debbie Crane Aliseda

The questions feel like you are throwing me a soft ball because the answers to 1 & 2 are simply the three things that you are looking for MISD Board members to support! My short answer to your 2 questions are YES, I pledge to support your three things.

As you know, and I have learned, bilingual education is a super power. It truly is a revolutionary power that MISD does not fully unleash. We were headed the right direction; however, now instead of growing our bilingual education program, we are misunderstanding that "revolutionary power" and simply using our bilingual education program to early exit. This does nothing to support the foundation of Spanish. Middle schoolers become illiterate in their own language because they never learned to critically think in their home language of Spanish. Sadly, MISD has not been courageous when it comes to the expectations we have from each campus. As you mentioned, not only will dual language generate revenue for the district, but it is best practices. Our goal should always be to give our students every tool available to prepare them for life. Being able to read, write and think critically, while forgetting about what language they are doing it in, would be the best tool to give them. Our region should be mastering TELPAS.

The answer to your question no 1:

My vision for dual language in MISD is that we follow our own Strategic Plan that we voted on years ago. Individual campuses in MISD should not be allowed the autonomy to decide what kind of bilingual education program they have on their campus. If administration at MISD had adhered to our Plan, at this point in time we would have 20 schools immersed in dual language. I understand the hesitation of a principal due to the difficulty in finding BL certified staff; however, dual language allows for flexibility because ESL teachers can teach the English portion of the day, even in one way. You are correct, we are missing an opportunity for academic advancement in south side elementaries and Brown and Travis because we do not offer dual language except at north side schools. Sadly, we do not have neighborhood schools, we have allowed that a magnet program be created. We have a new Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Dr. Rosalba DeHoyos. She had a Blue Ribbon campus at Achieve Early College High School. She may be the breath of fresh air that the bilingual program needs to allow it to soar.

The answer to your question no 2:

I would continue to ask that bilingual education programs be presented on the agenda and/or workshops so that we are able to give direction to the Superintendent. As Board members, we lose our focus on one particular item because there are so many things that are pressing. It is not an excuse, it is just the reality of the job. As Board members, it helps to have groups like you that are in our ear advocating and educating us. The Board needs to constantly be looking at data regarding students and programs. We need to be asking for data on EL's and focus on who passed state assessments, with what scores, and which bilingual education program they participated in. That will help ensure that programs are being implemented to their fullest potential.

It is also important to have the graduation ceremonies and bring students before the Board for recognitions. That show of faith and respect for the program will show employees and community members that MISD truly does understand and value dual language in our bilingual education program. Other districts around Texas have waiting lists of students that want to enter the dual language program because the community understands the value in both learning a new second language and in learning in your home language. The culture here is to move away from speaking Spanish at home because parents

think they are doing their child a service. We need parents to understand that is a dis-service and MISD needs to lead the way in showing the value in being a dual language student.

It truly does take a village to raise our children and with the help of parent groups like this, si se puede. Also, as I am rattling on, it occurs to me that there may be a simple solution regarding the communication piece that may be missing between your organization and MISD. Some non-profits have bi-laws that include a MISD board member as a non-voting member. This is a creative way to ensure that the group has the ear of MISD on a monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, or yearly basis ... whatever the circumstances of each group. The board member that would be best suited in regards to bilingual education is the "Chair" of the curriculum committee. Just something to think about. If that sounds like something you want to do, you need to speak with Natalie Goza, the Board's secretary. She can help expedite that calendar invite.

Thank you for advocating for the children in our community. I truly hope, with your support, to remain on the Board and continue to learn.

Many thanks,
Debbie Crane Aliseda

Lucia Regalado

My vision for Dual Language Education in McAllen ISD:

As a first-generation U.S. citizen, I am intimately aware of the challenges that my father faced in McAllen ISD as an ESL student, and I am proud that McAllen ISD has since seized on this opportunity to turn this *language barrier challenge* into an *opportunity for enhanced enrichment through collaboration* for all of our students.

The Dual Language Program is and will continue to be another measure by which McAllen ISD students are molded into culturally aware, skilled, well-rounded young adults who upon graduation will be competitive (on the local, state and national level) in whichever path they choose--college, military service or workforce. My vision is for the Dual Language Program to be expanded so as to ensure it's geographic accessibility to all interested students within our district while being mindful of student demand as well as budgetary constraints. Furthermore, consistent with the district's Strategic Plan, I envision the expansion of the Dual Language Program to the high school level. At that point, McAllen ISD's Dual Language Program ought to be *the* premier program in the region and as such, an added recruitment tool.

My plan of action for Dual Language Program at McAllen ISD:

First, I recognize that if given the opportunity to serve McAllen ISD as Trustee Place 3, I will be part of a team. As a member of that team, I am committed to preparedness, thoughtful collaboration, advocacy, and reasoned & transparent decision-making.

Specifically, as it relates to the Dual Language Program, I will:

Engage with the Dual Language Program community so as to facilitate the communication of ideas and issues from parents, students and teachers to administration;

Empower teachers and students for success by advocating for the necessary resources to ensure a quality education in the Dual Language Program; and

Support the district's Strategic Plan for expansion of the program in the 2021-2022 school year and collaborate with the Board to creatively and resourcefully overcome any potential COVID-19 related delay(s) to the plan.

McAllen PUEDE members may learn more about me by watching my introductory video on social media (Facebook: Lucia Regalado for McAllen ISD School Board Trustee Place 3 or Instagram: @oohlalawyer) and may feel free to reach me directly at (956) 607-5456 or via email at AttyLRegalado@gmail.com.

Place 6: Sofia M. Peña vs. Glida M. Garcia

Sofia M. Peña

It is my honor to provide a response to your questions about the future of the Dual Language Program at McAllen ISD. I appreciate the passion with which you promote the importance of multiple languages for your children and future generations. I would like to share a little about myself with regards to dual language. I grew up in Sullivan City, Texas (have lived in McAllen about 31 years now), and both my parents and grandparents spoke English and Spanish. My grandfather was adamant that we learn and practice both languages and encouraged us to speak, read, and write at all times. As a matter of fact, my grandfather often spoke to us only in Spanish and required us to respond in Spanish. His aim was to ensure that we would be able to retain Spanish while learning in English through the school system. I am proud to speak, read and write both languages fluently.

I believe in the notion that persons who are able to communicate in more than one language are valuable to the workforce and able to compete globally. I support this initiative and would love to see it thrive and expanded if possible. I believe in bilingual education and acknowledge the difference in bilingual education and a dual language program.

I offer my answers to your pointed questions below:

1. What is your vision for Dual Language at MISD?

I am proud of the work that is already in place at MISD with regards to dual language and applaud this group for pressing the continuance of such curriculum in the schools. Dual language programs are effective because they provide for learning that aims at bridging two or more cultures for complete understanding of the culture that drives the language. When we simply teach a language without a deeper understanding of the emotion and intent of the culture, it become superficial. It's like teaching history through memorization of dates with no real understanding of how impacts us daily. My vision for McAllen ISD is that bilingual education also become biliterate at the core. I believe that dual language programs can be expanded at all levels and hope to be an advocate for responsible application and expansion. Having qualified teachers and co-teachers is important and if the district is to expand, it must be done with diligence and purpose.

2. Practically Speaking, what would you do for MISD's Dual Language program, if elected?

In my years at South Texas College, working in higher education with a concentration in K-12 programming, I was able to witness some exciting and innovative work in the dual language, biliteracy

arena. I was part of the initial creation of the Early College High School Program in the Rio Grande Valley and was able to work with every school district in Hidalgo and Starr County, while providing assistance to neighboring counties in their expansion of that initiative. Through that experience, I was able to assist one district that applied the dual language program quite successfully. IF ELECTED, I provide the following as my offer in support of the dual language program at MISD.

- I would like to see the data that exists on the current dual language program with regards to teacher training and preparation, student success, retention in program, program scale-up, and cost to implement and sustain.
- I would like to entertain a potential collaboration between higher education (STC and UTRGV) and MISD to provide either a high school elective credit and the potential for a pathway to earn a college credit (program elective or foreign language) through a series of dual language courses while in middle and high school.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response. I may be reached at (956) 793-1324 at any time or via email at Sofia21MISD@gamil.com for further questions or any other matter

Sofia M. Peña, M.Ed.
Candidate for McAllen ISD School Board, Pl. 6

Glida M. Garcia

Thank you for your email! I appreciate the involvement that you and the rest of the PUEDE Members continue to show while in support of the education of the students of McAllen ISD.

I will begin my response to your email by briefly sharing my story with you. I began my career over 26 years ago at the old Sam Houston Elementary Campus in South McAllen. Coincidentally, I was at this neighborhood this afternoon during my Block Walk. As a teacher there, I became involved in a campus wide movement led by our Campus Principal to petition for a new campus for the community. It is the campus that is there today. At the time we were able to accomplish this undertaking by working jointly with the MISD School Board, parents, a grassroots organization, and the City of McAllen. As teachers, we traveled to observe other campuses and were able to create a micro society for our students that is still in place today. Simultaneously, we trained in Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language in order to better serve our students. We therefore were able to adequately meet the needs of every student on campus. Our students were successful and families and staff were extremely happy and grateful! I am so proud to have been a part of that endeavor.

I believe in a hard work ethic. I believe in the miracles that can be accomplished when a spirit of listening and collaboration exist within a community.

I admire the work that you are doing. I was raised learning both Spanish and English simultaneously. Through the years I have always made it a point to be continuously learning and teaching. I earned my Master's Degree in Education with a Specialty in Science and soon after I became certified as Principal K-12. I fully appreciate the value of having the command of two or more languages academically.

I have conducted research into the Gomez and Gomez Program, and I think very highly of it.

You have asked me to answer two questions:

1. What is your vision for Dual Language Education in McAllen ISD?

I hope to be elected on May 1 in order to serve on the McAllen ISD Board of Trustees for Place #6. If elected, I pledge to work collaboratively as a member of that group. I pledge to make every effort to

meet the needs of each student in the school district by ensuring that we as a district are aligned to the MISD Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategies. Parent and community involvement are a part of the MISD vision. After having read your email I understand your desire to broaden the Dual Language Education Program within McAllen ISD. The vision that I have of myself as a Trustee is to listen to the wishes and concerns of the School District's stakeholders and work to the best of my ability to ensure that our School District's vision is aligned with the needs of our students in order that they may grow and progress towards becoming future ready students capable of engaging in higher education and obtaining careers of their choosing as they become citizens of our community.

2. Practically speaking, what would you do for MISD's Dual Language Program if elected? Practically speaking, what I would do for MISD's Dual Language Program if elected would be to personally meet with stakeholders first of all in order to open lines of communication. Secondly, I would continue to educate myself in regards to current trends within Dual Language Education. I would work with my fellow Trustees in order to move the district in the direction of the programs that would best suit the needs of the MISD students. I would pledge to continue to listen to suggestions, concerns and wishes in order to as a member of a Board of Trustees continue to serve the students and meet their every educational need.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if PUEDE desires any further elaboration or clarification. I believe that the key to success is having those open lines of communication along with the willingness to work together to accomplish the necessary goals that will enable our students to not only succeed but thrive in order that they may have bright and productive futures!

Thank you,
Gilda M. Garcia M.Ed.

Place 7: Sam Saldivar, Jr. (running unopposed)

Sam Saldivar, Jr.

1. What is your vision for Dual Language Education in McAllen ISD?

The Dual Language Program at McAllen ISD is an enrichment program I, the district, values and celebrates. I will continue to support Bilingual education programs following the Texas Education Code required of board trustees to ensure students acclimate to English language proficiency.

The Texas Education Agency STARR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness), assesses student mastery of taught curriculum. The administration, with board oversight responsibility, is to ensure each student academically succeeds to timely grade level advance with proficiency and competes academically ready for college, chosen career and the military (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Test).

The district's goal is to ensure every student, including English Learners, develop a proficiency of English reflective in the TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency System) (tested in English).

I will continue to support a continuous review and renewal by the superintendent and his Executive Leadership Team (ELT) of student-driven programs, service needs, parental aspirations and expectations for their children.

I am committed to advocate for and expect a fidelity Dual Language program at McAllen ISD, kinder through twelve grade, to ensure English Learners participate in academically challenging programs that respect and build upon the cultural and language they bring to the whole community.

2. Practically speaking, what would you do for MISD's Dual Language Program if elected?

I will continue to listen, learn and advocate for students, their families, teachers, staff and entire community. As required by the Texas Education Agency, I will continue to fulfill my duties and responsibilities to include ensuring Bilingual Programs (Dual Language), develop policies, rules and regulations for (not limited to) school operations, organizational systems, school finance, purchases, curriculum and other functions essential to the operation of the district.

I will continue to hold the district administration accountable with fidelity to the support beyond the elementary school (mastery) required bilingual programs (including Dual Language) and support services. This would include my unwavering commitment to and advocacy for a student dual language academic pathway through middle school (Fossum MS) leading to a high school diploma (Rowe) with a Translation Certification Biliterate Seal. State sanctioned Bilingual/Biliterate endorsement is offered. The requirements are as follows:

- A grade of B or better in the following three years of Foreign Language (Spanish) credit,
- Four English credits,
- Proficiency in English; and
- Approaching graduation, must not be identified as a Limited English Proficient student.

I am advocating for a return to or development of a concurrent South Texas College Achieve Early High School course of study leading to a Bilingual/Biliterate associate degree pathway.

Samuel Saldivar Jr. Trustee, Place 7
McAllen Independent School District