



Bloomington Grove ISD



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Dr. Heath Burns

Candidate for Superintendent

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Our Family



This is our family – Heath, Cherie, Eli, Emma, Gabe and Grant. We currently reside in Abilene, TX where we've been for nearly 5 ½ years.

We were married in 2001, just after Heath began his first superintendency in Anderson-Shiro CISD. We lived in that area for four years. We welcomed our first set of twins, Eli and Emma in 2003. They were born in College Station. When Eli and Emma were 12 months old Heath began his second superintendency in Angleton ISD, south of Houston. We lived there for 5 ½ years before moving to Abilene in 2009. Our second set of twins, Gabe and Grant were born in Angleton in 2005.

Heath enjoys working in schools and being around students. He thrives on leading schools to be successful in every aspect. He enjoys fishing, hunting, playing basketball and spending time with his children. He loves board games and reading. He enjoys coaching youth sports. Heath grew up east of Houston in a community known as Barbers Hill. After graduating, Heath attended Lamar University in Beaumont earning his Bachelors and Masters degree. He then attended Sam Houston State University in Huntsville where he earned a Doctorate of Education degree.

I enjoy teaching. Currently, I teach math to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade students. After working in education for 10 years, I stayed home with our children for 8 years before

returning to teaching four years ago. I enjoy cooking and being home with my family. I love photography, gardening, puzzles, crafts and HGTV. I grew up in the Piney Woods of East Texas. I lived in the country until I was 25 years old and I enjoyed it a great deal. I grew up in the Corrigan-Camden ISD school system, graduated and attended Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches where I earned both my Bachelors and Masters degree in education.

Eli is 11 years old. He is completing his fifth grade year in school and is looking forward to finding out what Jr. High is all about. He loves playing basketball and baseball and anxiously awaits playing football in Jr. High. He loves animals and hunting/fishing with his Daddy. He also loves playing games and watching movies.

Emma is 11 years old and is also completing fifth grade. She is ready for Jr. High and all the excitement it holds. Emma loves playing basketball and looks forward to learning/playing volleyball. She enjoys reading and playing games. She has always dreamed of living in the country where she can raise animals, a garden, chickens and run free.

Gabe is 9 years old. He enjoys playing basketball and is learning to like baseball. He loves to hunt with his Daddy. He is completing third grade. Gabe enjoys playing with his twin brother Grant and wants to have rabbits and goats one day. Gabe is a super-fast talker....you have to listen very closely or you'll miss everything he says!

Grant is 9 years old. He is finishing third grade. He loves to play basketball. It's no wonder they've taken a shine to basketball. Their Daddy loves it and our pediatrician still insists they'll push 6'10". He's tried baseball and the verdict is still out on whether he likes it or not. He enjoys playing with his siblings. He loves animals, all kinds. He loves to visit zoos and animal parks and looks forward to having his own little farm one day. He especially likes to spend time with his dogs, Beau and Buttercup.

We look forward to meeting each of you. We have planned the move to small schools for many years. We enjoyed many wonderful years in Abilene, despite a rocky ending. I believe that God wants our family in Blooming Grove. (We hope you agree.) We will worship there. We will be at every event, and we will immerse ourselves into the community. That is how we are wired. That is how we serve children.

Cherie

February 13, 2015

Heath Burns, Ed.D.
2018 Brentwood Dr.
Abilene, TX 79605

Blooming Grove ISD
Care of Dr. R. Marshall:

School Board:

While I am sure you have many outstanding candidates for the position of superintendent of Blooming Grove Independent School District, I believe my success and track record in education, as well as my dedication to students makes me a viable candidate.

My teaching career laid a sound foundation for my success as an administrator. Through innovative programs I took advantage of opportunities to teach disadvantaged youths at Lamar University when I was 18 years old. I also enjoyed success teaching high school English and Forensics. Finally, I currently serve as an adjunct professor at various community colleges and universities in my region.

Through my teaching career, I had the unique opportunity to work with children and young adults from varying backgrounds, from the gifted and talented, to those identified at risk by the state. While my position has changed, I serve as a superintendent for the same reasons that I chose to teach, because I love children.

In June 1998, I accepted the position of assistant principal of Livingston ISD. After a short tenure as assistant principal, I was promoted to principal of Livingston Junior High School. While serving as principal of this 7-8-9 campus I performed traditional principal duties, such as budget and employee management, curriculum maintenance, appraisals and evaluations, etc. I also was afforded the opportunity of transitioning from the old dilapidated LJHS facility to the new \$20,000,000 facility. I was responsible for maintaining and leading one of the finest junior highs in East Texas. There are approximately 1000 students that attend LJHS and over 100 employees that worked under my leadership.

I am approaching fifteen years as a successful school superintendent having been nominated for Superintendent of the Year four times by my school boards (2003, 2007, 2009, 2014). I earned my first superintendency in November of 2000 assuming the reins of Anderson-Shiro CISD, a small 2A school in central Texas. Small schools, I believe, provide a wonderful learning opportunity for a new superintendent. Intricate involvement in all aspects of running a school including business management, food service, transportation, curriculum, etc., sharpened skills that many superintendents infrequently use. This breadth and depth of familiarity with all aspects of the education

business I obtained in A-SCISD has served me very well in leading a significantly larger district. In my years in Anderson-Shiro, test scores climbed dramatically, an alarming trend of poor fiscal management was reversed, and two significant bond issues were passed. Not coincidentally, the district had failed 3 straight issues prior to my arrival. A-SCISD is significantly better because I served there.

I enjoyed tremendous success as superintendent of Angleton ISD, enrollment 6500. During my six years at Angleton, academic performance of the district skyrocketed with every campus performing at the Recognized or Exemplary rating level. Furthermore, Angleton ISD elementary schools were the highest performing in the Houston area; the overall district performance placed Angleton in the top 10% overall. While AISD is diverse and approximately 50% economically disadvantaged, AISD was among the high achieving districts in the state. AISD, under my leadership, received commendations for financial efficiency while maximizing student performance. Under my leadership, a school of choice was born to serve at-risk kids. Many students graduate from the Accelerated Choices in Education (ACE) school each year. These students, prior to the advent of ACE, were candidates for dropping out. Additionally, relationships with community colleges and industrial partners have never been higher as evidenced by the advent of a comprehensive concurrent enrollment program and a cooperative Process Technology program. Additionally, I led AISD in the implementation of a comprehensive facility improvement plan and in passing the largest bond issue in the history of the ISD, approaching \$140,000,000. My family and I warmly remember our time and contributions in Angleton ISD.

Since October of 2009, I have served as superintendent of Abilene ISD, enrollment 17,500+. While Abilene ISD does not have the demographic challenges of the states' poorest schools, AISD is a very diverse and impoverished district. The district is well over 50% minority and close to 70% free and reduced lunch. Through key personnel changes, motivating and unifying fragmented employees, high accountability and expectations, and clarity and intolerance for ambiguity, I have played a key part in improving the performance of Abilene ISD. Like all schools in Texas, Abilene ISD has suffered significant cuts in school finances during recent legislative sessions. Despite these challenges, AISD has performed higher than state averages in most all tested areas. We are one of the highest performing diverse districts in the state. While remaining focused on the academic needs of the district, we created a comprehensive master facilities plan. Prior to my arrival, AISD had failed two consecutive bond issues by giant margins. In November, AISD voters passed the largest issue in the history of Abilene with a remarkable 70% approval rating. I have been very fortunate that Abilene ISD has encouraged me to remain active in state education issues by supporting my active involvement in organizations such as the Texas School Alliance, and by encouraging my involvement in a recent lawsuit against the state. I am proud of my work in Abilene ISD and I am very confident that the district is heading in a very positive direction. In fact, I earned the distinction of being one of the 18 statewide nominees for superintendent of the year in 2014 as a result of my good work in Abilene ISD.

I enjoyed my five years in Abilene ISD. I considered my tenure a great success as did my board members as indicated in the accompanying letters of support. However, even the best of things sometimes come to an unfortunate end. In December of 2015 our district and city was rocked by a sex scandal involving a high school principal, teachers, and sadly several high school aged students. I reported these incidents to SBEC and to local police as required by law. These incidents rocked our community and ultimately led me to a decision to separate. Please understand that I left the district voluntarily and that I acknowledge no wrongdoing. I have a very serious philosophical difference in opinion than the chief of police. I believe cases of child abuse should be reported to the police when a person has, "reason to believe." The police chief believes every rumor should be reported and that the school district should refrain from investigating. My position on this issues allows me to expediently remove a suspect from the classroom in a matter of minutes, thereby creating safety for all students. The chief insists that the school does no investigating and simply refers the rumor. While this is the easy way out, it would allow a sex offender more time and access to our students as police procedure calls on the suspect to be one of the last persons investigated. Finally, I value the protection of our teachers' reputation to refer ever rumor I hear to the police without first inquiring administratively on our own. Ask around, you will find my process commonplace in school districts. The board and I agreed that despite our outstanding 5 year run, it was time for a change in leadership. They wished to abide the chief's vision for referral of all rumors. Please understand that I initiated the conversation about exiting, and was not asked to leave. It was time for fresh eyes, in light of some serious philosophical differences, and I made the right choice for children.

As a superintendent, I attempt to use a collaborative leadership style when appropriate. I believe that all stakeholders can contribute to decision-making and their opinions/perspectives must be considered. I also have learned that school leaders often times must make difficult and unpopular decisions. I pride myself in my willingness to make strong, student-centered decisions without regards to politics, even in the face of resistance.

I have enjoyed immense success in all of my educational endeavors. While I certainly met many challenges, I consistently have produced outstanding results, whether they be dramatically increasing school academic performance, reversing poor fiduciary trends, school renovation/construction or addressing difficult employee relations issues.

I am married with four children, two sets of twins. While Cherie and I enjoyed our experiences in large schools, we want our children to graduate, like we did, from small schools. There is nothing better for student to play both ways in a football game, and rush to the stage for participation in theatre arts productions. Big schools offer many advantages, but this type of intimacy where every child matters is unique to small school America. That is what I want for my children.

I have every confidence that I can effectively lead Blooming Grove ISD with zeal, enthusiasm, and great skill. I think I can provide your ISD the rare combination of youth and enthusiasm, as well as the experience necessary to be successful.

I have every confidence that I can effectively lead Blooming Grove ISD with zeal, enthusiasm, and great skill. I think I can provide your ISD the rare combination of youth and enthusiasm, as well as the experience necessary to be successful.

Respectfully,

Heath Burns, Ed.D.

VITA**HEATH BURNS, Ed.D.****ADDRESS:**

2018 Brentwood Dr.
Abilene, TX 79605
(979)481-0644

OBJECTIVE:

Position of superintendent

FAMILY INFORMATION:

WIFE: Cherie Burns (married 13 years)

CHILDREN: Eli & Emma (11 year old twins) and Gabe & Grant (9 year old twins)

**EDUCATION:**

HIGH SCHOOL: Barbers Hill High School, Mont Belvieu, TX.

UNIVERSITY: Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX.
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Aug. 2001.
Dissertation title: Decision Making and Ethics: A
Study of Texas Superintendents.

Lamar University-Beaumont, Beaumont, TX.

Master of Education in Administration, Aug. 1997.

Certifications: Mid-Management, Superintendent

Bachelor of Science, Dec. 1995.

Certifications: English, Speech, Physical Education,
Special Education

PUBLIC EDUCATION EXPERIENCE:

TEACHING:

Lamar University/Youth Opportunities Unlimited Instructor/Peer Counselor	Beaumont, TX (Summer 93-Fall 95)
Port Neches-Groves High School Teacher	Port Neches, TX (Fall 95-Spring 97)
Tomball High School Forensics Coordinator/Teacher	Tomball, TX (Jan.98-June 98)

ADMINISTRATION:

Assumption Catholic School Principal	Beaumont, TX (May 97-January 98)
Livingston ISD AP/Principal	Livingston, TX (June 98-January 01)

SUPERINTENDENCY:

Anderson-Shiro CISD (enrollment 600) Superintendent <i>Highlights: Built significant fund balance while managing the transition from Ch. 42 to Ch. 41 finance status, increased District accountability rating to Recognized, implemented many positive programmatic and curricular improvements.</i>	Anderson, TX (January 01-October 04)
Angleton ISD (enrollment 6500) Superintendent <i>Highlights: Achieved tremendous academic growth leading the district to the academic elite status (one of the largest diverse recognized districts in the state), led faculty and staff of over 800 employees, managed a budget that exceeded 40 million, implemented many positive programmatic and</i>	Angleton, TX (October 04-October 09)

curricular improvement, passed over 140 million bond issue and related facility improvement programs.

Abilene ISD (Enrollment 17,500+)

Abilene, TX

Superintendent

(October 09-Feb. 2015)

Highlights: Led the ISD from an academically unacceptable rating, to acceptable. Many campuses currently building towards exemplary and recognized ratings. Implemented a comprehensive management oversight program with the board, geared at creating systemic change in all aspects of the school system, from academic reform to operational. Implemented a comprehensive facility management plan. Navigated over 8 million dollars in legislative budget cuts, while continuing to outpace state averages on standardized tests. After two failed bond issues, passed the largest issue in AISD history with a 70% success rate (Negotiated separation Feb 2015).

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE:

Lamar University

Beaumont, TX

Lecturer/Adjunct Professor

(Sept. 2010-Current)

Sul Ross State University

Abilene, TX

Lecturer/Adjunct Professor

(Sept. 2010-Current)

Sam Houston State University

Huntsville, TX

Lecturer/Adjunct Professor

(May 02-2009)

Brazosport College

Brazosport, TX

Lecturer/Adjunct Professor

(Dec. 04-2009)

University of Houston Clear Lake

Houston, TX

Lecturer/Adjunct Professor

(Jan. 07-2009)

PUBLICATIONS and WORKSHOPS:

“Getting the Grant, Keeping the Grant. Secrets to Success.”

TASB 2012 Summer Leadership Institute, Ft. Worth, June 30, 2012.

Description: As state and federal government continues to cut public school funding, it becomes even more critical that school leadership teams create and implement processes that can deliver big grant funding. Dr. Burns and team outline keys to success.

Featured in:

Extra Credit (2011). All about executives. Page, 25. Beverly, MA: JVC

Media Group, LLC.

“Math Gaps-Losing your Mind. Reasoning Mind.”

TASB 2011 Summer Leadership Institute, Ft. Worth, June 18.

Description: Presented innovative math instructional methodologies, specifically the need for transition from teacher directed instruction to teacher directed learning. Presented examples of appropriate models for remediation that target and grow minority and economically-disadvantaged populations.

“Reasoning Mind: An Effective Technology-Based Mathematics Curriculum.”

TASB 2008 Summer Leadership Institute, San Antonio, June 13, 2008, and Fort Worth June 20, 2008.

Description: Presented innovative math philosophies and curriculum implemented in Angleton ISD. The program emphasized a move from direct instruction to a student driven, self-paced, teacher facilitation instructional model. Hard data was emphasized to reinforce AISD growth in the area of math and science resulting from this innovation.

“Reforming Secondary Schools.” Region XII Superintendent’s Retreat, Salado, TX, November 7-8, 2007.

Description: Presented material over a two-day period outlining the success of Angleton University, the research that went into putting the program together, statistics gathered since the program has been in operation and how the program is managed and operated on a day-to-day basis.

“Using Innovative Programs to Improve High School Performance.” 2007 TASB Summer Leadership Institute, San Antonio, TX, June 2007.

Description: Presented a session outlining the strategies Angleton ISD used to greatly reduce failures, increase TAKS performance, and better school climate. The session focused specially on two programs, *Angleton University and Friday Night Live*.

“Facilitation of Collegial Relationships with Media.” ESC IV, Houston, TX, February, 2007.

Description: Served on a panel of five ESC IV superintendents to lead an exchange with the Houston Chronicle Editorial Board in an effort to promote collegiality and better the media’s understanding of complex school issues.

“What Makes an Excellent Educational Service Center.” ESC IV, Houston, TX, February, 2007.

Description: Served on a panel of five ESC IV superintendents to present

descriptions of outstanding service centers to a national audience of service center executives and leadership at the ESC IV conference, *Re-engineering for the Entrepreneurial Challenge Confronting ESCs*.

“Desirable Principal Attributes.” Lamar University-Beaumont, Beaumont, TX. February, 2006.

Description: Presented workshop to practicing principals at the Lamar University Principals’ Academy regarding the transition into the superintendency and desirable attributes of the effective principal.

“Administrative Leadership and the Superintendency.” Prairie View A & M University, Prairie View, TX. November 8, 2003.

Description: Presented workshop to aspiring administrator on roles of the superintendent versus that of the principal. Content focused primarily on finance and budgeting.

“Differentiated Instruction: The Key to TAKS Success.” Hubbard ISD, Hubbard, TX. October 14, 2002.

Description: Presented full day inservice on serving the needs of all students in an integrated classroom, including responding to the needs of Gifted & Talented, Special Education, advanced, and struggling learners with special emphasis on using varied instruction for success on the TAKS.

“Motivating Employees and Increasing Morale.” East Texas Administrators Enrichment Academy, Pine Creek Lodge, Nacogdoches, TX. April 23, 2002.

Description: Presented workshop on the relationship between staff morale/motivation and student success. Specifically, outlined effective methods of dealing with ineffective/negative teachers, as well as methods of motivating and encouraging effective teachers to serve students well.

“The Right Stuff: Is it Time to Take the Next Step?” Region VI Service Center, Huntsville, TX. February 27, 2002.

Description: Outlined the budget process with special emphasis on the differences between the roles of principals and superintendents. Discussed the daily operations of the school business office with special emphasis on funding types, building the budget, CH. 41 and CH. 42 schools, and setting the tax rate. Closed with a discussion on how to address finance/business questions in the superintendent interview.

“Differentiated Instruction: Responding to the Needs of All Learners.” Sabine Pass ISD. January 4, 2002.

Description: Presented full day in service on serving the needs of all

students in an integrated classroom, including responding to the needs of Gifted & Talented, Special Education, advanced, and struggling learners.

Featured in:

500 Leaders of Influence (10th ed.). (2001). Raleigh, NC: American Biographical Institute.

“Concurrent Enrollment: An Opportunity for All Learners.” 17th Annual Recruitment and Retention Conference of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Austin, TX. June 18-20, 2001.

Description: Outlined appropriate uses of concurrent enrollment in Texas public school districts. Discussed specifically the responsibilities of the partnering institution, program benefits to learners, marketing the program, the relationship between AP and concurrent enrollment, and other significant issues.

“Getting On-line with Student Success.” Ninth Annual Technology Conference. Rudder Tower, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX. November 9-10, 2000.

Description: Presented on the uses of on-line, internet driven curriculum services that provide alternatives to retention and dropout. Presenter focused on the use of *Novanet* as a method of serving high-risk, dropout potential students.

Featured in:

Brown, G., & Irby, B. (2000). The career advancement portfolio. New York: Corwin Press.

“Using Data to Improve Learning and Schooling.” Exploring New Dimensions-2000 TASSP Summer Workshop. Austin Convention Center. Austin, TX. June 7, 2000.

Description: Outlined an action research project and progress made in moving from traditional time-based instructional programs toward a standards based continuous progress, student-centered system.

“Using Data to Improve Learning and Schooling.” 16th Annual Access and Equity Recruitment and Retention-Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Double Tree Hotel, 6505 IH 35 North. Austin, TX. June 6, 2000.

Description: Outlined an action research project and progress made in moving from traditional time-based instructional programs toward a standards based continuous progress, student-centered system.

“Using Data to Improve Learning and Schooling.” Leadership in the 21st Century.

Education Service Center, Region VI Spring Administrators' Conference. Del Lago Resort and Conference Center. Montgomery, TX. April 6, 2000.

Description: Outlined an action research project and progress made in moving from traditional time-based instructional programs toward a standards based continuous progress, student-centered system.

"Connecting Classrooms, Communities, and Careers." 7th International Integration of Academic & Technical Education Conference. Beaver Creek, CO. June 28-July 1, 1999.

Description: Presented original research on the development and growth of concurrent enrollment at this international conference. Presentation of program developed and implemented at Livingston High School.

"Sam Houston State University Research Forum." Sam Houston State University. April 28, 1999.

Description: Served as host. Introduced speakers and members of SHSU's Doctoral Cohort II. Facilitated discussion of issues in research and educational leadership.

Burns, H. and Lewis, B. (1998). Dual-enrolled students' perceptions of the effect of classroom environment on educational experience. The Qualitative Report, 4, (1 and 2). Available on-line at: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR4-1/burns.html>

"Administrators Workshop." Sam Houston State University. June 17, 1998.

Description: Discussed ever-changing role of administrators in schools today. Highlighted differences between public school administration and private school administration. Introduced keynote speaker, Dr. Linda J. Reaves.

"Tomball ISD Gifted Kids' Conference." Tomball H.S. May 2, 1998.

Description: Presentation to students, faculty and parents of TISD on the importance of communication skills. Discussed active listening and Peter Senge's feedback classifications.

"The Counterplan in Competitive Debate." Midway H.S. December 12, 1997.

Description: Presentation to the Midway H.S. debate and speech team and the Midway H.S. speech department on advanced counterplan theory. Strengths and weaknesses of this negative approach to competitive debate.

"The Role of the 2nd Grade Teacher." Diocese of Beaumont. Oct. 24 1997

Description: Presentation of the roles and expectations of 2nd grade

teachers employed by the Diocese of Beaumont. Topics included: vertical teaming, fundraising, horizontal teaming, spiritual/instructional leadership, the exceptional learner, and alignment of the curriculum diocese wide.

“The Mission of Assumption Catholic School.” Diocese of Beaumont. August 8, 1997.

Description: Presentation to staff, faculty and stakeholders concerning the mission and philosophy of Catholic schools. Topics included: goal setting, setting the standards for excellence, special needs in Catholic schools, prayer in schools, and teacher mentoring.

AWARDS AND ACTIVITIES:

Commissioner’s Select Advisory Cabinet. (2004-Current)

Texas Association for School Administrators, Legislative Committee,
(October 2009-Current)

Nominated for ESC XIV Superintendent of the Year. (Spring 2014)

Nominated for ESC IV Superintendent of the Year. (Spring 2009)

Nominated for ESC IV Superintendent of the Year. (Spring 2007)

Angleton Rotary Club Rotarian of the Month. (Fall 2005)

Lamar University Superintendents’ Academy. (Fall 2002-Summer 2003).

Texas Association of Community Schools. Executive Committee Member
(Spring 2002-2005).

Region VI Teacher of the Year Judge (Summer 2001, Summer 2002).

*Served as one of three evaluators in selecting the top elementary and secondary school teacher in Region VI for a given school year.

T.A.S.S.P. Region 6 Outstanding Middle School Principal.

*Selected by a committee of Region 6 administrators as the most outstanding middle school principal in the region based on accomplishments in education, contributions to education, student-centeredness, and contributions to Region 6 (2000).

Nominated for the C. Robert Kemble Award (Spring 96).

*Award honoring the top five graduates of Lamar based on leadership, service, integrity, and scholarship.

REFERENCES:

Kelvin Kelly, Ph.D.
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325-829-8322

Robert Laird
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325-668-3783

Randy Piersall
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325-232-8626

Mike Moses
Former Commissioner
Former Dallas Super.

Charlie Wolfe
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Charlyn Rogers
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crogerscpa@fpaa.us
979-215-4494

Texas Educator Certificate

This certifies that

Heath Lane Burns

*has fulfilled requirements of state law and regulations of the
State Board for Educator Certification
and is hereby authorized to perform duties as designated below:*

PROFESSIONAL

Description	Effective Date	Expiration Date	Status
Mid-Management Administrator Grades (PK-12)	12/16/1997	Life	<u>Valid</u>
Superintendent Grades (PK-12)	05/07/1999	Life	<u>Valid</u>

PROVISIONAL

Description	Effective Date	Expiration Date	Status
Secondary Speech Communications Grades (6-12)	01/14/1996	Life	<u>Valid</u>
Secondary English Language Arts Grades (6-12)	01/14/1996	Life	<u>Valid</u>
Secondary English Grades (6-12)	01/14/1996	Life	<u>Valid</u>

STANDARD

Description	Effective Date	Expiration Date	Status
Classroom Teacher			
All-Level Physical Education Grades (PK-12)	03/16/2003	08/31/2008	<u>Inactive</u>
Generic Special Education	03/16/2003	08/31/2008	<u>Inactive</u>

NON-RENEWABLE PERMIT

Description	Effective Date	Expiration Date	Status
Secondary English Grades (6-12)	01/02/1996	01/02/1997	<u>Expired</u>

Official Record of Certification
Friday, February 13, 2015

Robert T. Laird, CRNA
Anesthesiology
4101 S. 20th
Abilene Texas 79605
325-668-3783

Please allow me the pleasure of recommending Dr. Heath Burns for the position of Superintendent for your district. As a member of the Abilene Independent School District Board of Trustees, I have known Dr. Burns for five years while he led the district as our Superintendent. Dr Burns was hired to improve scores, increase accountability, and create an atmosphere of success for both our students and our staff. He did this, and more. Dr. Burns instituted a "grow your own" program, providing opportunities for staff to learn and advance in our district. Many of our principals have come through this program. Dr Burns worked with staff, board, and community members to do a needs assessment and, as a result, the District passed a bond that exceeded 85 million dollars. We were one of the few Districts to pass a bond during this time.

During Dr. Burns' leadership, the District has moved from low performing to high performing, and completion rates for all grades have improved. I am proud of the progress the AISD has had under Dr. Burns' guidance.

Dr. Burns has worked with the community to improve the educational opportunities of our students. Under his direction, the district has expanded advanced placement and dual credit courses, working with our local Colleges and Universities to partner with the District in many ways, from a Medical High School located on a University campus to career tech programs with our local State College.

Dr. Burns has accomplished many things during his time at the AISD. From improving scores to passing a bond, he worked every day to make the District a success in every day. I hate to see Dr.

Burns leave but recently an ongoing dispute with our local Police Department has made it difficult for him to be effective as our Superintendent. There have been two instances of inappropriate relationships between teachers and students recently that placed the District and the Police Department at odds over what is the Superintendent's role in the safety and protection of our children. Dr. Burns followed his duty and his heart to remove the offending teachers as soon as credible evidence came to light. The Police wanted the district to wait while they investigated the allegations. The Board is working with the police to improve communications and have a better understanding of our roles in protecting our children. In order to help the District and the Community move forward, Dr. Burns decided to step down from his position as Superintendent, taking the responsibility on his shoulders. I commend him for this sacrifice, one which will help our District in the future. Dr Burns did right by our district, and I thank him for that.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Very sincerely yours:

Robert T. Laird, CRNA
Secretary,
Abilene Independent School District Board of Trustees

Dr. Kelvin J. Kelley
Box #16105
Abilene, Texas 79698



Date: February 5, 2015
Re: Personal Reference

To whom it may concern

My name is Dr. Kelvin J. Kelley and I am an Associate Professor at Hardin-Simmons University. I am pleased to submit this reference on behalf of Dr. Heath Burns. I have known of Dr. Burns since his coming to Abilene, Texas as superintendent. I have known him personally since being appointed to the board in the spring of 2013. As an advocate for student achievement, I discovered in Dr. Burns a kindred spirit. I was unaware of his prior academic leadership, but upon observing his program implementation, assessment of educators, and intent to provide achievement opportunities for all students, I began to see why Abilene sought him out.

Allow me to stress that I am a member of the Abilene community, and the African American community in particular. Therefore, what I have to say is influenced by the changes I could see being implemented. Dr. Burns is a leader; someone who influences others. Since becoming a member of the board and going through orientation, I've learned that the intricate details and programming necessary to lead a district can be overwhelming if you are not prepared for them. Yet, this was not the case with Dr. Burns. He developed his personnel from within by providing learning and skills development opportunities at the local level and encouraged the educators to broaden the scope of their professional development.

Each aspect of his tenure here in Abilene is most impressive. I think a superintendent should be evaluated on at least three scales: academic achievement; administrative development; and community engagement. Using this rubric it would not be hard to rate Dr. Burns an overwhelming success. He is highly respected in the African American community as a man who cares about students and gets things done. I can't think of a higher compliment for anyone in this capacity. These two ideas equate

Dr. Kelvin J. Kelley
Box #16105
Abilene, Texas 79698

to a man creating the potential for transformative change in a community that has basically only known mediocrity. When educators clearly understand the value of their service to students and the community, then they should be motivated to provide quality education for all students. This is unequivocally the challenge given by Dr. Burns to all who serve students in AISD. I am personally disappointed to see him leave.

As a parent of two students currently in AISD, and two graduates of Abilene Cooper, I can personally attest to the change that is in the air. It is difficult to understand and assess the quality of education in a system when you do not have children involved in it. I understand that. But to see the direction of the administration in achieving academic and administrative values was very encouraging. It was fruit for the community to appreciate.

I have no doubt that Dr. Burns will provide the same quality and commitment to an aspiring district. He will bring perspective and insight that will challenge at first and then encourage as you see the impact on students and community. It matters. I noted earlier in my correspondence that Dr. Heath Burns is a leader. Please accept this as a notice to a prospective community, if you want a manager keep looking! He can manage, but leadership is his most endearing characteristic.

I am personally proud to offer this reference and recommendation for Dr. Burns. He is a fine example of a man who is committed to his faith, his family, and his vocation (education). I commend your organization for sincerely considering his candidacy. Please contact me if you have any further questions. Peace!

Sincerely,

Dr. Kelvin J. Kelley
Associate Professor
325.670.5898
kjkelley@hsutx.edu

Mark 4:26-29

Letter of Reference

Dr. Heath Burns

From: Randy Piersall - AISD Trustee

To Whom it May Concern:

Over the past two and half I have had the privilege of working with Dr. Burns in the capacity of Trustee. It is because of that professional relationship and the qualities that I have seen demonstrated by him that I am writing this letter of recommendation.

Upon his arrival in Abilene, Dr. Burns was charged with the very difficult work of improving academics, improving financial stewardship and enhancing our aging facilities. All three areas have received significant attention and have been put in much better position during his tenure with our district. For example:

All our campuses are now rated academically acceptable with many of them receiving areas of distinction

Two legislative sessions ago when our state reduced education funding by such a dramatic amount, Dr. Burns and his team were able to institute a buyout that was funded by federal dollars which allowed the impact not to be felt by our local budget. In addition, it allowed fewer teachers contracts to be terminated

One of the most significant accomplishments was his ability to get an eighty-seven million dollar bond passed in our district after two previously failed bond attempts

Dr. Burns has been responsive to the direction of the board, supportive of his team and continually mindful of what our district can do to ensure that each child reaches their full potential. I believe that his leadership would be a benefit to any organization he chooses to work with and I would recommend him without reservation.

Sincerely,

Randy Piersall

AISD Trustee

Charles L Wolfe, CPA
2901 S First St
Abilene, TX 79605
Direct Office: 325-788-0305
Cell: 325-669-4203

February 20, 2015

To whom it may concern:

Please excuse the length of this letter. I believe it is important to let you know a little background that might help explain a little of the situation Abilene has had over the years. I have lived in Abilene all my life, attended AISD for 12 years, served on the school board for another 12 years, and currently have grandchildren in the district. I believe people like Dr. Heath Burns can and do make a huge difference in a school district. I wouldn't have believed the magnitude if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

In the 1990's, Charles Hundley was Superintendent of Abilene ISD (AISD). For 12 years his charismatic leadership style and his basic "fun" atmosphere kept the staff happy and the board pretty much in check. With 2 high schools that were racially and economically out of balance, he had the strength and determination to push through a rebalancing effort that changed the mix. In true AISD fashion, when the dust settled (some kids were grandfathered in which caused a delay in seeing the results), the mix had been over corrected such that it became out of balance the other way, but the public outcry and backlash left the board way too gun shy to bring up the issue again.

By the late 1990s the boundary changes caused such unrest that the realtors rebelled. That, combined with a very hardnosed city building inspection department, had caused a near total shutdown of all new housing within the city limits. This resulted in dozens of new sub-divisions to be developed outside the city limits (i.e. outside of the AISD boundaries). After these subdivisions started filling up with young Abilene families, AISD's enrollment started dropping.

By 2000, Charles Hundley decided he wasn't having as much fun as he wanted to have and decided to retire (and then work another 10 years having a blast at the much smaller Crowell ISD). The board decided to shift gears a little and get a superintendent that could provide some oversight and start addressing some of the problems that had started showing up. Problems with enrollment drops had started to show up and pressure was starting to mount as to why AISD wasn't an exemplary district like most of the smaller districts surrounding AISD were.

The only in-house candidate (David Polnick), who's only administrative experience had been working for Charles Hundley, was eliminated in the first round. After narrowing the

candidates down, a former military officer, Dr Michael Moehler was hired. Before he started working, one board member retired and a new one was elected. Dr Moehler started in June, late in the budgeting cycle, and enrollment drops were getting a little worse. He was already trying to play catch up.

Soon the drop of 300 grew to 400, to 500 to 700 students a year! State budget cuts were adding to the mix making things worse. Dr Moehler delivered on what he was hired to do; he effectively started trimming costs while improving academics. He introduced the concept of Personal Units where a campus earned so many units based on its enrollment. Between hiring freezes, early retirement program incentives, and placing staff that principals didn't want to spend their personal units on into a general pool (causing several to take the early retirement), costs were getting under control and in sync with enrollment. Dr Moehler was viewed by many in the community as the board's temporary hatchet man that wouldn't be around for long. He and his wife lived in a modest apartment, never buying a home, which added to the rumor mill. Budget concerns and the resulting school closings and consolidations were the hot topics of the day for many years.

By 2002, the joint city/school elections produced some turnovers for both the school board and the city council. Board members were getting worn out quickly having public hearings on school closures and hearing from passionate parents that had 3 generations of their family that attended that school and it should be kept open for their kid to finish too. The city was feeling pressure from business and others about the building inspection office and it became a campaign topic. The city manager responded by consolidating the various city's building inspector areas together and a new "user friendly" manager was put into place.

The city's economy was starting to slow down, gas prices had increased – all generally bad news except they did slow down the building of more outside the city limits housing. The district stayed the course and continued to cut costs as it could. The district started the year with a 6 million deficit, but as the rate of decline slowed and teachers and staff that left during the school year were replaced with subs, the year ended up with a very surprising 6 million surplus. The announcement of the surplus came as the district was dotting the last i on the closing of an aging, half used elementary campus as a must do cost saving item. Between the personal units terminology, the public reaction of the superintendent's banning of 5th graders from seeing nude French paintings at the local art gallery, to the surprise surplus, the negative feedback from staff and the public was growing and growing.

In late 2003, the majority of the board was growing tired and worn out. The board president followed the consensus of the board and met with Dr Moehler in private and talked him into retiring. Under tremendous public and staff pressure, the board skipped any type of formal hiring process and immediately hired David Polnick, the formerly shunned 25-year veteran of the AISD (13 years as Deputy Superintendent for business and finance) that jumped ship and left the district in a financial reporting disarray back in 2001. The perception was that he was a master at finance and all of the district's

financial problems would go away once he was in charge. He was good at public relations, having learned from the master himself, Charles Hundley. He was a known element by the city power brokers and was more than willing to do their bidding. In the late 1990's when Robin Hood was at its peak, AISD benefited greatly from the increase in state funding. This resulted in loose budgets such that monies could be repurposed by the financial chief for "special needs". Dr Polnick was THE go-to guy to get your special projects funded, giving him an almost sugar daddy rep with the staff. Happy days were again returning to AISD! The next board election resulted in the rest of the board members that had hired Dr Moehler being replaced with strong supporters of the new superintendent.

With our very own "financial wizard" at the helm, (and the enrollment stabilizing, while the saving from the school closings kicked in), Dr Polnick was able to start increasing staff. Teacher and Staff evaluations were eliminated as a drain on staff time. When the new subject of new principal assignments came up, neither academic leadership nor academic performance were ever mentioned. Staff morale hit a new high, and a 75.6 million dollar bond proposal was quickly put together. It advertised a long list of detailed renovations for every campus. With happy days here again, the bond passed.

The party was able to endure several years before the hangovers started. Instead of all the bond projects being done in 6 years as promised during the election, more detailed plans were revealed that stretched the timeline out to 12 years. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit and sent construction costs surging. With the long timeline, the facilities all grew older and more problematic, wants and needs evolved and grew more demanding, and costs kept going up. The board and public was starting to wake up that perhaps our wizard's magic wand was more smoke and mirrors. Several additional supplement bond elections were attempted, and they all failed.

Aftereffects of management changes were also starting to show up on the academic front. The district slid from being a few points below exemplary under Dr Moehler to becoming an unacceptable school district. The district's Critical Needs Task Force released a report that stressed the need for much better career and technical training for our students. They stated how shortfalls of our existing programs were causing serious problems with our local employers and our students. Administrators and teachers that wanted to just coast were migrated to low performing campuses where there were no expectations and were allowed to live out their last days in peace.

Some of the members of the AISD board started recognizing the slide and started growing tired of sitting on the sidelines while the district seemed to be starting to circle the drain. We knew we needed to do something, but what? Claims of Micro Management were the battle cry of any type of inquiry or attempt at governance by the board. The board members attended various TASB conferences, but never as a combined group, thus as a corporate body weren't clear what its role and responsibilities were. Dr Polnick still had some strong supporters on the board, but they weren't totally blind to the trends.

AISD was selected as one of the school districts to participate in CRSS's (Center for Reform for School Systems) yearlong board training. The entire board attended every session and took the training very serious. As it came time to implement what was learned as a team of 8, the ability and willingness for the superintendent to evolve or want to change wasn't there. Changing our meeting formats to have an Agenda review followed by a Board meeting was a disaster. Scheduled in-depth management reports of the topic of the quarter were a waste of time for everyone. Eventually, even the superintendent's strongest supporters realized this wasn't working. A deal was made for the superintendent to announce his retirement.

In 2009, a firm was hired to help search for an effective leader that could engage the public and win back its trust (code word for "pass a bond") while reforming our academics both for college bound and non-college bound students. But the entire board wasn't really on board with the change nor the goals. Memories of the near tar and feathers weren't that old. There was still a couple of members just wanting to go back to the "happy days".

The list of candidates were narrowed down to two: a near retirement age candidate that had experience working with military families and was interested in moving to Abilene to be closer to aging family and ultimately retire; and a younger more energetic Dr Burns, a tall football/basketball player size guy that had two young sets of twins. We were looking at the possibility of hiring a superintendent that would actually have a house and have kids in the district! Someone with a personal stake in the district as their kids grew up.

The more progressive members of the board convinced the others that we owed it to the students of AISD to be a much better school district. That we couldn't wait another 5 or 10 years and maybe getting things turned around. That greatly favored hiring someone like Dr Burns. In a public 7-0 vote, Dr Burns was hired. However, Dr Polnick wasn't scheduled to retire for another six months! This proved to be an interesting 6 months as the newly hired superintendent to-be was unofficially put in charge and did all the work, while Dr Polnick continued to draw his salary and plan his retirement parties.

Dr Burns brought to the job a high level of enthusiasm and passion that was tempered by experience and a degree of realism. He was open and honest with his communication with the board, providing transparency to things that used to just be overlooked. He was idealist in many respects, always harping on the simple theme, "what is the best things for kids?" He was able to quickly spot the low hanging fruit of things needing refinements and get those things done immediately and put into place plans for fundamental long lasting changes. He firmly believed that the core fundamentals had to be in place to support real progress. Some of those fundamental management techniques included relevant academic evaluations (along with individual growth plans), training and accountability for our administrative staff, enabling them to effectively manage and become true academic leaders for the campuses.

Repairing the public trust started with properly finishing the 2004 renovations. Promises had been made that weren't kept. Some monies were still remaining and needed to be accounted for to the public, but not near enough to do what was promised. The last two campuses that renovation were scheduled for: their structures were way beyond their useful life and were so far out of specs with modern standards that no amount of renovation could address the true needs. A member of the board started pushing the idea of combining the two schools with a brand new school built at a site in between. The rest of the board agreed with the idea, but it was pretty much the same idea the old superintendent flat out rejected a year earlier as impossible to do. The district had some fund balance set aside to help in the costs, if at least the interest that had been earned from the unspent bond monies could be used toward the project. Dr Burns didn't have a magic wand nor any smoke and mirrors, but he did roll up his sleeves, sold the idea to the public and made it happen. Today we have a safe, secure and highly functional new campus that will serve the district well for the next 50 years and the two obsolete, unsafe, worn out campuses gone.

Following the direction from the Board, Dr. Burns started educating the public on the merits of the cost effectiveness of replacing old obsolete buildings instead of continuing to patch buildings that were impossible to meet modern safety and functional needs. He led the efforts of putting together a bond proposal that included some new campuses and it passed with overwhelming margins.

The entire board was embarrassed by the unacceptable rating that the district had earned under Dr Polnick. What seemed like little things to board members but were impossibilities with the prior superintendent, such as ensuring the students were in attendance during testing days, began to happen with Dr. Burns in place. Dr. Burns rallied the staff and somehow got our students to show up for testing. In the process, attendance officers became accountable for the type of jobs they were doing and expectations were developed and followed up on. The management style of setting expectations and measuring results worked in a lot of different areas! Wow!

Over the decades prior to Dr Burns, the district had accumulated more than a dozen administrators that were drawing nice salaries but had been transferred to a custom made job description within the district or to low performing campuses; out of sight and out of mind. These areas were never discussed in public. This practice was demoralizing to some of the working staff and students, but this pre-retirement wind down period for the selected few was seen as common practice in Abilene. Dr Burns created a number of friends and a number of enemies when he started reforming all of the low performing campuses and setting expectations. Today in AISD, there are no campuses where low performance is the accepted norm. There are no campuses where a person in the know would never allow their own kids to attend.

All over the district, academic leadership training for principals started in earnest. Goals and improvement plans were developed that really touched the lives of kids and weren't just things to put in the state mandated document each year. Ineffective principals were given the opportunity to learn and improve. Some of our previously written off

administrators became effective ones, others quickly retired. Minority administrators weren't exempt under Dr Burns. Soon everyone realized that if you didn't want to do your job, you wouldn't have it for long. The black community leadership, whom had previous been very protective of a couple of administrators because of their color, got on board and became supportive of this new management style as they saw ineffective administrators get replaced with effective ones. When it came time to discuss new principal assignments, Dr Burns would start the discussions with the campus' academic needs and how the individual he selected was going to best address those needs. WOW! Gone were the days of sweeping the problems under the rug and blame the drop in scores to a bad bunch of kids.

Dr Burns was able to forge a working relationship with the local TSTC and enabling our STEM campus to finally find a home. He did more than just lip service to the concept that not everyone is going to college, but everyone needs to be prepared to enter the workforce and be prepared to learn for life. He was able to connect and bring the business community on board and help out some the district's vocational training to give it more up-to-date and useful.

At board meetings, both public and closed sessions, and in any private conversations, Dr. Burns always returned to the litmus test: "what is best for the kids?". Everything else was secondary. That focus was refreshing and made my job as trustee a lot more fulfilling and enjoyable!

"Accountability" and "effectiveness" started having meanings instead of being the latest buzz words. Attitudes and focus toward sustainable educational results and doing what was best for the students of the district became the norm instead of trying to find new creative ways to bypass or cheat the accountability system.

The bottom line, Dr. Burns is a proven effective leader. He knows firsthand of the problems that school districts encounter and takes realistic and practical steps on addressing those issues instead of making excuses. His approach of keeping the focus on the education of the student is one not found everywhere.

The middle of October of 2014, the City manager retired and left a power vacuum among the city department heads. It was a free for all, as the city council moved very slowly in replacing the 12 year veteran. In December, Abilene's chief of police decided it was his turn to be in the spotlight. He held a press conference to announce the arrest and how he was taking exception with how AISD's dealt with a staff member (Michael Trook) that they had under surveillance for several days. Their investigation was all unknown to AISD at the time, as the APD was secretly waiting for Trook to continue his relationship and allow them the opportunity to collect evidence. When Mr. Trook self-reported part of the relationship to the administration, Dr Burns insisted on and received Trook's immediate resignation. Michael Trook was later charged by the APD with having an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old female student. However, the immediate action by the district messed up the surveillance efforts and left the officers in charge scrambling. They then became a little miffed when their first search warrant

didn't include a school computer full of student records, and AISD wanted them to sign for the machine if they wanted to take it. Instead of signing for the computer, they went back to the judge for a 2nd warrant, citing that the district was hampering their investigation.

Another case surfaced during Christmas break, when a rumor surfaced from a 4th hand source that a high school boy was having an inappropriate relationship with a female teacher. The principal called the parents to confirm the rumor that was said to be from them and they denied it came from them. The teacher was called in and grilled by the Principal, Dr Burns and Mark Neal, the district's head of personnel (and lawyer). The teacher's story matches the parents, and insisted that nothing was going on. Days later, the parents recanted their story and admitted they knew about their son. The district immediately brought in the teacher (Breanne Brown), got her to admit that she had lied in their earlier meeting, and that she had indeed at least had improper communication with the student. The district asked for, and received, her immediate resignation. The police were immediately notified of the resignation under suspicious circumstances. The APD chief was displeased that the teacher was "strong armed" to resign, compromising their ability to use investigative methods including one-party consent calls and the collecting of digital evidence.

Leaving teachers and administrators in place that weren't doing their job or were abusing kids isn't in Dr Burns' DNA. He has the ability in most cases to get to the bottom of a situation, correct the things that are correctable, and get rid of the ones that aren't. Leaving an abuser in the classroom or in leadership role at a campus wasn't going to happen under his watch, period. The Abilene chief of police didn't like that approach at all. With only an powerless interim city manager in place, the chief held a series of press conferences during Christmas break to blast the superintendent and AISD in public about how the situation was handled. With only vague statements about how he didn't like the way AISD was handling things, the lack of cooperation, followed by details can't be released because of pending investigations. Rumors started flying, and everyone that ever had a beef with the district started making wild claims. The same techniques that created such unrest and forced out Dr Moehler was turned to by those wishing to return to "happy days". It worked before and it would work again.

As the Police innuendos caused imaginations to run wild, rumors multiplied. Wild stories developed. As no creditable facts were released to the general public, school board members were stopped everywhere they went, as the general public was dying to hear the latest inside story and/or offer their 2 cents as to which rumors they thought were true. Board members also received an earful from those offering their support of the district. Then the APD pours gas on the fire and announces two more investigations taking place. Of course, they didn't tell the public that the subjects of their investigations had been fired or resigned months earlier. The general public consensus was the offenders were still working at AISD and Burns was covering it up. Finally the police announced the suspects were FORMER AISD employees, but at this point, the story had a life of their own.

The Abilene Police Department started requesting all sorts of records over the last 5 years. It was internally estimated by the district that it would take several people working fulltime several months to locate, copy and produce the copies. It was made known that this was just the start of their requests. With the constant public calls wanting to know what was happening and/or defending the actions, board members lives and jobs were being affected. This had to stop. An understanding was developed with the APD to rescind the requests and let things calm down if Burns left. It was decided, it was time for AISD to move on. For the good of the district, Burns had to go. After a late night closed door session, Dr Burns was talked into signing a Voluntary Separation Agreement on February 2nd and take a buyout.

Question: If I had it to do all over again, would I have pushed for the hiring of Dr Burns and/or someone like him 5 years ago? Yes, without a doubt. AISD is much better today for him being here 5 years than any other thing I could have done as a board member. He identified, trained and put into place academic leaders that the district will continue to benefit from for years to come.

Question: Do you think it was fair how Dr. Burns was treated? As I would tell my kids: Life isn't always fair - make the best of whatever cards you were dealt and move forward. Sometimes elected officials feel like they have to overlook what is fair for one individual and look at the big picture. School board members, earning nothing for their service, have their own day jobs and their own families to worry about. The decision was balanced out in their minds by providing some funds to help offset the treatment.

I would be happy to discuss in whatever level of detail any general or specific questions you might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles L Wolfe". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Charles L Wolfe

Charles Wolfe born and raised in Abilene. He attended Abilene public schools and graduated in the top 25 of his graduating class at Abilene High. He has a BBA in Accounting from Abilene Christian University and a MBA from Texas Tech. He is also a CPA and has earned several computer related certifications. Charles served as a trustee of the Abilene ISD for 12 years including 2 years as President. For the last 29 years, he has owned and operated an accounting software company headquartered in

Abilene with customers in 45 states and 8 countries. For the last 30+ years, he has also maintained strong involvements with the Boy Scouts of America, Better Business Bureau, Day Nursery of Abilene, and Abilene Chamber of Commerce.

Follow up: Yesterday, an Abilene police officer (SRO at one of the middle school campuses) was accused of grabbing a 12-year old student from behind, pushing him face first into the ground, getting on top of him and putting him in a choke hold until he became unconscious. Police have refused to allow the school's surveillance footage to be viewed by the parent or be released. A parent that was at the school, captured the last part of the activity on her phone. The Abilene police chief defended the officer's action because the kid was verbally belligerent, but places him on "modified duty" and reassigned away from the campus.



Audra Ude Ed.D.
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Abilene Independent School District

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February, 2015

Dear Board of Trustees,

I am honored to provide my recommendation for Dr. Heath Burns as you select your next superintendent. I first met Dr. Burns in June, 2013 and have had the pleasure of being a member of his team during the last two years. By way of introduction, I have served in education 25 years, 12 of which I have served in an assistant/associate superintendent role and 17 total in a district leadership role, responsible for curriculum and instruction. I have served in this capacity under three great leaders—Carol Moffett, Julie Carbajal and Heath Burns. I can tell you Heath Burns comes with my highest recommendation. It has been clear every day in every way that Dr. Burns puts children first. He is a strong advocate for the disadvantaged, be that economically disadvantaged, minority or at-risk. I have seen him take action time and time again in a fair and professional manner to ensure that students have the best teachers, curriculum and instruction possible, as well as support services, sound instructional materials and technology to fulfill a solid, viable education for every single child. The team of educators who have worked for him love and respect him greatly, because he challenges us and holds all accountable for serving children well. He supports appropriate action with high expectations, coaching, discussions, love and care for his team as well as children. I have seen Dr. Burns interact well with children and adults alike. In the fall of 2013, as I first came on board in Abilene ISD, I also observed Dr. Burns work tirelessly to promote a bond package to provide for better safety, security and facilities for the children of Abilene. He knew they deserved so much more than some of the dilapidated facilities at *some of our campuses and sought to fulfill a need to create better safety and protection as well as* technology resources. I observed as he presented approximately 90 times to various community, parent, staff and student groups, clearly demonstrating the need. He also interacted one-on-one with influential members of the community to garner their support. The bond election overwhelmingly passed, despite previous rejections from the community. He was able to instill not only confidence and trust, but also enthusiasm in the community for accomplishing something much greater for children. Furthermore, I have observed Dr. Burns mentoring, instructing and conversing with children in a way that let children know they had a leader who wanted to know and love them, while helping them achieve at the highest levels.

Dr. Burns is also considered a leader in the state, having served on various committees, including the *Commissioner's Cabinet*. I believe he is one of the longest standing members of the Commissioner's Cabinet. He has also testified before the legislature, in the school district finance suit and sought

audience with the Commissioner and other TEA staff on behalf of the unique needs of children. For example, he had the Commissioner visit Abilene to hear firsthand of the diverse needs of our many refugee children, as Abilene hosts an International Rescue Committee center and approximately half of our English Language Learner population is unschooled refugee children with a very diverse set of primary languages and skills.

I have also seen Dr. Burns “go to bat” for children and their educational options, even though that has not always been the popular thing to do with some influential folks in the community. Recently, he has experienced a politically charged environment with the local police department that ultimately led to his resignation in agreement with the AISD Board of Trustees. I will tell you he took the high road. Sometimes, it simply becomes a better choice to resign and part ways than to fight things out and bring negative attention in an already difficult situation. I must tell you we have a serious battle occurring in our local community, like none I have previously seen, regarding when and how to report rumors. It appears clear to all when a direct outcry should be reported. I believe Dr. Burns, throughout this situation, has acted with the upmost integrity and as most any superintendent would under the circumstances. Continually, he has sought to resolve the concerns in a professional, respectful manner and directly with those impacted. I witnessed many of his actions and believe he always worked with the best interest of students in mind, while following the law and acting in good common sense. However, our local Chief of Police has a different idea about what is required of the law than what I have ever experienced in my service, having served in different communities and districts. Unfortunately, this battle took place in the public eye and Dr. Burns, from my perspective, was unjustly accused of trying to interfere with an investigation and failure to report. In fact, I saw Dr. Burns act expediently to report to all appropriate authorities when he learned a dean (through a partial and incomplete self-report) had entered a harmful relationship with a student. Shortly after the self-report, we learned the police department had been investigating the individual for a couple of days and had already issued a search warrant. However, the police department did not notify the school district or seek to work in partnership with us to bring the individual to justice. Instead, the individual was permitted to remain on campus a couple of more days, exposed to the student he harmed and all other students at the school. Within 30 minutes of learning of the self-report, Dr. Burns called law enforcement and began notifying the Board, parents, staff, the State Board for Educator Certification, etc. as necessary and appropriate under the circumstances. Additionally, we had a second situation a few days later, where we learned a rumor that a teacher had become involved with a student. Having two situations like this in close succession impacts the trust of the community for the school district and educators. It is a harsh reality. With the advent of social media, we lose the opportunity to share the truth through normal protocols. Social media quickly becomes a firestorm. Dr. Burns learned of the *rumor regarding a teacher over the Christmas Break and worked as expediently as possible supporting the principal who learned of the rumor*. Allegedly the rumor was initiated by a community member, to an assistant principal’s wife, to the assistant principal, then principal, then Dr. Burns. The community member indicated a parent had said something to her. Dr. Burns and the principal began acting immediately. The first action was to call the parents to see if they knew anything of concern. They fully denied there was any concern or relationship between a teacher and their teenage child. However, a few days later, they discovered a text message, reported it and the very same day Dr. Burns moved to get the teacher’s resignation, in order to immediately remove her from students, and submitted a report to law enforcement. The chief took issue with the report not being made upon first hearing a general rumor handed down through several parties. He chose Dr. Burns and the principal as his targets

for action. Instead of sitting down and discussing any concerns for safety and seeking to find a better solution, the local chief choose to make the matter an issue in the public eye, a battle of wills. It was four days after Dr. Burns report to law enforcement before they arrested the ex-teacher and she continued to have opportunities to interact with the alleged victim throughout this time. Some of the law enforcement actions were also supported by affidavits steeped in false information, conjecture and errors. Despite the testimony of all involved, and effort on the part of Dr. Burns and his team to get the record corrected with the Chief, local law enforcement has still not corrected the record, formally or in the public eye. None of the statements of district witnesses have been released to the public. Only the false affidavit has been placed out in the media. I have never seen anything quite like it. I have always experienced a partnership with local law enforcement in order to protect the safety of children.

Most importantly, I will share with you the success Dr. Burns has been able to achieve in 5 short years, to turn a district around from one that was not meeting standard to a district that not only meets standard, but every campus in 2014 met standard and our campuses earned nearly 50% of the available Distinction Designation measures available. He has also employed programs to help students accelerate their learning, catch-up and get excited about their education. He seeks daily to ensure a quality education for every child, regardless of background. There has been a steady increase in Math and Science scores over the last 4 years, under STAAR. Additionally, this year, we launched a major literacy initiative, starting at the Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade levels, with a goal of 100% growth for every student and great effort to lay a solid foundation for success in every content area. Early results are showing positive increases in the reading and writing skills of our children, while increasing the joy for learning on the part of students and teachers. Under Dr. Burns' leadership, the district has continued to have a strong Advanced Placement program, with several National Merit Semifinalists and Finalists. He has also provided leadership in developing Dual Credit options to broaden the number and type of students involved in advanced educational services.

I am proud to call Dr. Burns a friend and a colleague. He is sincerely one of the strongest advocates for children and I have enjoyed working with him. Given the opportunity, I would work with Dr. Burns again in my future service. I know he will continue to succeed and be a champion for children wherever he serves.

Sincerely,

Dr. Audra Ude,
Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Abilene Independent School District



Abilene Independent School District

241 Pine Street • Abilene, Texas 79601 • (325) 677-1444

February 17, 2015

Dear School Leaders:

We are honored to write a letter of recommendation for Dr. Heath Burns for the position of Superintendent of Schools. We enjoyed the privilege of working for Dr. Burns as he served as Superintendent for Abilene ISD. He led the district with integrity, compassion, and a great work ethic.

Under the leadership of Dr. Burns, student academic success increased significantly. All campuses are currently rated academically acceptable with many receiving areas of distinction. He has the rare ability to remain focused on serving underprivileged students, while insisting that a challenging and rigorous curriculum be maintained for academically elite students. He wants every student to be successful.

A very significant accomplishment was Dr. Burns' ability to plan, communicate, and pass the largest bond in the history of Abilene ISD. In November of 2013, the district passed an \$87.7 million bond in a landslide victory. A great triumph for Abilene ISD and the Abilene community.

Dr. Burns likes to be involved in the day to day operations of the district. He enjoys spending time on campuses and in classrooms to witness and support the exceptional things taking place each day. He always takes time to thank teachers, administrators, and support staff for making a difference in the lives of students.

Dr. Burns is well respected among other superintendents in our region and in the state of Texas. He is known for his unwavering dedication to the service of children. We have every confidence that Dr. Burns will be a great leader for your district.

Respectfully,

Paula Tallant
Secretary to the Superintendent/Board of Trustees

Susan Neil
Secretary to the Superintendent/Board of Trustees



THOMAS RATLIFF
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
VICE-CHAIRMAN

P.O. Box 232
MT. PLEASANT, TX 75456

TEL: (903) 717-1190
WWW.THOMASRATLIFF.COM

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write a letter of recommendation for Dr. Heath Burns. I have worked with him on several different issues over the past few years and know him as a tireless advocate for common-sense reforms at the state level to yield positive changes for students and professional educators at the local level. Heath is always willing to stand up to those who want to tear down public education and do the right thing.

While he may not be as well known as some superintendents around the state, I would put Heath in the league with superintendents like HD Chambers, Mary Ann Whitaker and Jeff Turner, just to name a few.

A lot of superintendents can look good on paper, but the human factor can make a huge difference in the performance of a superintendent. Look no further than Heath's track record at Abilene for his abilities and potential. Any school district would be blessed to have Heath at the helm.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T Ratliff", with a horizontal line above the first name.

Thomas Ratliff
SBOE Member, District 9



EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER
REGION XIV

1830 Highway 151
Ottawa, TX
76067-4750
940-728-0111
Fax 940-728-0111

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation for Heath Burns, who is seeking the superintendency in your school district. I have had the privilege of knowing Heath for three years. Not only are Heath and I professional colleagues, I consider him a friend.

First and foremost, Heath is a person of high moral character and one of the most committed professionals with whom I have had the pleasure of working. When considering applicants, I consider these traits to be more important than any an applicant may possess. He has a sincere love and concern for his district, its students, and staff that is manifested in a positive, supportive role that enables them to reach their fullest potential.

Heath's successful experiences as a superintendent have given him the necessary tools and confidence to lead your district. You will find him to be honest, open, and dedicated to students of the district. His decision making will always be predicated on what is right for children.

I have had many opportunities to see Heath interact with superintendents and other administrators, and he has the respect of all. He is definitely a leader. You will not find a person with more dedication, enthusiasm, perseverance, and a servant's heart than Heath.

I can not say enough good things about Heath Burns. Your district will be in good hands with Heath at the helm. Again, without any reservation, I highly recommend Heath for your superintendent vacancy.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Kincaid
Executive Director
Region 14 Education Service Center

February 16, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am the President of Education Abilene, the local for Texas State Teacher's Association (TSTA, NEA). We have over 200 members in Abilene – teachers, secretaries, maintenance people, and other support personnel. I am also a teacher at Madison Middle School and have been in public schools for over thirty years.

Here's what I know about Dr. Heath Burns, as a superintendent. He would make a great superintendent no matter where he is. From my perspective, he's always been approachable, open to suggestions and open-minded about anything. He requires much and expects all employees to do their best.

As a leader in our organization, I was privileged to join the presidents of the other organizations at the monthly meeting with Dr. Burns here in AISD to discuss what was on our minds and address any concerns we had.

Your truly,

Mark Grose

(325)660-6303



Jerry Maze
Executive Director

Sharon Henson
Deputy Director
School Support &
Grant Services

Terry Marak
Chief Financial Officer
Financial & Building Services

Charlene Simpson
Deputy Director
Academic &
Administrative Services

Nick Brown
Senior Director/
Chief Information Officer
School Finance

February 20, 2015

Dear Members of the Board and Search Firm:

Dr. Heath L. Burns asked me to write a letter of recommendation for him and I am honored to do so. Dr. Burns and I have worked together in a wide variety of educational leadership roles for more than 15 years. I am among a large group of educators who consider him one of the best school superintendents in the state. Dr. Burns' passion for and commitment to leading high-quality schools and the children they serve is made evident by his work.

Dr. Burns began his administrative career as an assistant principal for me at a 4A high school. Within two years he had distinguished himself at such a high level of leadership that the district made him principal of a large junior high campus. Again he excelled to the level that within two years he was called upon by a school district to serve as their superintendent.

Heath Burns is passionate about student success in and out of the classroom. In each community where he has served as superintendent, his ability to gain the trust of students, staff, parents and community has led to increased student performance and measurable school improvement. His resume will reflect countless innovative solutions to ensure that students receive the instruction they need for academic success and the leadership opportunities they need for success beyond the classroom.

Heath Burns is a trusted school leader in the communities where he serves. Each community starting with Anderson-Shiro, then Angleton and Abilene demonstrated their confidence in him as their school superintendent by approving major bond elections and building projects to better serve their students. He developed that trust by consistently responding to community needs through a high level of community engagement and by working effectively with their local boards of trustees.

Dr. Burns is trusted and respected statewide as a powerful voice in the on-going advocacy for public education and the students we serve. Good examples of that confidence in his knowledge and clarity on school matters is him being chosen to testify on behalf of our schools in the recent school finance litigation and his frequent testimony before the state legislature on policy issues that define the future for our children.

Dr. Burns is a servant leader as exemplified by his commitment to his family and four wonderful children. He gives back to them and to the community through his work in school activities, coaching youth sports and teaching by example in his local church.



Jerry Maze
Executive Director

Sharon Henson
Deputy Director
School Support &
Grant Services

Terry Marak
Chief Financial Officer
Financial & Building Services

Charlene Simpson
Deputy Director
Academic &
Administrative Services

Nick Brown
Senior Director/
Chief Information Officer
School Finance

I recommend Heath Burns to you respectfully and without reservation. I only wish that he was applying for a position in our organization. I would hire him today. His leadership continues to make a positive difference wherever he serves. Please call on me if a conversation will better inform your decision.

Sincerely,

Jerry G. Maze, Ed.D.



Education Service Center
Region VI

302 Montgomery Road
Harrisville, Texas 77340-6499
Tel: (361) 295-9161
Fax: (361) 295-1447
www.escc.net

March 5, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is a recommendation for Dr. Heath Burns.

I have known Heath Burns both socially and professionally through my association with the Livingston and Anderson-Shiro Independent School Districts. Dr. Burns is informed, articulate, and has the ability to communicate with any group or organization. He has the expertise to guide, instruct, discipline and delegate duties to the personnel for which he is responsible. He is an outstanding motivator who leads by example both challenging and encouraging teachers and students to strive for excellence in and out of the classroom. He is very knowledgeable about school finance and understands the accounting rules and regulations under which school districts must operate.

Dr. Burns has been recognized as an educational leader who is committed to academic excellence. The various programs and projects that he has implemented or become involved with have greatly improved the instructional process and test scores in the Livingston and Anderson-Shiro Independent School Districts.

Dr. Burns maintains the highest standards of integrity and responsibility. He is fair, responsive, community-minded, and motivated by his love for children. I recommend him for consideration with no reservations.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas Poe".

Thomas Poe
Executive Director

Brandon L. Eisenman

July 30, 2013


RE: Dr. Heath Burns

Dr. Heath Burns was superintendent of schools at Anderson-Shiro CISD from 2001-2004. As a member of the board of trustees during that time (and ever since), I can honestly say that he helped save our district. Dr. Burns came on board at a time when we were struggling financially. We had no money in the bank, were overstaffed, and had little prospects for recovery. Dr. Burns trimmed the budget, made tough decisions to streamline staff, and put us on a path to prosperity that we still enjoy today.

Dr. Burns is a leader in every sense of the word. He commands respect from his administration and expects greatness from those around him. He helped teach the board members at Anderson-Shiro how to be the best we could be. To this day his influence is still felt within our schools.

I am absolutely certain Dr. Burns is capable of being a leader of any organization – no matter the size. He possesses a rare set of characteristics and skills that rarely exist in one person. I would give him my highest recommendation for superintendent of schools at any school district.

Sincerely,



Brandon L. Eisenman