

TASK FORCE ON HISPANIC QUALITY OF LIFE: EDUCATION

Overview of Major AISD Initiatives

Comprehensive Education Plan

AISD is implementing a comprehensive and coherent education plan for all campuses and all grades to enhance teaching and learning. This plan will help us raise achievement levels for all students and progress toward eliminating achievement gaps. The plan provides a strong alignment between the written, taught, and tested curricula. The main elements of the plan include:

- Focus on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)
- Principles of Learning framework (see Appendix C)
- Instructional Planning Guides and Advanced Planning Guides in core academic areas
- Benchmark assessments
- Interventions for struggling learners
- Ongoing professional development

High School Redesign

The High School Redesign Initiative came about from the results of our own internal review and from the results of two outside reports: an audit of AISD career and college preparation conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB); and a report on AISD school organizational climates by the University of Texas. Much of our reform work is centered on addressing the seven challenges and associated recommendations in the SREB audit (see Appendix D).

In developing reform plans for each high school, considerable input will be obtained from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. The main elements of the initiative include:

- Implementing the Comprehensive Education Plan (described above)
- Strengthening Career and Technology Education (CATE) offerings to create strong programs in all high schools, with career pathways and majors that are closely aligned with current and projected Austin job markets
- Establishing pipelines to college for all students (which will be greatly facilitated by the *College Connection* collaborative program with ACC)
- Implementing the *Four Rs* (Rigor in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; Relevance in learning to student interests and opportunities; Relationships between students and their peers and caring adults; and Results to support and sustain redesign)

Blueprint Initiative

AISD has identified six under-performing elementary and middle schools to serve as prototypes for future efforts to raise student achievement. Intensive restructuring of these “blueprint” schools includes providing well-qualified teachers, proven leadership, consistent systems and procedures, specific curricula, and additional staff development and student support services. This initiative is designed to gain sustainable improvement in each of the blueprint schools

Character Education

In order to address the holistic needs of all its students, AISD is continuing to place emphasis on providing character education. Across all AISD campuses exist a growing number and variety of character education programs. Recently, under Results Policy R-6, pertaining to personal development skills, the Board of Trustees approved a character education “touchstone.” The touchstone is a set of ten desired character traits for all students, and each trait will be incrementally implemented district-wide through a variety of activities: Respect, Courage, Caring, Honesty, Perseverance, Responsibility, Integrity, Self-Discipline, Trustworthiness, and Fairness.

English Language Learners

AISD is resolute about raising the academic achievement of its English Language Learners (ELLs), and is engaged in implementing a district-wide initiative, *English Learners and Educators Versed in Academic Rigor* (ELEVAR). At the elementary level, *Rigorous Instruction in Spanish and English* (RISE) is a framework built on providing all ELLs equal access to the standard curriculum while providing coherent programs in Bilingual Education or English as a Second Language (ESL). At the middle school level, *Read 180* is an intensive opportunity for the acceleration of language and reading skills that serves the largest number of ELLs. At the high school level, the International High School has been established to better serve immigrant students new to the American school system. The International High School is complemented by the International Welcome Center, which receives families and students, completes assessments of reading and language skills, and recommends school placement for immigrant students.

Pre-Kindergarten Expansion

AISD Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) enrollment continues to increase annually. AISD is applying state Pre-K expansion grants to provide full-day instruction to eligible four-year-olds who are limited English proficient (LEP), economically disadvantaged, or homeless. Full-day instruction is offered in all elementary schools with Pre-K programs. The full-day pre-K program is an important part of the district’s response to meeting requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind act.

Bond Program

In 2004, with strong voter approval, AISD successfully passed a major bond program totaling \$519.5 million. Implementation of this initiative will involve:

- Building eight new schools and 92 additional classrooms
- Renovating existing campuses and athletic facilities
- Upgrading campus security
- Purchasing low-emission school buses
- Refinancing district debt

A special oversight committee will assist the district in ensuring that the implementation of the bond program will be marked by timely completion, sound workmanship, and the wise use of public dollars.

Campus Safety

In 2004, a special Community Safety Task Force formed by AISD presented recommendations for ensuring that campuses are safe, conducive to learning, and free from disruption. These recommendations addressed district policies, campus facilities, campus climate, and continuum of care for students. AISD is actively moving to implement these recommendations, and recently adopted policies addressing the prevention and intervention of bullying and sexual harassment. As recommended by the task force, the district is also using research-based *Positive Behavior Supports* as a framework for creating and sustaining positive learning environments. Other important measures related to safety include: dress codes for students and staff; closed campuses during lunch at high schools; and safety goals and strategies in all Campus Improvement Plans. Additionally, the 2004 Bond Program includes \$20.9 million for improving campus security.

Customer Service Initiative

The Customer Service Initiative has two objectives. The first of these objectives is to create an organizational culture oriented toward providing quality customer service. In working to achieve this objective, AISD is continuing to provide targeted staff training centered on Guidelines for Model Customer Service (see Appendix E). In addition, the district has created an Ombudsman position which plays an important role in informal dispute resolution, providing general information, and clarifying policies and procedures. Together, these actions help promote an enhanced customer service environment. The second objective of the Customer Service Initiative is to monitor and assess various customer service efforts. AISD conducts several customer service satisfaction surveys as well as random telephone calls and site visits to assess customer service practices.