SECTION FOURTEEN
Environmental Scan

An “environmental scan” provides a detailed assessment of internal and external conditions, forces, and variables. The environmental scan for the AISD Strategic Plan consisted of: SWOT analysis; evaluation of possible Strategic Plan priorities; research into pertinent trends; assessment of challenges; and identification of linkages to other local and regional planning efforts.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

The SWOT analysis relied on the perspectives of over 70 individuals, including community and business leaders and district staff (see Appendix N). Following is a summary of the most frequently occurring responses that came from the individual interviews (not listed in any particular order):

Strengths

• Strong, stable leadership
• Continued emphasis on college and career preparation
• Continued progress in raising achievement for all students and working to eliminate achievement gaps
• Reduction in dropouts
• Community support
• Rigorous instructional standards and high expectations for all students
• Strong alignment of written, taught, and tested curricula
• Principles of Learning framework
• Improvements in data systems and instructional technology
• Greater emphasis on character education and positive behavioral supports
• Successes with ELLs
• Safer and more orderly learning environments

Weaknesses

• Achievement gaps still exist among student groups
• Need to look at the big picture and how everything connects
• More active involvement of parents
• Need for greater diversity among teachers and administrators
• Need for better communications, both internally and externally
• Overworked and underpaid staff with low morale
• Crisis-oriented or damage-control mentality
• Lack of an organization-wide customer service orientation
Opportunities

- Partnerships with colleges, businesses, and community groups
- Resource sharing with other local governments
- Strong community arts and cultural support
- Students and parents as resources
- Schools as community centers
- To be the best urban school district in the nation

Threats

- More ELLs and at-risk students
- Loss of socio-economic and ethnic diversity within the district
- Increasing expectations and requirements with limited resources
- Loss of high quality teachers and principals
- Political enemies of public schools and alternatives to public schools
- Keeping up with technology needs
- Keeping up with safety and security needs

Possible Strategic Plan Priorities

In the over 70 individual interviews described above, perspectives were also gained on possible Strategic Plan priorities. Following is a summary of the most frequent responses that came from the individual interviews (not listed in any particular order):

- Continuing to raise achievement levels for all students and progressing to eliminate achievement gaps
- Improving attendance rates and decreasing dropout rates
- Addressing the needs of ELLs
- Redesign of high schools
- Greater emphasis on college and career preparation
- Recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers and administrators
- Attaining more active parental and community involvement
- Providing more culturally relevant instruction
- Implementing educational standards in every classroom
- Better integrating technology with instruction
- Maintaining safe and orderly learning environments
- Building greater diversity in the professional workforce of the district
- Providing sound stewardship of district resources

In addition to a number of individuals, the Board of Trustees provided input on possible priorities to the Strategic Planning Panel (see Appendix O). Also, the District Advisory Council and Austin Council of PTAs provided recommendations on possible priorities to the panel (see Appendices P and Q, respectively).
An online survey was also created to gain input on possible Strategic Plan priorities from the general public, district staff, and Campus Advisory Councils (which consist of parents, teachers, other campus staff, and students). The results of the online survey are provided in Appendix R.

**Trends**

Research into pertinent trends was conducted by planning staff in the areas of population, economy, and education. Following are salient points under each of these areas.

**Population**

- Texas has the second-highest state birth rate in the nation. The total population of the state grew 7.9% between 2000 and 2003, compared to 4.3% for the nation; the total population of Travis County grew 5.7%.
- As of 2003, Texas is a “majority-minority” state (i.e., more than half of the total state population is other than White). Travis and Tarrant are now the only metropolitan counties in Texas with a White majority population. The White percentage of the population is 49.5% for the state, and 53.7% for Travis County.
- Between 2000 and 2003, the Hispanic population of Travis County grew by 9.5%.
- Between 2000 and 2003, the percentage of people in Travis County who speak English less than very well grew 15.5%.
- The total population of Texas is projected to increase from 20,851,829 in 2000 to 24,178,507 in 2010 (an increase of 15.95%). The Hispanic population of Texas is projected to increase from 6,669,666 in 2000 to 11,742,820 in 2010 (an increase of 76.15%).
- The total population of Travis County is projected to increase from 812,280 in 2000 to 963,120 in 2010 (an increase of 18.57%). The Hispanic population of Travis County is projected to increase from 229,048 in 2000 to 327,367 in 2010 (an increase of 42.93%).

**Economy**

- The Austin regional unemployment rate is beginning to show signs of declining, and is currently at 4.6%.
- Consumer spending in the Austin region increased 6.0% between 2003 and 2004.
- The median household income in Travis County is 12.1% higher than that for the state, and 4.7% higher than that for the nation.
- Between 2000 and 2003, the number of households in the Austin region facing affordable housing challenges (i.e., 30%+ of income spent on housing costs) increased 41.8%.
- At 16.3%, Texas has the eighth-highest state poverty rate in the nation. In Travis County, 14.0% of the population lives in poverty.
Education

- For every 100 ninth-graders in Texas, 64 graduate from high school on time and only 13 go on to earn at least an associate’s degree.
- In Texas, Whites are three times more likely to attend college than Hispanics, and five times more likely than African Americans.
- In Travis County in 2003, 40.6% of the population aged 25 and over had at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 24.5% for the state and 26.5% for the nation. However, the figure for Travis County is down from 43.1% in 2001.
- Between 2000 and 2003, the population of Travis County aged 25 and over with less than a ninth grade education increased from 5.5% to 8.4%.

Challenges

AISD is a strong and successful organization, but the environment does include some weaknesses and threats, multiple priorities, and certain demographic trends with implications for planning. This environment will produce several challenges for the continued success of AISD over the next five years (not presented in any particular order):

- Increases in the number of ELLs as well as persons in poverty will place greater demands on fully meeting the needs of all students and their families.
- Progressing toward closing achievement gaps among student groups, and preparing all students for successful careers and continuing education will continue to be challenging.
- College and career preparatory programs will need to keep pace with changing job market demands.
- Increases in total enrollment will result in the need for more schools, teachers, and principals. Along with this demand will be increasing desires and expectations for smaller class sizes as well as smaller schools.
- Maintaining the safety and security of district facilities and transportation will continue to be a concern.
- Demands on keeping up with current technology and integrating technology into the classroom will continue.
- More public school users will rent while more public school nonusers will own homes and pay taxes, creating a potential impact on district revenues. Loss of socio-economic diversity may also impact the district’s tax base.
- Recruiting and retaining Special Education, Bilingual, math, and science teachers will continue to be difficult in a competitive market.
Options to public schools will require that the district engage and involve its customers and encourage their sense of ownership and investment in the system. The district will need to manage public perceptions and build awareness of successes.

Finding the resources to provide adequate incentives and supports to retain highly qualified teachers and principals will continue to be difficult, particularly for high-need schools.

Providing increased professional development for all teachers will be important so that they are better prepared to meet the specific needs of their students. It will be particularly important to provide accelerated development of beginning teachers.

**Linkages to Other Local and Regional Plans**

A number of entities in the Austin area are actively involved in long-range planning. As described below, the AISD Strategic Plan provides several linkages to other local and regional plans.

**Envision Central Texas**

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*Envision Central Texas* was completed in 2004 after a two-year planning process involving a substantial regional effort and extensive public input. *Envision Central Texas* points out that AISD is a major part of a complete educational system that is vital to the overall quality of life in the Austin area. The AISD Strategic Plan supports *Envision Central Texas* through:

- Contributing to a skilled and educated regional workforce
- Helping build a sense of opportunity and possibility within the community
- Providing continued commitment to environmental protection and resource conservation
- Encouraging public engagement and involvement
- Underscoring the important role of public schools in neighborhoods

**City of Austin**

The AISD Strategic Plan supports long-range planning efforts of the City of Austin, primarily through maintaining a collaborative intergovernmental partnership and contributing to the economic base of the community. AISD works with the City of Austin to support its *Watershed Protection Master Plan* and *Sustainable Communities Initiative* through Land Development Standards Agreements and School Impact Analyses, particularly in the areas of environmentally sensitive development practices and resource conservation. Results Policy R-5, pertaining to citizenship, is particularly supportive of the *Sustainable Communities Initiative*, in that R-5 states all students will understand and respect the broad range of cultures,
languages, and belief structures in the community, as well as participate in the political process, contribute to the community, and be good stewards of the environment. In addition, R-6, pertaining to personal development skills, supports the sustainability tenets of providing equal opportunities for individual development and maximizing the use of individual abilities.

The City of Austin is amending the *Austin Tomorrow Plan* through development and adoption of individual *Neighborhood Plans*. A number of these plans have already been adopted, but several more are either underway or pending initiation. Involvement of schools and school communities in these planning efforts helps provide the broad level of participation desired in the process and will continue to be encouraged. The AISD Strategic Plan supports the goals of the *Austin Tomorrow Plan* and its amending *Neighborhood Plans* through:

- Lending to the desirable image and character of neighborhoods
- Preserving the varied historical, architectural, and cultural inheritance of Austin
- Helping the local economy through providing a stable, high-level workforce
- Assuring the sensitivity of development to environmental features
- Practicing sound resource conservation
- Helping to provide recreational facilities to meet the needs of Austin’s citizens
- Improving the planning, management, funding, and delivery of health and human services

**Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce**

In 2003, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce (GACC) released *Opportunity Austin*, a long-range plan consisting of five strategies to promote economic development. One of the strategies relates to improving regional competitiveness and, among other things, states the importance of building workforce quality through ensuring that regional educational standards, performance, and capacity are maintained at competitive levels. The AISD Strategic Plan is squarely focused on providing a world-class education for all students and fully preparing them for successful careers and continuing education.

The AISD Strategic Plan also supports the specific Education and Workforce Mission of GACC through: enhancing the capacity of K-12 education to graduate academically prepared students; ensuring that greater numbers and a broader spectrum of students attend postsecondary education; and ensuring that effective workforce training programs exist to meet the needs of a continually evolving employment sector.
University of Texas

The Strategic Plan of the University of Texas (UT) focuses on providing a quality college education, but the plan also acknowledges the importance of a quality K-12 education and directs a number of supportive programs. In this regard, the AISD Strategic Plan provides close linkages to the University of Texas Strategic Plan in the following areas:

- Application of instructional technology
- Reinforcing programs focusing on literacy, math, and science
- Promotion of the arts
- Tutoring, mentoring, and other volunteer programs
- Children’s wellness
- Teacher training and development
- Educational innovation (as supported by the University’s Charles A. Dana Center and Distance Education Program)
- Expertise and resource sharing
- Providing avenues for meaningful community involvement

Austin Partners in Education

Austin Partners in Education (APIE) was found in 1983 by AISD and GACC with the purpose of encouraging businesses, community organizations, and individuals to partner with public schools in enhancing the quality of education. Partners may share expertise, volunteer time, or donate funding or materials. The AISD Strategic Plan supports all aspects of the APIE Strategic Plan, including its mission to create and foster effective community and school partnerships that support and enrich student learning and success, and its strategic action areas:

- Student Mentoring
- Student Tutoring
- Instructional Technology
- Career Development
- Campus Beautification
- Materials Acquisition
- Recognition of Partners and Contributions (Annual “Salute” Program)

Austin Community College

The mission of the Austin Community College Master Plan, 2004-2006, closely parallels an important focus of the AISD Strategic Plan, in that emphasis is placed on preparing students for successful lives through providing an array of academic and vocational programs. Further, the AISD Strategic Plan is supportive of the stated values in the Austin Community College Master Plan:
Open and responsible exchange of ideas (Communication)
An open door to educational potential (Access)
Targeted actions to address students and internal needs within available resources (Responsiveness)
A commitment to integrity and exemplary standards (Excellence)
Personal and professional ownership that generates accountability (Stewardship)

Community Action Network

The Community Action Network (CAN) works to achieve sustainable social, health, educational, and economic outcomes through active community engagement. CAN recently established Key Areas of Focus to provide strategic direction for its efforts. The AISD Strategic Plan supports CAN’s efforts in striving for excellence in all schools and promotes its message that “Good Community is Good Business.”

In 2001, with considerable public input, CAN prepared an Urgent Issues Action Plan, and this plan is still used to guide community dialogs. The AISD Strategic Plan supports the educational, workforce, health, and safety targets of this plan, including:

- Recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers
- Preparing all students to succeed in higher education and the workforce
- Increasing student enrollment in advanced courses
- Consistently communicating high expectations for all students
- Addressing the whole needs of each student
- Facilitating community access to information and resources
- Keeping students in school and on track to attain their educational goals
- Placing emphasis on early education
- Providing safe and nurturing learning environments for all students

Travis County

Travis County has developed Strategic Directions for Health and Human Services which the AISD Strategic Plan supports in the following ways:

- Meeting the physical and mental health needs of all children
- Promoting healthy behaviors
- Helping meet employer needs to support economic success
- Encouraging work-based learning activities for in-school youth
- Applying a wraparound approach to providing systems of care to children and families
- Focusing on high-risk children and families
- Providing safe and accessible after-school programs
- Promoting community partnerships and collaboration
Other Plans

The AISD Strategic Plan supports the Mobility 2030 Plan of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), the Clean Air Action Plan for the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area prepared by the Central Texas Clean Air Coalition, and All Systems Go Long-Range Transit Plan being developed by the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, specifically through application of “green building” standards and phased replacement of school buses with cleaner emission vehicles. In addition, as previously mentioned, R-5 states that all students will be good stewards of the environment. Further, the promotion of safe routes to school, combined with student health initiatives, will encourage more students to walk or bike to and from school.

The AISD Strategic Plan also supports the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan of the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG). Most AISD schools recycle at least aluminum and paper, and the district as a whole gives preference to the purchase of recycled products. In addition, awareness of and practicing resource conservation are integral to ensuring that all students will be good stewards of the environment, under R-5.

Ongoing Efforts

AISD is committed to ongoing coordination and cooperation with other entities to better guarantee the success of various local and regional plans that have similar aims. This commitment is clearly articulated in Implementation Strategy 5.4 of the AISD Strategic Plan.

The AISD Board of Trustees and Superintendent hold regular meetings with the Austin City Council as well as the Board of Trustees of ACC. These meetings allow for continued dialog and collaborative efforts. The AISD Board of Trustees is also represented on the City of Austin’s Planning Commission and Bond Advisory Committee. AISD continues its strong working relationship with GACC, UT, and APIE in furthering quality education and building the workforce of tomorrow. AISD planning staff will continue to work with planners in other local and regional organizations to promote ongoing coordination and cooperation.

As indicated in Section Ten, part of the annual strategic assessment process will include an assessment of the relationships between the AISD Strategic Plan and other local and regional plans. Implementation of the AISD Strategic Plan will have implications to education and workforce in the Austin area, and the implementation of other local and regional plans may have implications to AISD. For example, the effects of “Smart Growth” on urban infill could affect total AISD enrollment and facility needs; proposed transportation networks may also affect population distributions, as well as traffic patterns near schools.