

Academic Program Management Audit DRAFT REPORT

Prepared for:
Austin Independent School District

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Executive Summary	1
Project Objectives and Scope	4
Approach and Methodology.....	6
Chapter 2: District Profile.....	8
Student Enrollment and Demographics.....	8
Student Performance and Outcomes	9
Instructional Resource Allocations	17
Chapter 3: Academic Organization and Management.....	26
Policy Framework for Academic Program Management.....	26
Central Office Organization and Staffing.....	32
Systems of School Support	39
Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement.....	44
Chapter 4: Curriculum Management	51
Austin ISD Theory of Action	51
Written Curriculum.....	51
Taught Curriculum	65
Assessed Curriculum.....	79
Chapter 5: Professional Learning and Instructional Supports	87
Principal and Teacher Profile	87
Oversight of Professional Learning in AISD	95
Professional Learning.....	98
Leadership Development.....	115

Appendix A: Interviews and School Visits A-1

 Interviews..... A-1

 Group Interviews..... A-2

 School Visits A-2

Appendix B: Campus Administrator Survey Results B-1

Appendix C: Teacher Survey Results C-1

Appendix D: Classroom Observations D-1

 Approach and Methodology..... D-1

 Learning Intentions D-2

 Technology and Blended Learning..... D-4

Chapter 1: Introduction

This report presents the results of the Academic Program Management Audit, as part of the internal audit program for the Austin Independent School District (Austin ISD, AISD) to support continuous improvement. This audit began in December 2022 and was completed in October 2023. This introductory Chapter provides an executive summary of audit findings and recommendations, describes the audit objectives and scope, and presents an overview of Gibson Consulting Group's (Gibson's) approach and methodology.

The audit team wishes to thank the AISD leadership and staff for their assistance in conducting this audit, and the Board Audit Committee (BAC) for overseeing this important work.

Executive Summary

Austin ISD is the eighth largest school district in Texas, enrolling more than 73,000 students in 2022-23. AISD's student population is 54% Hispanic/Latino, 31% White, 6% Black or African American, and 4% Asian, with the remaining 5% spread over multiple ethnicities. More than half (51.5%) of all students in AISD are economically disadvantaged, and almost as many students (46.8%) are identified as At-Risk (i.e., considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school). Other special populations include Emergent Bilingual/English Learners (EB/EL), (30.5%), Special Education (13.9%), and Gifted and Talented (G/T) (12.9%) students. Overall, AISD students are performing above the Region 13 and state averages across all grade levels and content areas but are performing below many of its peer districts.

This academic program management audit was conducted during a time of transition in AISD. Over the past few years, AISD has experienced high turnover in board governance (five of the nine trustees were newly elected in 2022), the superintendency (AISD has had four superintendents since 2020), and various other members of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). Further, the chief academic officer (CAO) and both of the associate superintendents of elementary and secondary schools positions within the Office of School Leadership (OSL) were vacant for most of the 2022-23 school year. The district also experienced the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, which altered the district's approach to teaching and learning and contributed to a wave of turnover among campus administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff. It is in this context that Gibson assessed the systems, structures, and processes that support the implementation of effective instructional practices and student learning across the district.

Below is a summary of the major themes that emerged from this audit:

- AISD's recent strategic planning efforts have resulted in a fundamental shift in strategy regarding the delivery of programs and services to historically underserved student populations. The district's development of the Equity Action Plan identified major problems with respect to students' equitable access to instruction and services, and the Long-Range Plan (LRP) subsequently identified major strategic changes to ensure that all students have such access. The audit team believes this strategic plan and these strategic shifts have great potential to make a difference for AISD students.
- Until a reorganization in August 2023, oversight and accountability for curriculum and instruction was diffused between the Office of Academics and OSL. This organizational structure (combined

with high staff turnover) resulted in misaligned priorities due to “differing educational philosophies,” disjointed decision-making, and a lack of coordinated support to campuses. The new (2023-24) realignment of these offices under a deputy superintendent position will help to promote a shared vision for teaching and learning in AISD by providing leadership and direction over the planning, implementation, and monitoring of all schools and educational programs.

- During this audit, several examples of inconsistent program implementation were noted relating to the use of the curriculum, unit planning, lesson planning, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), among other areas. During interviews and focus groups, the audit team repeatedly heard that it was not clear what elements of the instructional program were required (centrally decided) versus optional (decided at the campus level). There are no administrative procedures that define this for the district. AISD would benefit from the development of a decision-making framework to provide this clarity for day-to-day decisions at all levels of the organization regarding the instructional program.
- A re-write of the district’s K-8 curriculum in preparation for the 2023-24 school year was a primary focus of the Office of Academics during the time this audit was conducted. The audit team supports this effort and recommends that AISD supplement its classroom walkthrough instrument to include items related to curriculum implementation fidelity, which were absent in the 2022-23 walkthrough instrument.
- Literacy proficiency in AISD at all grade levels is low for students who are economically disadvantaged and/or non-White. Yet, AISD does not have a current district-wide literacy improvement strategy to address this issue. Utilization of the district’s instructional model for literacy (and math) is optional, and the structures to support fidelity of implementation are limited. Many teachers rated the quality of the professional development they have received related to literacy as “weak” or “inadequate” on the teacher survey, and data show that literacy professional development offerings are, in fact, limited.
- AISD has a comprehensive assessment system that includes diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, interim assessments, and state/national assessments. In 2020-21, AISD implemented the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) interim assessment pursuant to its 2020-25 Strategic Framework. The implementation of MAP during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the continuation of Short Cycle Assessments (SCAs) through 2022-23, created several challenges for the district. The audit team recommends that AISD fully invest in MAP as the singular, long-term interim assessment tool by enhancing teachers’ skills in the use of MAP assessments.
- Teacher turnover is a persistent challenge, and data show that the teacher turnover rate in AISD is higher than peer districts. AISD currently has four mentoring programs aimed at supporting novice teachers, yet they appear to be redundant and not well monitored. Feedback provided by teachers on the survey was also unfavorable. Consolidating these programs, more effectively pairing mentors with mentees, and providing more consistent program oversight will better support novice teachers and ultimately improve teacher retention in AISD.
- Professional learning (PL) in AISD is described as “one size fits all” and is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of principals and teachers based on their levels of experience and/or varying learning needs. Refining the district’s PL plan to better align with best practice

standards is a necessary first step in developing a comprehensive PL system for campus administrators and instructional staff.

- AISD offers several leadership development (LD) programs for aspiring principals and assistant principals, but they do not appear to be effective in preparing and placing program graduates into campus administrator positions. Data show that approximately two-thirds of principals and assistant principal program graduates do not serve as campus leaders during their tenures with AISD. Given the district's high rate of turnover of campus administrators and significant investment of resources in these leadership programs, an overhaul of both of these programs is recommended.

This audit identified 19 recommendations to improve the management of academic programs in AISD. These recommendations are listed in Table 1, along with the priority assigned by the audit team. The audit team assigned a priority level to each recommendation based on perceived risk and/or impact to the organization. Recommendations are not listed in order of priority but rather the order in which they appear in the report.

Table 1. Summary of Audit Recommendations

No.	Priority	Recommendation	Page
1	High	Develop a decision-making framework to support instructional decisions at all levels of the AISD organization.	30
2	Medium	Consider student and school needs in determining central office support and oversight of schools.	41
3	High	Implement financial incentives to attract more experienced principals to high-need schools.	42
4	High	Integrate change management practices for all major district initiatives.	44
5	Medium	Redesign the AISD portal navigation to increase accessibility and usage.	58
6	High	Provide more effective PL for teachers and principals to enhance their understanding of the new curriculum.	60
7	Medium	Embed resources and exemplars for accommodations and modifications in the new district curriculum to support teachers' scaffolding instruction for special populations.	63
8	High	Develop a curriculum management plan that better aligns resources to support a successful implementation.	64
9	Medium	Develop a "Portrait of a Graduate" and define the essential components of an instructional framework that represent the goals of AISD.	66
10	High	Implement strategies to address literacy achievement gaps.	72
11	Medium	Modify the district walkthrough rubric to include curriculum implementation.	75
12	Medium	Develop lesson plan templates for the core content areas.	77
13	Medium	Consistently review and provide feedback on unit plans.	79

No.	Priority	Recommendation	Page
14	High	Fully invest in MAP as the singular, long-term assessment program for Grades K-8.	84
15	Medium	Update the PL Guide to reflect effective program management practices.	104
16	Medium	Differentiate in-person training for AISD instructional staff.	107
17	Medium	Standardize "Learning Walks" as a development practice for AISD principals.	111
18	High	Consolidate the district's efforts to mentor and support its novice teachers.	115
19	High	Redesign components of AISD's LD programs.	122

Project Objectives and Scope

The objective of this Academic Program Management Audit was to assess how AISD organizes its resources, systems, and processes to support the implementation of effective instructional practices and student learning across the district. The scope of this audit primarily focused on the responsibilities under the Office of Academics (Academics Division), the OSL, and the Human Capital (HC) Department (Professional Learning Division), and it included relevant input from other departments as it relates to accountability systems and processes, technology and information systems, and professional development activities. Key questions that define the scope of this audit are listed below.

District Profile

- How has the district's portfolio of schools changed over the past five years?
- What changes in enrollment has the district experienced with regard to student demographics and special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are at risk of academic failure, students who are economically disadvantaged)?
- How are the district and schools performing according to Texas Education Agency (TEA) academic accountability ratings?
- How are students performing on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and other performance indicators?
- What is the current profile of the district's teacher workforce with regard to their certification program, highest degree earned, and average years of teaching experience? What is the teacher turnover rate, and how do these metrics compare to benchmark districts?
- What is the current profile of the district's principals with regard to their years in the principalship and turnover rates?

Instructional Leadership and Accountability

- Does the district have a comprehensive policy framework that clearly communicates the board's educational philosophy and expectations for curriculum and instruction?

- Is there a clear vision and strategy for achieving the board's academic goals and objectives? Do strategic planning documents include defined metrics and milestones aligned to the board's academic goals and objectives?
- Does the central office organization and staffing enable effective oversight and management of all academic programs and resources?
- In what ways does the district support school leaders and hold them accountable for student performance? What degree of autonomy do principals have regarding implementation of the district's curriculum?

Curriculum Management

- Is there a curriculum management plan that communicates the intentions of the district in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment?
- Is there well-defined and cyclical process for developing, reviewing, and revising the district's curriculum? Are decisions about improvements and updates to the curriculum guided by feedback from stakeholders?
- Does the district have a comprehensive and coherent curriculum to support teachers in planning and delivering high-quality instruction?
- Is there consistency in the organization of the curriculum components in the district's learning management system (LMS) and alignment across grade levels and content areas?
- Has the district identified a preferred instructional model (or models) to support the delivery of instruction in each content area?
- Do teachers routinely develop unit and/or lesson plans that outline their objectives for what students will accomplish during a unit of instruction or lesson? Do campus administrators periodically review them and provide feedback?
- Are there well-defined processes for requesting, approving, procuring, and retiring instructional materials and supplemental resources to support the district's curriculum?
- Does the district have an assessment strategy that includes SCAs, interim assessments, and a system for progress-monitoring?
- What systems and processes are in place to ensure that the written, taught, and tested curricula are aligned? What processes and tools are used to monitor the fidelity of implementation?

Professional Learning and Instructional Supports

- Does the district have an effective program for supporting new and beginning teachers through induction and mentoring?
- Does the district have a comprehensive PL plan that aligns resources and guides PL for all administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff?
- Are district-led PL opportunities meeting the diverse needs of the district's teacher workforce?

- What campus-based instructional support models (i.e., coaching models) are used to build the capacity of teachers to implement the curriculum using research-based, data-driven instruction?
- Are teacher PLCs widely implemented across the district? Are the conditions for highly effective PLCs in place?
- Does the district have established career pathways or LD programs to identify and prepare aspiring school- or district-level leaders?
- Do principals have the opportunity to routinely collaborate with their peers to improve their leadership and learning skills?

Approach and Methodology

The findings and recommendations included in this report were informed by the following data collection and analytical activities.

Extant Data Analysis and Benchmarking

Gibson collected and analyzed current year and historical data provided by AISD, which included student enrollment and performance data, position data, budget and expenditure data, and other program-specific information. To provide additional context, Gibson also benchmarked AISD to five peer districts, which were selected by the audit team with input from AISD based on similarity to AISD in size, demographics, district type, and overall performance. Gibson also compared AISD's performance to state and regional averages, where applicable. Throughout this report, Gibson used the most current data publicly available from the TEA. Table 2 presents a profile of the benchmark districts and AISD.

Table 2. Profile of Benchmark Districts, 2021-22

District	Region	Enrollment	# Schools	Performance Alpha (Scale)	% Economically Disadvantaged
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (101907)	04: Houston	116,913	88	A (90)	57.6%
Northside ISD (015915)	20: San Antonio	101,584	122	B (84)	48.9%
Fort Bend ISD (079907)	04: Houston	76,543	82	B (89)	47.8%
Austin ISD (227901)	13: Austin	71,883	123	B (88)	50.9%
North East ISD (015910)	20: San Antonio	59,445	75	B (89)	59.3%
Klein ISD (101915)	04: Houston	53,059	50	B (89)	51.2%

Source: <https://txschools.gov/districts> and Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPRs), 2021-22

Interviews and Focus Groups

In March 2023, the audit team conducted 28 interviews with district leaders, including the Board of Trustees president, the interim superintendent, central office administrators, and department staff. Additionally, the audit team conducted group interview sessions with campus administrators, teachers, and instructional

coaches. The objective of the interviews and focus group sessions was to gather information about AISD's academic programs and to assess stakeholder perceptions regarding areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

A complete list of interviewees and group interviews can be found in *Appendix A – Interviews and School Visits*.

School Visits and Classroom Observations

School visits and classroom observations were an important component of this evaluation, as they enabled the review team to evaluate school-based practices related to teaching, learning, and teacher PLCs, as well as to observe first-hand the delivery of Tier I instruction. In February 2023, the review team observed 50 classrooms at six elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. Schools visited were selected by the audit team with input from AISD, and were chosen based on their geographic location, student demographics, and school performance.

The list of schools visited can be found in *Appendix A: Interviews and School Visits*.

Campus Administrator and Teacher Surveys

Gibson developed two online surveys and administered them to all campus administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) and teachers to solicit feedback related to the district's current instructional approach and perceptions regarding district successes and systemic barriers to effective instruction. In total, the audit team administered 284 campus administrator surveys and 4,764 teacher surveys and achieved overall response rates of 51.8% and 37.1%, respectively. Survey results can be found in *Appendix B: Campus Administrator Survey Results* and *Appendix C: Teacher Survey Results*.

The remainder of this report is organized into the following chapters and appendices:

- Chapter 2: District Profile
- Chapter 3: Instructional Leadership and Accountability
- Chapter 4: Curriculum Management
- Chapter 5: Professional Learning and Instructional Supports
- Appendices
 - Appendix A: Interviews and School Visits
 - Appendix B: Campus Administrator Survey Results
 - Appendix C: Teacher Survey Results
 - Appendix D: Classroom Observations

Chapter 2: District Profile

In order to provide context for the audit findings and recommendations contained in subsequent chapters of this report, this Chapter provides an overview of AISD's student population and a summary of trends in the district's overall academic performance, academic expenditures, and instructional staffing.

There are several key messages emerging from the data presented in this Chapter that are further explained in subsequent chapters of this audit report:

- While the AISD student population continues to decrease, representation of students with disabilities and Emergent Bilingual/English Learner populations is increasing.
- AISD student achievement is generally above the Region 13 and state averages and below many of the peer districts across grade levels and content areas.
- AISD expenditures per student on instruction are higher than peer districts.

Student Enrollment and Demographics

Austin ISD is one of seven public school districts located in Travis County, Texas, one of the fastest-growing metropolises in the country. The TEA characterizes AISD as a major urban district.¹ Austin ISD is the eighth largest school district in Texas, enrolling more than 73,000 students in 2022-23 in 79 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 16 high schools, and nine specialty campuses to address the academic and vocational interests of students. As shown in Table 3, AISD has experienced an 8.3% decrease in total enrollment over the past four years, most of which has occurred at the elementary and middle school levels.

Table 3. Student Enrollment by School Level, 2018-19 and 2022-23

School Level	2018-19	2022-23	Pct. Δ
Elementary	42,539	37,621	-11.6%
Middle	15,757	13,885	-11.9%
High	20,426	20,636	1.0%
Specialty Campus	1,310	1,242	-5.2%
Total	80,032	74,384	-8.3%

Source. TEA Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) student enrollment data, 2018-19 and 2022-23

The AISD student population overwhelmingly identifies as one of two ethnicities: Hispanic/Latino or White. Table 4 compares the representation of students by race/ethnicity in 2018-19 and 2022-23. These percentages have remained relatively unchanged since 2018-19.

¹ Overview of AISD was obtained from the *2021-22 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*.

Table 4. Student Percentages by Ethnicity, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Ethnicity	2018-19	2022-23	Pct. Δ
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%
Asian	4.4%	4.9%	0.5%
Black or African American	7.1%	6.1%	-1.0%
Hispanic/Latino	55.5%	54.0%	-1.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Two or More Races	3.2%	3.9%	0.7%
White	29.6%	30.8%	1.2%

Source. TEA PEIMS student enrollment data, 2018-19 and 2022-23

In 2022-23, 51.5% of students were economically disadvantaged, 46.8% of students were identified as at risk (i.e., considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school), 30.5% were EB/EL, 13.9% of students had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and received special education (SPED) services, 12.9% were G/T, and 0.2% of students were militarily connected. Table 5 shows the four-year change in enrollment and representation of these student subgroups.

Table 5. AISD Student Enrollment and Representation by Subgroup, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Subgroup	Enrollment			Representation		
	2018-19	2022-23	Pct. Δ	2018-19	2022-23	Pct. Δ
All Students	80,032	73,384	-8.3%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Economically Disadvantaged	42,700	37,762	-11.6%	53.4%	51.5%	-1.9%
At-Risk	39,512	34,377	-13.0%	49.4%	46.8%	-2.5%
EB/EL	21,706	22,352	3.0%	27.1%	30.5%	3.3%
SPED	9,690	10,197	5.2%	12.1%	13.9%	1.8%
G/T	7,743	9,456	22.1%	9.7%	12.9%	3.2%
Military	271	132	-51.3%	0.3%	0.2%	-0.2%

Source. TEA PEIMS student special population data, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Student Performance and Outcomes

District performance is evaluated in three domains, and a letter grade of A through F is assigned based on performance. The three performance domains² are:

² TEA website: <https://tea.texas.gov/A-F/>.

1. **Student Achievement** – Evaluates performance across all subjects for all students on general and alternate assessments; College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicators; and graduation rates.
2. **School Progress** – Measures district and campus outcomes in two areas: (1) the number of students who grew at least one year academically (or are on track), as measured by STAAR results; and (2) the achievement of all students relative to districts or campuses with similar economically disadvantaged percentages.
3. **Closing the Gaps** – Uses disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other factors. The indicators included in this domain, as well as the domain’s construction, align the state accountability system with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In 2021-22 (the most current year for which data are available), AISD received an overall rating of 88 (B). Of the 105 campuses that received ratings, 91 campuses (87%) earned an A or B rating. Table 6 presents a summary of AISD’s scale scores and letter grades for each of the academic performance domains.

Table 6. Student Academic Achievement Summary, 2021-22

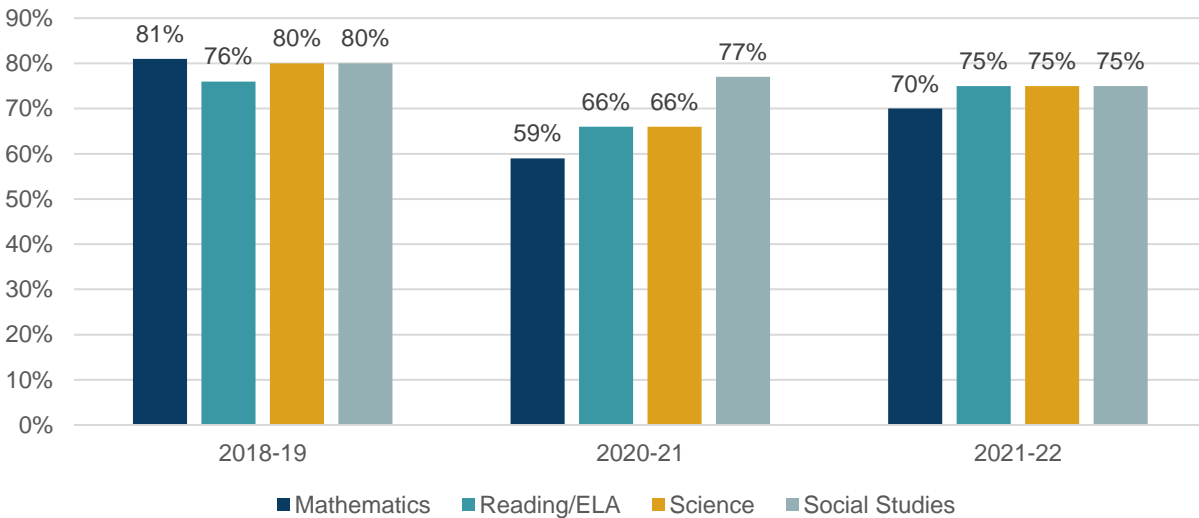
Domain	Score	Grade	Overall Score	Weight	Total
Student Achievement	89	B	89	70%	62
--STAAR Performance	82	B			
--CCMR	95	A			
--Graduation Rate	90	A			
School Progress	89	B	86	30%	26
--Academic Growth	90	A			
--Relative Performance	91	A			
Closing the Gaps	86	B	86	30%	26
--Academic Achievement	63	C			
--Graduation Rate	67	C			
--English Language Proficiency	100	A			
--School Quality	100	A			
Overall Score		B			88

Source. <https://txschools.gov>

Set by the State Board of Education, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are the statewide curriculum standards that outline what students should know and be able to do at every grade level and in each subject of the required curriculum. Beginning in third grade, STAAR provides information on how students are performing against the TEKS at the end of the school year. Students meeting grade-level expectations on the STAAR are likely to succeed in the next school year.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of AISD students at “Approaches Grade Level or Above” on the STAAR tests from 2018-19 to 2021-22.³ The percentage of students approaching grade-level expectations or above in all core content declined substantially from 2018-10 to 2020-21, likely the result of the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception of STAAR Social Studies, the percentage of students approaching grade-level expectations or above in all content areas increased significantly from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Student performance on STAAR Reading/English Language Arts (ELA) approximated pre-pandemic performance, while student performance on STAAR Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies remained below pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1. AISD STAAR Percentage of Students at “Approaches Grade Level” or Above, All Grades, 2018-19 to 2021-22



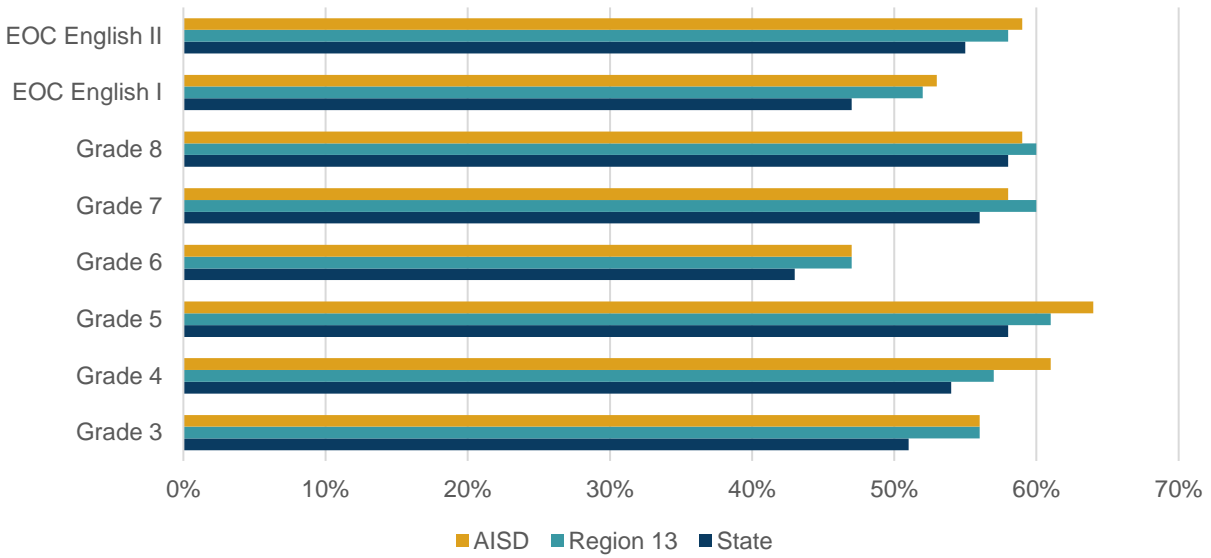
Source. TEA TAPRs

The following series of charts illustrate the percentage of students in AISD, Region 13, and the state at “Meets Grade Level or Above” on the STAAR for each of the tested subjects and grades.

AISD student performance on STAAR Reading/ELA exceeds the Region 13 and state averages in Grades 4 and 5, and on the English I and English II End-of-Course (EOC) exams. AISD student performance approximates the Region 13 and state averages in Grades 3, 6, 7, and 8 (Figure 2).

³ The STAAR was not administered in 2019-20 due to the impact of COVID-19. Additionally, writing was removed as a separate subject in 2021-22 by Texas House Bill 3096.

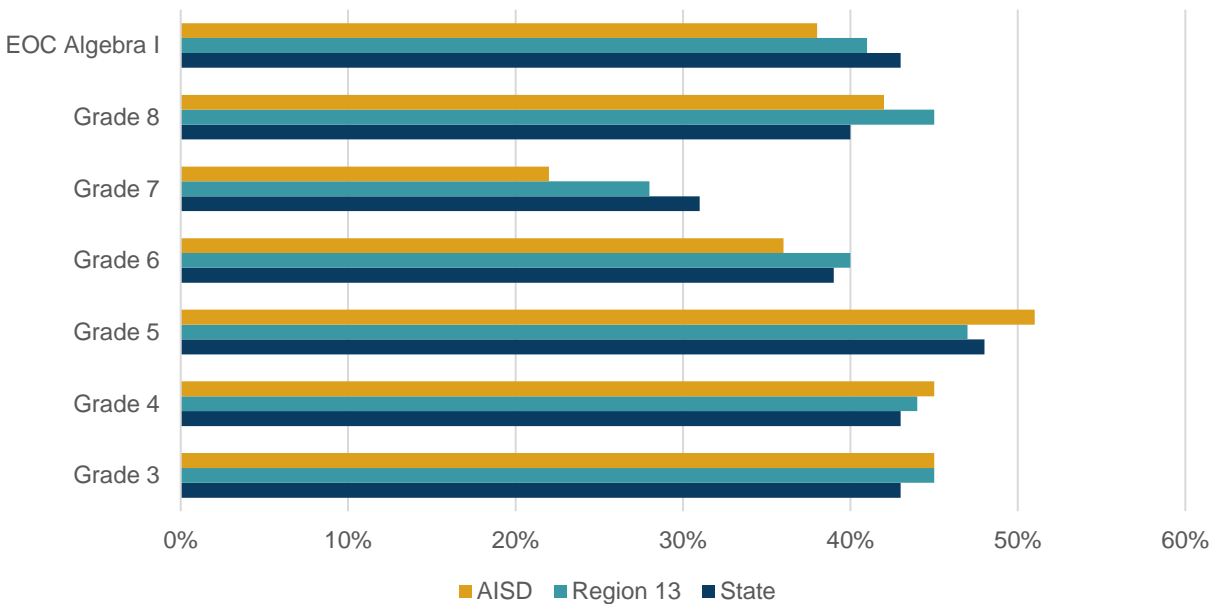
Figure 2. STAAR Reading/ELA: Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs

AISD student performance on STAAR Mathematics lags the Region 13 and state averages in Grades 6, 7, and 8, and on the Algebra I EOC exam (Figure 3). AISD student performance in Grades 3, 4, and 5 met or exceeded the Region 13 and state averages.

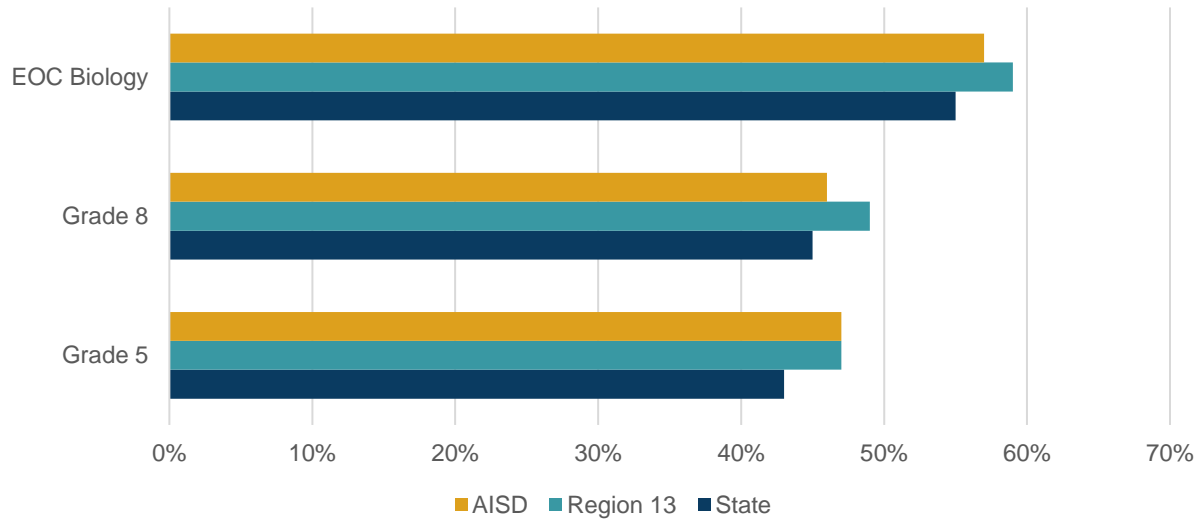
Figure 3. STAAR Mathematics: Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs

AISD student performance on the STAAR Science assessment mirrors Region 13 and state performance, although AISD performs at or just below these averages (Figure 4).

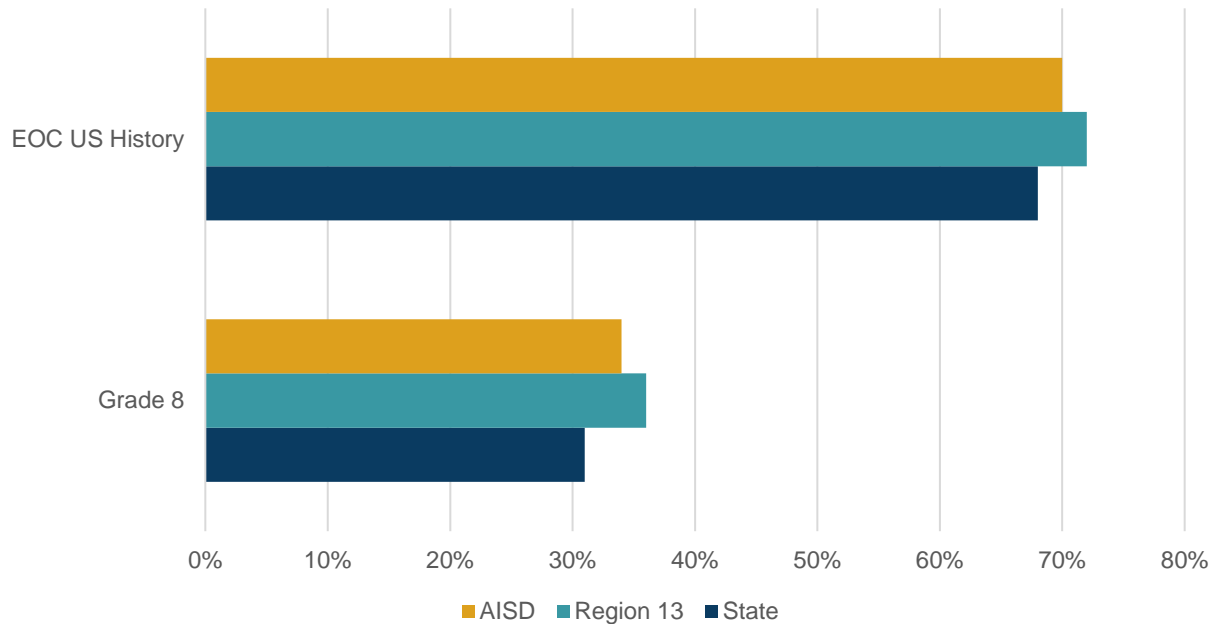
Figure 4. STAAR Science: Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs

AISD’s performance on the US History EOC exam exceeded the state average but was less than the Region 13 average. Grade 8 performance lagged the state and Region 13 averages (Figure 5).

Figure 5. STAAR Social Studies: Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs

Compared to peer districts, AISD student performance on the STAAR and EOC exams ranked sixth or fifth in all content areas (Table 7).

Table 7. STAAR All Grades: Percentage of Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22

District	Reading/ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
Austin ISD	57%	42%	49%	53%
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	58%	50%	61%	63%
Fort Bend ISD	62%	50%	54%	58%
Klein ISD	58%	48%	54%	58%
North East ISD	60%	47%	57%	61%
Northside ISD	53%	35%	49%	55%
Austin ISD Rank	5th	5th	5th	6th

Source. TEA TAPRs

AISD ranked below all of the peer districts on the Algebra I, Biology, and US History EOC assessments (Table 8).

Table 8. EOC All Grades: Percentage of Students at “Meets Grade Level” or Above, 2021-22

District	English I	English II	Algebra I	Biology	US History
Austin ISD	53%	59%	38%	57%	70%
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	63%	68%	62%	70%	82%
Fort Bend ISD	56%	64%	46%	63%	74%
Klein ISD	52%	57%	52%	59%	77%
North East ISD	59%	64%	48%	69%	82%
Northside ISD	54%	60%	39%	63%	77%
Austin ISD Rank	5th	5th	6th	6th	6th

Source. TEA TAPRs

The CCMR component of the student achievement domain measures graduates' preparedness for college, the workforce, or the military, and accounts for 40% of the student achievement indicator for high schools. There are several ways a student can demonstrate college, career, or military readiness: earning minimum scores on national college entrance exams, completing college-level classes in high school, or earning a qualifying industry credential.⁴ Table 9 shows the percentage of students in AISD, Region 13, and the state who met one of these criteria to demonstrate they were ready for one of those paths. In 2021-22, AISD earned an “A” on the CCMR portion for student achievement in Domain I and was above the Region 13 and state averages.

⁴ TEA website: <https://tea.texas.gov/A-F/>.

Table 9. CCMR Indicators, 2021-22

Indicator	AISD	Region 13	State
CCMR Rate	80%	70%	65%
College Ready Graduates	74%	61%	53%
TSI Criteria Graduates (ELA and Math)	68%	54%	40%
Dual Credit	29%	23%	26%
College Credit on AP/IB Exams	33%	30%	21%
Associate Degree	2%	1%	3%
Onramps Course Credits	25%	13%	4%
Career- or Military-Ready Graduates	17%	20%	24%
Approved Industry-based Certification	9%	13%	18%
Completed IEP/Workforce Readiness IEP	3%	2%	2%
Level I or Level II Certificate	0.5%	0.2%	0.7%
SPED Students under Advanced Diploma Plan	6%	5%	4%

Source. TEA TAPRs

In 2021-22, AISD's student retention rates at every grade level were below the state average. AISD's retention rate was highest in Grade 9, followed by Kindergarten and Grade 1, mirroring the state pattern (Table 10).

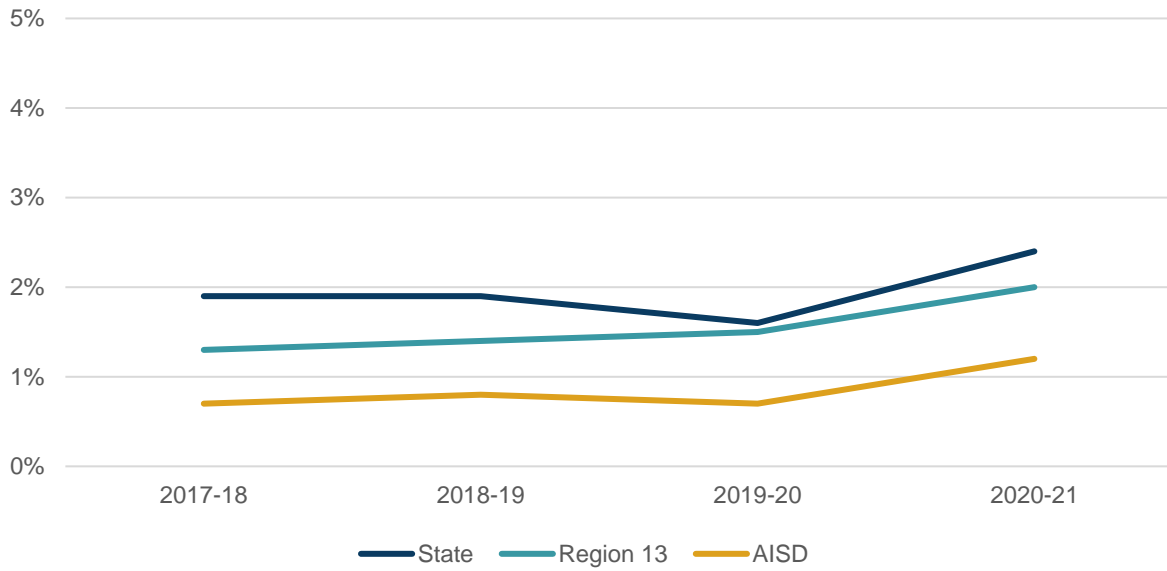
Table 10. Retention Rates by Grade (Non-SPED), 2021-22

Grade	AISD	State	Pct. Δ
Kindergarten	0.7%	1.9%	-1.2%
Grade 1	0.7%	2.9%	-2.2%
Grade 2	0.5%	1.7%	-1.2%
Grade 3	0.5%	1.0%	-0.5%
Grade 4	0.1%	0.7%	-0.6%
Grade 5	0.1%	0.5%	-0.4%
Grade 6	0.2%	0.6%	-0.4%
Grade 7	0.2%	0.7%	-0.5%
Grade 8	0.2%	0.6%	-0.4%
Grade 9	5.4%	10.5%	-5.1%

Source. TEA TAPRs

AISD's dropout rates have been consistently below the Region 13 and state averages for the past five years (Figure 6), but increased in the past two years, likely due to the impact of COVID-19.

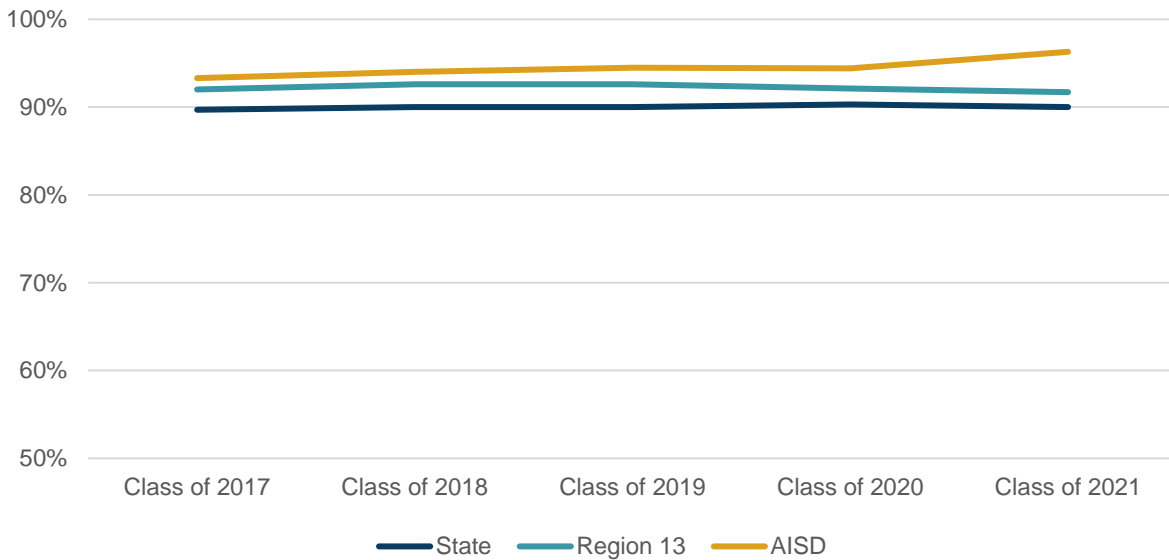
Figure 6. Dropout Rates (Grades 9-12), 2017-18 to 2020-21



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2020-21

As shown in Figure 7, AISD’s four-year longitudinal graduation rate is higher than both the Region 13 and state averages. In 2020, the graduation rate dipped (likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic), but then increased in 2021 to above the pre-pandemic rates.

Figure 7. Four-Year Longitudinal Graduation Rate, 2017 to 2021



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Instructional Resource Allocations

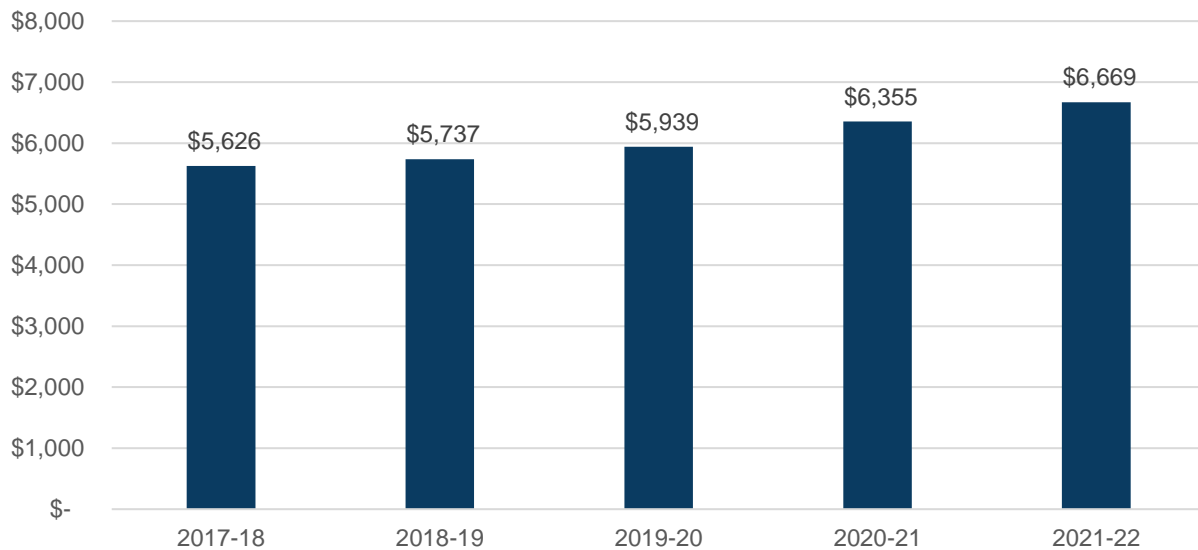
Instructional Expenditures

Instructional expenditures represent the largest investment of district annual operating funds. In 2021-22, AISD's total operating budget was \$955.9 million, and total expenditures on Instruction (Function 11) accounted for 50.1%, or \$479.3 million. Instructional Leadership (Function 21) accounted for 2.3% (\$22.4 million), and Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development (Function 13) accounted for 2.9% (\$27.8 million). The following charts illustrate how these expenditures have changed over the past five years relative to the number of students and/or teachers, and how AISD's expenditures on Instruction compare to peer districts.

Instruction

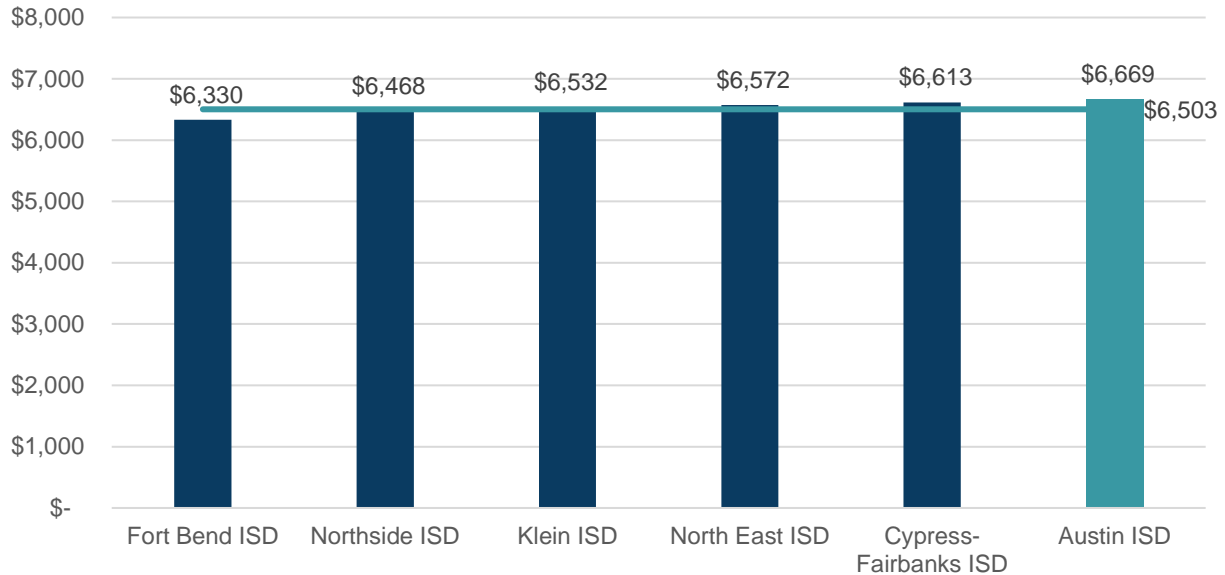
Function 11 (Instruction) is the TEA accounting code used to classify expenditures relating directly to the interaction between teachers and students. On a per-student basis, total Instruction expenditures (all funds) increased 18.5% (\$1,043) from 2017-18 to 2021-22 (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Instructional Expenditures Per Student, Function 11, All Funds, AISD, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2017-18 to 2021-22

In 2021-22, AISD's Instruction expenditures per student were higher than all of the peer districts, and \$166 per student (2.5%) higher than the peer average (green line), as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Instructional Expenditures Per Student, Function 11, All Funds, Peer Comparison, 2021-22

Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

Table 11 compares AISD's percentage of General Fund to All Other Funds instructional expenditures per student. General Fund expenditures account for a higher percentage of AISD's expenditures on Instruction than in benchmark districts. This is likely due to the fact that AISD has a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students (50.9%) than all but two of the benchmark districts: Fort Bend ISD (47.8%) and Northside ISD (48.9%). Districts with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged student populations typically have greater percentages of their budgets supported by federal funds.

Table 11. General Fund and Other Funds Instructional Expenditures Per Student, AISD and Peer Average, 2021-22

Fund	Austin ISD	Peer Avg.	Δ
199 General Fund	\$6,026	\$5,569	\$457
All Other Funds	\$643	\$934	\$(291)
Total Instruction	\$6,669	\$6,503	\$166
Percent General Fund	90.4%	85.6%	4.7%

Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

Salaries and Wages expenditures per student for teachers and paraprofessionals (Object 6119), which account for the largest line-item expenditure, are lower in AISD than in benchmark districts (Table 12).

Table 12. Comparison of Instructional Line-Item Spending Per Student, AISD and Peer Average, 2021-22

Object	Austin ISD	Peer Avg.	Δ
6119 Wages – Teachers & Professional	\$4,260	\$4,509	\$(249)

Object	Austin ISD	Peer Avg.	Δ
6399 General Supplies	\$221	\$299	\$(77)
All Other Objects	\$2,187	\$1,695	\$492
Total Instruction	\$6,669	\$6,503	\$166

Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

Table 13 presents instructional expenditures per student (total enrollment) by Program Intent Code (PIC). AISD spends less per student than peer districts on Basic Educational Services (\$210 less per student than the peer average) and Accelerated Education (\$122 less per student than the peer average). AISD spends more per student than peer districts on students with disabilities (\$378 more per student than the peer average) and Pre-kindergarten Regular Education (\$146 more per student than the peer average).

Table 13. Instructional Expenditures Per Student by PIC, Peer Comparison, 2021-22

Program Intent	Austin ISD	Peer Avg.	Δ
11 Basic Educational Services	\$3,844	\$4,054	\$(210)
21 Gifted and Talented	\$22	\$38	\$(16)
22 Career and Technical	\$197	\$255	\$(58)
23 Services to Students with Disabilities	\$1,442	\$1,064	\$378
24 Accelerated Education	\$172	\$294	\$(122)
25 Bilingual Education and Special Language	\$101	\$64	\$37
32 PreK Regular Education	\$213	\$68	\$146
33 PreK Special Education	\$3	\$78	\$(74)
35 PreK Bilingual Education	\$0	\$9	\$(9)
37 Dyslexia or Related Disorder Services	\$107	\$30	\$77
38 College Career Military Readiness	\$33	\$28	\$4
All Other Program Intent Codes	\$535	\$537	\$(2)
Total Instruction	\$6,669	\$6,503	\$166

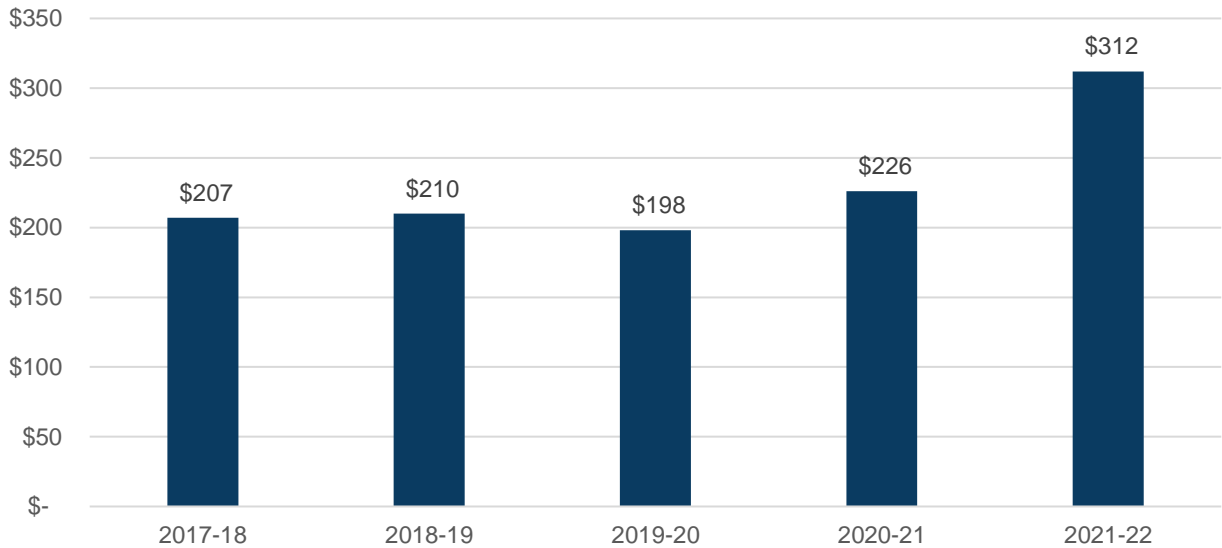
Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

Instructional Leadership

Instructional Leadership (Function 21) is used to classify expenditures that are used for managing, directing, supervising, and providing leadership for staff who provide either instructional or instruction-related services.

In 2021-22, AISD expenditures on Instructional Leadership totaled \$22.4 million. Instructional Leadership expenditures per student increased 50.7% (\$105 per student) over the past five years (Figure 10).

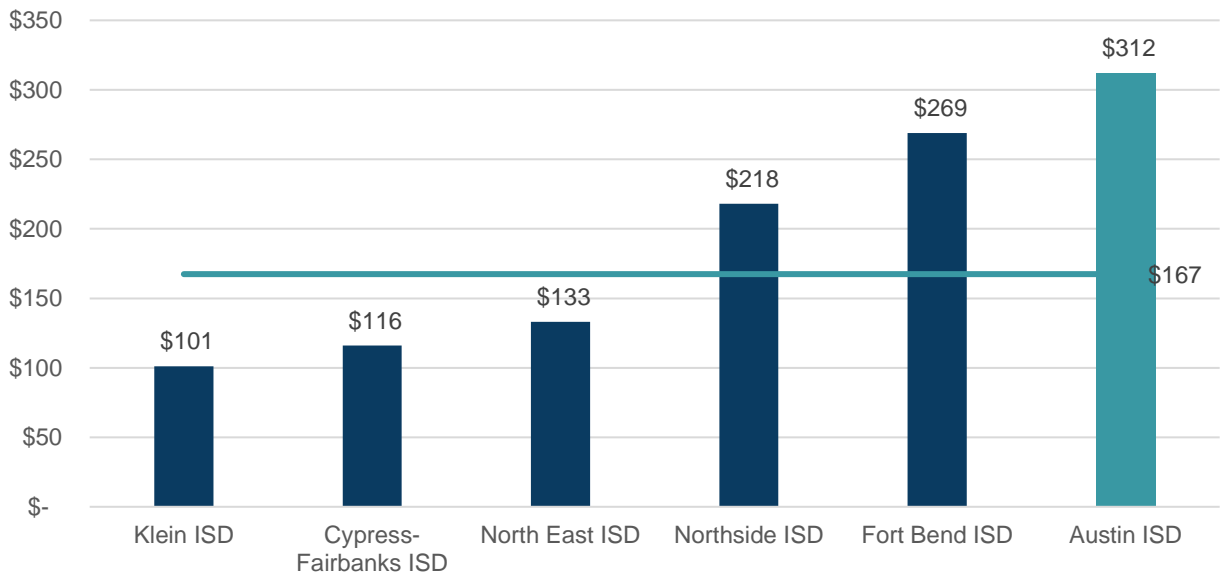
Figure 10. Instructional Leadership Expenditures Per Student, AISD, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2017-18 to 2021-22

In 2021-22, AISD Instructional Leadership expenditures per student were higher than all peer districts (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Instructional Leadership Expenditures Per Student, Peer Comparison, 2021-22



Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

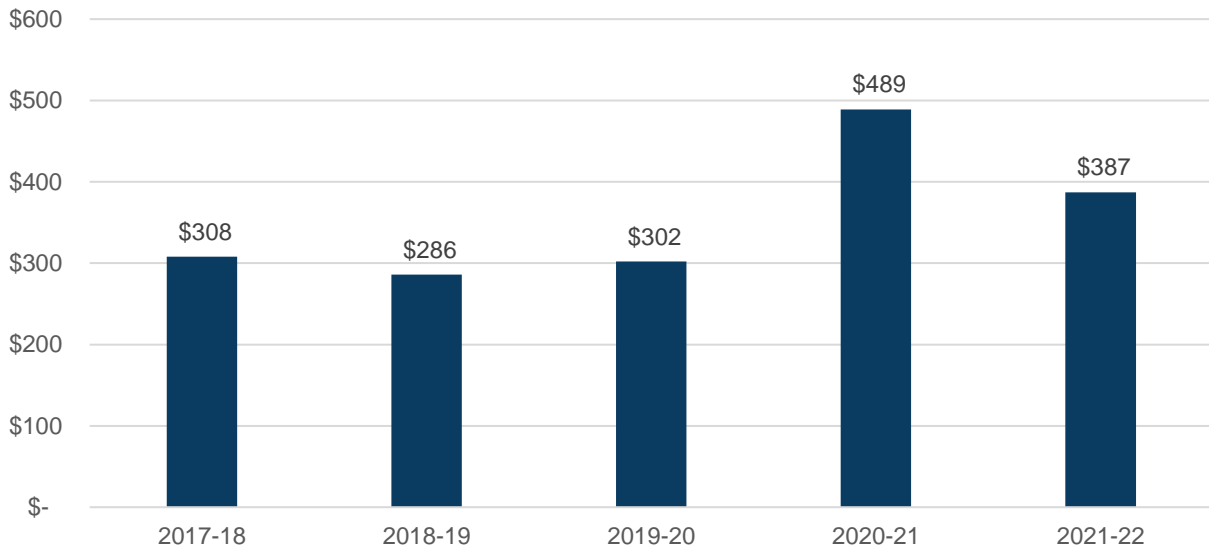
Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development

Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development (Function 13) is used to classify expenditures that are directly and exclusively used to aid instructional staff in planning, developing, and evaluating the process of providing learning experiences for students. This includes in-service training and other staff

development for instructional or instructional-related personnel of the school district. This function also includes expenditures related to research and development activities that investigate, experiment, and/or follow through with the development of new or modified instructional methods, techniques, procedures, services, etc.

In 2021-22, AISD's Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development expenditures totaled \$27.8 million. As shown in Figure 12, on a per-student basis, AISD's Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development expenditures peaked in 2020-21. Over the past five years, total expenditures per student increased 25.6% (\$79 per student).

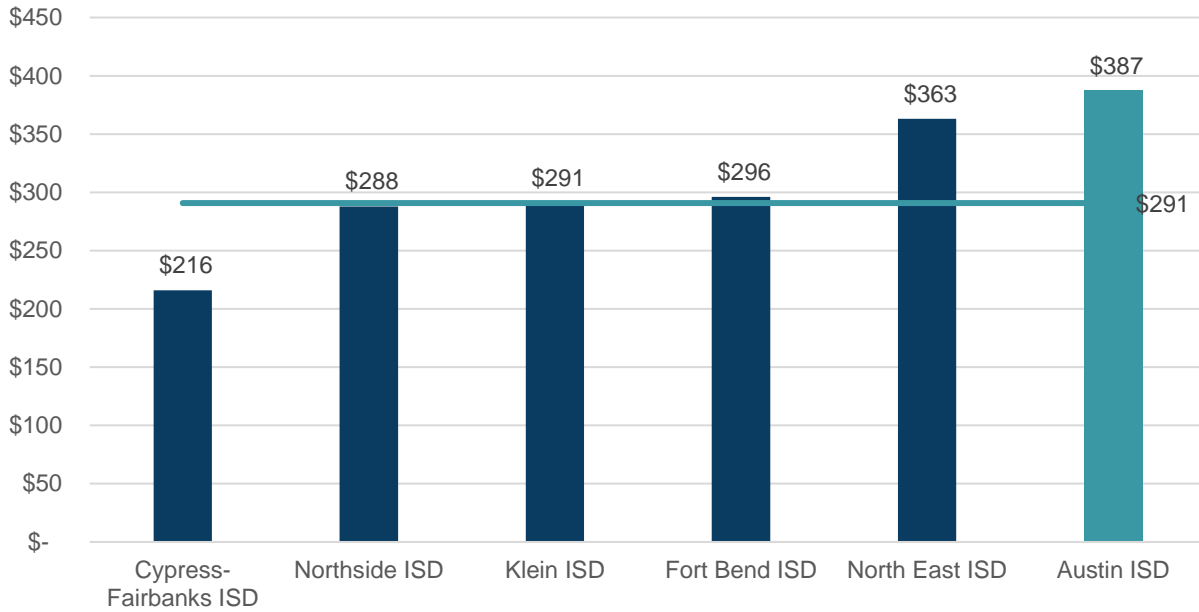
Figure 12. Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development Expenditures Per Student, AISD, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2013-14 to 2021-22

In 2021-22, AISD's total Curriculum and Instructional Staff Development expenditures per student were above the peer district average (\$291). Expenditures per student varied across districts, ranging from \$216 per student in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD to \$387 per student in Austin ISD (Figure 13).

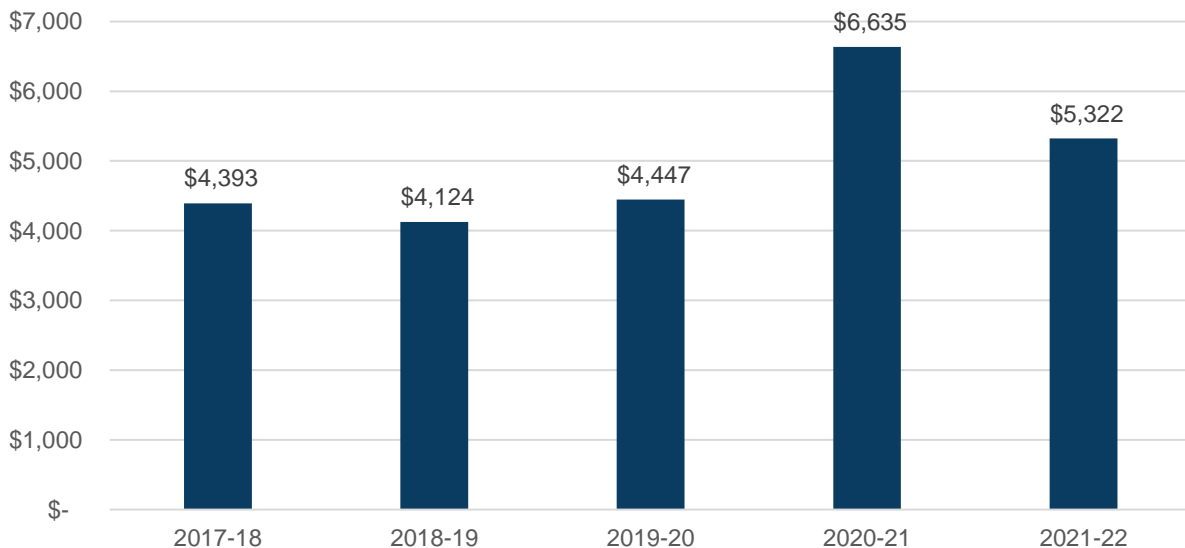
Figure 13. Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development Expenditures Per Student, Peer Comparison, 2021-22



Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

On a per-teacher basis, AISD Curriculum and Instructional Staff Development expenditures increased 21.2% (\$929 per teacher) over the past five years (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development Expenditures Per Teacher, AISD, 2017-18 to 2021-22

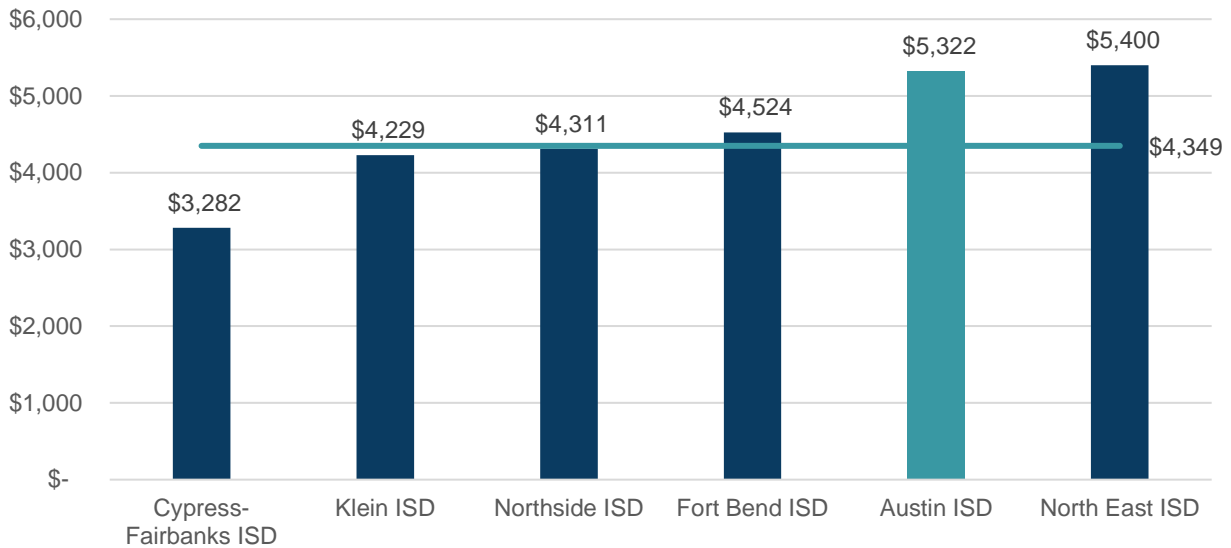


Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2017-18 to 2021-22

AISD's Curriculum and Instructional Staff Development expenditures per teacher were higher than all but one of the peer districts (North East ISD). Total expenditures per teacher varied widely (\$2,118 per teacher)

across the comparison districts, ranging from a low of \$3,282 per teacher in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD to a high of \$5,400 per teacher in North East ISD (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Curriculum Development and Instructional Staff Development Expenditures Per Teacher, Peer Comparison, 2021-22

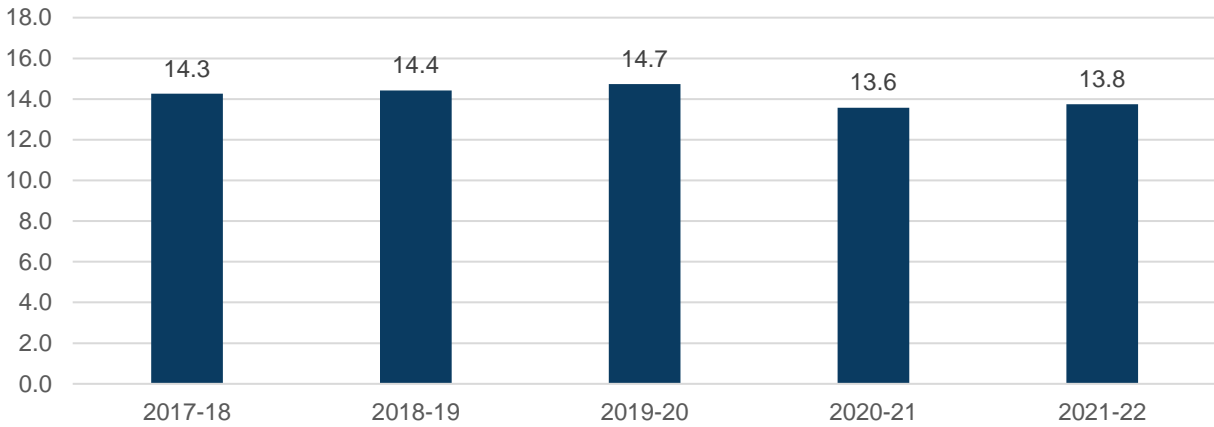


Source. TEA PEIMS financial data, 2021-22

Instructional Staffing

The audit team's analysis of staffing "sufficiency" and "efficiency" involved a comparison of AISD's staffing levels over time and relative to peer districts. Since teachers comprise the largest employee group of any district, it is important to first examine changes in their staffing levels and trends. From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the total number of teachers in AISD decreased 8.3%. During this same time period, the total number of students (membership) decreased 11.6%. These trends are reflected in Figure 16, which illustrates a 3.6% decrease in AISD's student-teacher ratio over the past five years, reflecting more teachers relative to the student population.

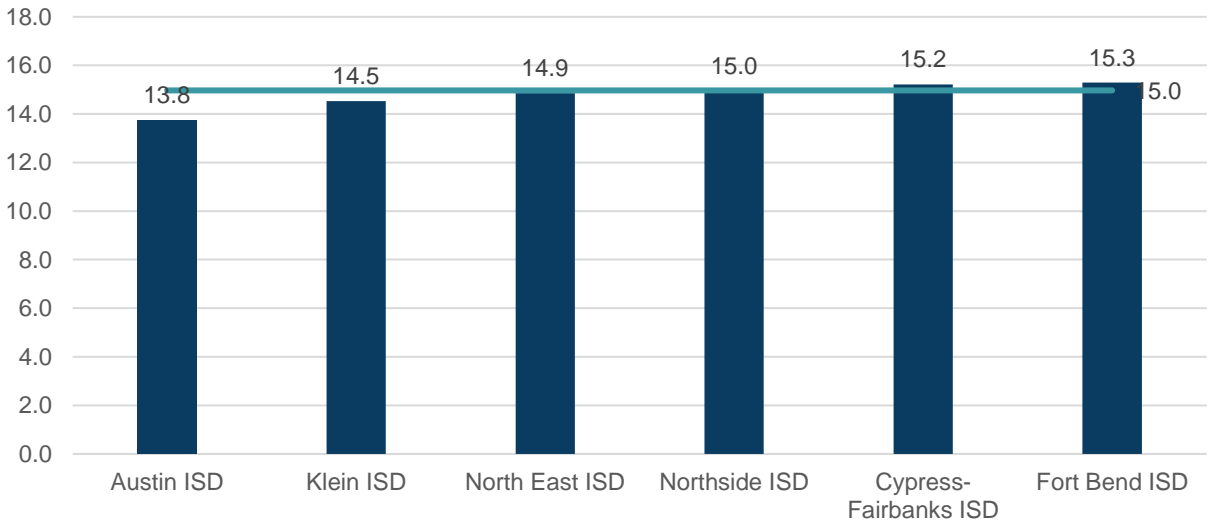
Figure 16. AISD Student-Teacher Ratio, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Figure 17 shows that the 2021-22 student-teacher ratio in AISD (13.8) is lower than all the benchmark districts.

Figure 17. Student-Teacher Ratio, Peer Comparison, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2021-22

Average class size is another indicator of staffing efficiency. Table 14 shows that average class sizes in AISD are lower than the state average in every grade level and content area except science and math.

Table 14. AISD Class Size Averages by Grade and Subject, 2021-22

Grade/Subject Area	Austin ISD	State Average	Δ
Kindergarten	17.5	18.7	-1.2
Grade 1	16.9	18.7	-1.8
Grade 2	15.7	18.6	-2.9
Grade 3	15.1	18.7	-3.6
Grade 4	15.7	18.8	-3.1
Grade 5	18.0	20.2	-2.2
Grade 6	17.7	19.2	-1.5
ELA	15.9	16.3	-0.4
Foreign Language	18.0	18.4	-0.4
Math	17.5	17.5	0
Science	19.3	18.5	0.8
Social Studies	18.7	19.1	-0.4

Source. TEA TAPRs, 2021-22

Chapter 3: Academic Organization and Management

This Chapter describes the policy framework outlining the board's educational philosophy and expectations for curriculum and instruction, the central office organization that supports teaching and learning, and the planning and accountability systems related to school and student performance.

Policy Framework for Academic Program Management

Board policies are statements which set forth the purpose and describe in general terms the organization and program of a school district; they create a framework within which the superintendent and his or her staff can implement their assigned duties with positive direction.

AISD subscribes to the Texas Association of School Board's (TASB's) Policy On Line (POL), an internet-based tool for publishing board policies. All board policies are located on the AISD website at <https://www.austinisd.org/board/policy>. "LEGAL" policies contain compilations of federal law, state law, and court decisions as statutory context in which all other policies are to be read, while "LOCAL" policies reflect policies adopted by the board specific to AISD. Below are excerpts of the major LEGAL and LOCAL policies relevant to the district's educational philosophy, planning and decision-making, instructional goals and objectives, curriculum design, and staff development.

Section A – Basic District Foundations

- *Policy AE (LEGAL) Educational Philosophy* requires the board to adopt a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent. This policy also outlines the state's mission, goals, and objectives for public education.
 - *Policy AE (LOCAL) Educational Philosophy* communicates the district's mission, vision, and values, and specifies four priority focus areas for which equity is the cornerstone. Through this policy, the board directs the superintendent to implement a comprehensive strategic plan to demonstrate and effectuate the core values and beliefs and requires the establishment of performance measures to monitor progress toward goals. This policy further specifies the district's commitment to delivering a high-quality education to every student; using technology in a transformative way; ensuring that all students perform at or above grade level in math and reading; preparing students to graduate on time; providing opportunities for civic engagement; creating an effective, agile, and responsive organization; and creating vibrant partnerships. This policy also specifies the board's adoption of managed instruction as its theory of action for teaching and learning and promotes the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional development. Per policy, all schools are required to implement the district's curriculum within identified parameters and ensure that all students have access to a common, rigorous curriculum. This policy was last updated on January 4, 2021.

Section B – Local Governance

- *Policy BQ (LEGAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process* requires that boards ensure that a district improvement plan (DIP) and campus improvement plans (CIP) are developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students. This policy also outlines the required components of both the DIP and the CIP.
 - *Policy BQ (LOCAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process* requires the board to periodically review the district's vision, mission, and goals to improve student performance and to develop a DIP and CIPs with the input from a district-level committee. This policy also ensures that administrative procedures are developed in the areas of planning, budgeting, curriculum, staffing patterns, staff development, and school organization, and that data are gathered and criteria are developed to evaluate that these are effectively structured to positively impact student performance. This policy was last updated on July 25, 2016.
- *Policy BQA (LEGAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process: District Level* requires that a district's policy and procedures establish a district-level planning and decision-making committee. It also specifies requirements regarding representation of professional staff, parents, and business and community members on the committees and requirements for regular meetings, communications, and responsibilities.
 - *Policy BQA (LOCAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process: District Level* expands on legal policy to include the requirement that the District Advisory Council (DAC) also advise the board on establishing and reviewing the district's educational goals, performance objectives, and major district-wide classroom instructional programs. This policy was last updated on December 6, 2021.
- *Policy BQB (LEGAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process: Campus Level* requires that the district maintain policies and procedures to ensure that effective planning and site-based decision-making occur at each campus to direct and support the improvement of student performance for all students.
 - *Policy BQB (LOCAL) Planning and Decision-Making Process: Campus Level* expands on legal policy and requires that a Campus Advisory Council (CAC) assist the principal in implementing planning processes, making site-based decisions, and establishing campus performance objectives. This policy was last updated on September 14, 2012.

Section D – Personnel

- *Policy DMA (LEGAL) Required Staff Development* documents the standards for providing staff development to teachers and principals and specifies that staff development for teachers should be predominantly campus-based, related to achieving campus performance objectives, and developed and approved by the CAC. District-wide staff development that has been developed and approved through the district-level decision process can also be delivered.
 - *Policy DMA (LOCAL) Required Staff Development* requires that the superintendent recommend the district's professional development plan for all employees and that the board annually review and approve the plan. It specifies that the plan must be guided by the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) clearinghouse training recommendations and include

a schedule of required professional development for all district employees. This policy was last updated on June 29, 2022.

Section E – Instruction

- *Policy EA (LEGAL) Instructional Goals and Objectives* documents the district's expectations for literacy, math, and CCMR plans, including the establishment of annual goals, targeted professional development, district-coordinated implementation of the plan, annual reporting to the board, and website posting requirements.
- *Policy EF (LEGAL) Instructional Materials* allows districts discretion to determine the content of instructional materials contained in school libraries, specifies the right of parents to access instructional materials, requires districts to provide instructional materials to students at no cost, and addresses the collection of protected information from students.
 - *Policy EF (LOCAL) Instructional Materials* outlines the board's expectations to provide a wide range of instructional resources for both students and faculty that present varying levels of difficulty, diversity of appeal, and a variety of viewpoints. This policy also outlines criteria for selecting instructional resources, provides guidance with respect to any materials that address controversial issues, and describes the process for parents or staff to formally challenge their use. This policy was last updated on March 14, 2018.
- *Policy EH (LOCAL) Curriculum Design* states that the school system shall continually develop and modify its curriculum to meet changing needs and to ensure the highest quality program. It also states that the ongoing curriculum development process must involve teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Teachers are expected to follow the curriculum, administrators are expected to assist teachers in implementing the curriculum, and curriculum frameworks are to be provided for all programs and subject areas. It also states that unit/lesson expectations and formative assessments are to be developed at each campus with the guidance of the principal. This policy was last updated on June 9, 2017.
- *Policy EK (LEGAL) Testing Programs* allows districts to adopt and administer criterion-referenced or norm-referenced assessment instruments and limits the amount of time students can spend each year taking assessments.

AISD has a strong policy framework to effectively guide instruction. Most notably, it codifies managed instruction as the district's Theory of Action for instruction and establishes clear expectations regarding the use of the district's curriculum.

Finding 1: The lack of a district-wide decision-making framework is contributing to inconsistencies in implementing certain required instructional program elements.

In districts with strong systems that support and guide the work of school principals, district leaders define autonomy for school principals in a way that empowers principals to drive improvement in their particular schools, while also balancing the bounds of the district's structures and expectations defined in board policy. For example, a district expectation might be that all schools implement PLCs. The autonomy is in "how" principals implement PLCs to address the unique context of their schools. There may be flexibility in how often PLCs meet, the work that takes place in the PLC, or the documents the PLCs are expected to

keep. Without clearly defined expectations, it is difficult to support fidelity of implementation of the district's most important practices.

During school and classroom visits (a full description is provided in *Appendix D*), the audit team observed for three practices that both principals and staff indicated were expected of all teachers. Specifically, the team observed for these three practices under two components of the district's curriculum: learning intentions (learning objectives and student success criteria) and language objectives.

Learning intentions help learners understand the purpose behind the lesson. The two primary components include the learning objective and the student success criteria. Sharing learning objectives and success criteria can encourage students to control their learning. Students know what and why they are learning, and it allows them to make connections from one lesson to another. The following describes each in more detail.

- The *learning objective* describes what the teacher wants their students to know and be able to do at the end of the lesson and helps inform the lesson's design so that the instruction directly addresses the goal. Additionally, a well-written learning objective provides students with a clear purpose and focus for their learning efforts while also guiding the teacher's assessment strategy.
- The *student success criteria* are developed from the learning objective. Success criteria explicitly describe the student performance that will demonstrate that students have met the learning objective. When students know what is expected of them and what success looks like, they are more likely to engage in the learning process and judge their own progress. A common form for a student success criteria is an "I can" statement. For example, "*I can work with others to research and write about a topic.*"

In addition to the learning intentions, the team also observed for the display of a language objective:

- The *language objective* tells how the students will learn and demonstrate mastery of the lesson through one or more language modalities of reading, speaking, writing, or listening. Language objectives complement the learning objective and success criteria and address the aspects of academic language that will be developed or reinforced while teaching grade-level content concepts. For example, "I will speak and listen to my peers about using equations to determine missing angles in a triangle." Language objectives are beneficial for EB/EL students. They can be a decisive first step in ensuring that EB/EL students have access to the curriculum in a way that supports their second language acquisition.

The expectation (as referenced in curriculum documents) is that learning intentions be clearly posted for teachers to reference at the beginning and conclusion of the lesson and for students to reference throughout the lesson. Table 15 illustrates the inconsistent practice of posting learning intentions, with the lowest rate of compliance at secondary schools, with only 42.9% of teachers observed posting a learning objective, 28.6% posting the student success criteria for the lesson, and 23.8% posting the lesson-related language objective.

Table 15. Percentage of Classrooms Visited With Posted Learning Intentions (n = 50)

Learning Intentions	Elementary	Secondary
Learning Objective	69.0%	42.9%
Student Success Criteria	55.2%	28.6%
Language Objective	58.6%	23.8%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Other practices, such as lesson and unit planning and following a model of instruction for literacy, are noted in Chapter 4 of this report. The audit team found that decisions regarding these areas may vary from one school to another based on the discretion of the principal and/or the expectations of the principal's supervisor. During the interviews, focus groups, and school visits, the audit team learned there is a lack of a definition of what decisions can be made at various organizational levels regarding the delivery of the district's instructional program.

Board Policy BQ (LEGAL) and BQA (LEGAL) define the planning and decision-making process at the district and campus levels, respectively. However, these legal policies, and the related local policies and administrative regulations, focus on the planning committees at the district and school levels to support annual decision-making. They are not designed to support daily decision-making at the district administration or school levels. There are no administrative procedures that define how major decisions are made within the organization on a day-to-day basis, including decisions related to the implementation of instructional programs.

Recommendation 1: Develop a decision-making framework to support instructional decisions at all levels of the AISD organization.

In the publication *District Leadership That Works, Striking the Right Balance* (Marzano & Waters, 2009), the authors identified the concept of "defined autonomy" as a critical success factor in a study of thriving districts. Unlike "earned autonomy," which is often based on the academic performance of a school, defined autonomy empowers leaders in the school organization to take ownership of their department/school/project and use their judgment to follow through on the vision and goals established by the superintendent and board. One of the hallmarks of this approach is a pervasive sense of accountability throughout the organization. District leaders are clear in their expectations and hold organizational members to a high standard in exchange for the freedom that comes with autonomy.

For a defined autonomy framework to work, it requires a clear definition of what decision-making is centralized versus decentralized in delivering the district's instructional program. Documentation of a single decision-making framework will help ensure that all principals and district administrators understand the criteria for making certain decisions. Formally adopting a framework will ensure its consistent use by all positions involved in decision-making. At a minimum, decisions should be identified in the following four categories:

- **Site-based decisions not requiring district administration approval.** These are decisions that can be made or approved independently by principals or their designees without intervention or

approval by the district administration. These decisions might include teaching strategies used and assignments of special projects to staff.

- **Site-based selection from a list of district-provided options.** An example of a selection list is instructional software. Schools can be provided pre-approved choices of instructional software. Purchasing items that are not on the approved list could result in the inability of the district to effectively support software training and updates. Selecting from a list provides decision-making flexibility within a framework that helps ensure districtwide efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Site-based decisions requiring district office approval.** Certain decisions, such as hiring or terminating school staff, require the approval of district administration to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and district policy.
- **District decisions.** There are certain decisions that should be made by the board or district administration and enforced at all schools. The requirements to use a district-wide curriculum and student assessments are examples of decisions that should be established through board policy (as curriculum currently is) or through an administrative regulation (adopted by the superintendent).

Lower-level instructional decisions, such as lesson plans, unit plans, instructional models, and PLCs, should be evaluated and placed on this framework to clearly identify decision-making authority and where flexibility is provided.

AISD should inventory the instructional decisions that need to be included in the scope of a decision-making framework. The process for determining decision rules should consider the following elements:

1. Does state or federal law dictate the decision?
2. Does board policy prescribe a decision?
3. Do administrative regulations prescribe a decision?
4. Does the decision affect the flexibility schools need to meet individual student needs?
5. Who is technically capable of making the decision?
6. Does the decision affect the district's immediate or long-term cost?
7. What are the risks of making the wrong decision?
8. Does the decision affect the ability of the central office to provide ongoing support?
9. Could the decision have a ripple effect on other areas in the school system?

Some decisions, such as those relating to teacher professional development, may be assigned to more than one decision maker based on the type of training. The district may require certain professional development and leave other training to the discretion of the principal.

The audit team recommends the following framework (Table 16) as a starting point for instructional decision-making. This template could easily be expanded to include other areas of decision-making within AISD.

Table 16. Suggested Decision-Making Framework for Instructional Decisions

Sample Decisions	Principal Decision	Principal Selection	District Approval	District Decision
Curriculum/Curriculum Guides				
Instructional Frameworks				
Instructional Models				
Unit Plans				
Lesson Plans				
Assessments				
Instructional Professional Development				
Professional Learning Communities (PLC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use - Frequency / Length - Content 				
Master Schedule				
Class Size				
Block Scheduling (Secondary)				
Course Offerings (Secondary)				
Instructional Software				
Student Computer Devices				
Re-assignment of Instructional Staff				
Hiring Instructional Staff (e.g., teachers, aides)				

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Central Office Organization and Staffing

The primary scope of this Academic Program Management Audit is focused on the curriculum and development functions that are the responsibility of the Office of Academics, as well as the school supervision functions that are the responsibility of the OSL. The following sections describe the organizational structure and positions that were in place during the Spring of 2022-23, when this audit was conducted.

Office of Academics

The Office of Academics is led by an assistant superintendent who reports to the CAO, a position that has been vacant since the beginning of the 2022-23 school year. Until the CAO position is filled, the assistant superintendent for academics (along with the assistant superintendent for special education and the

assistant superintendent for multilingual education and student programs) report to the interim superintendent.

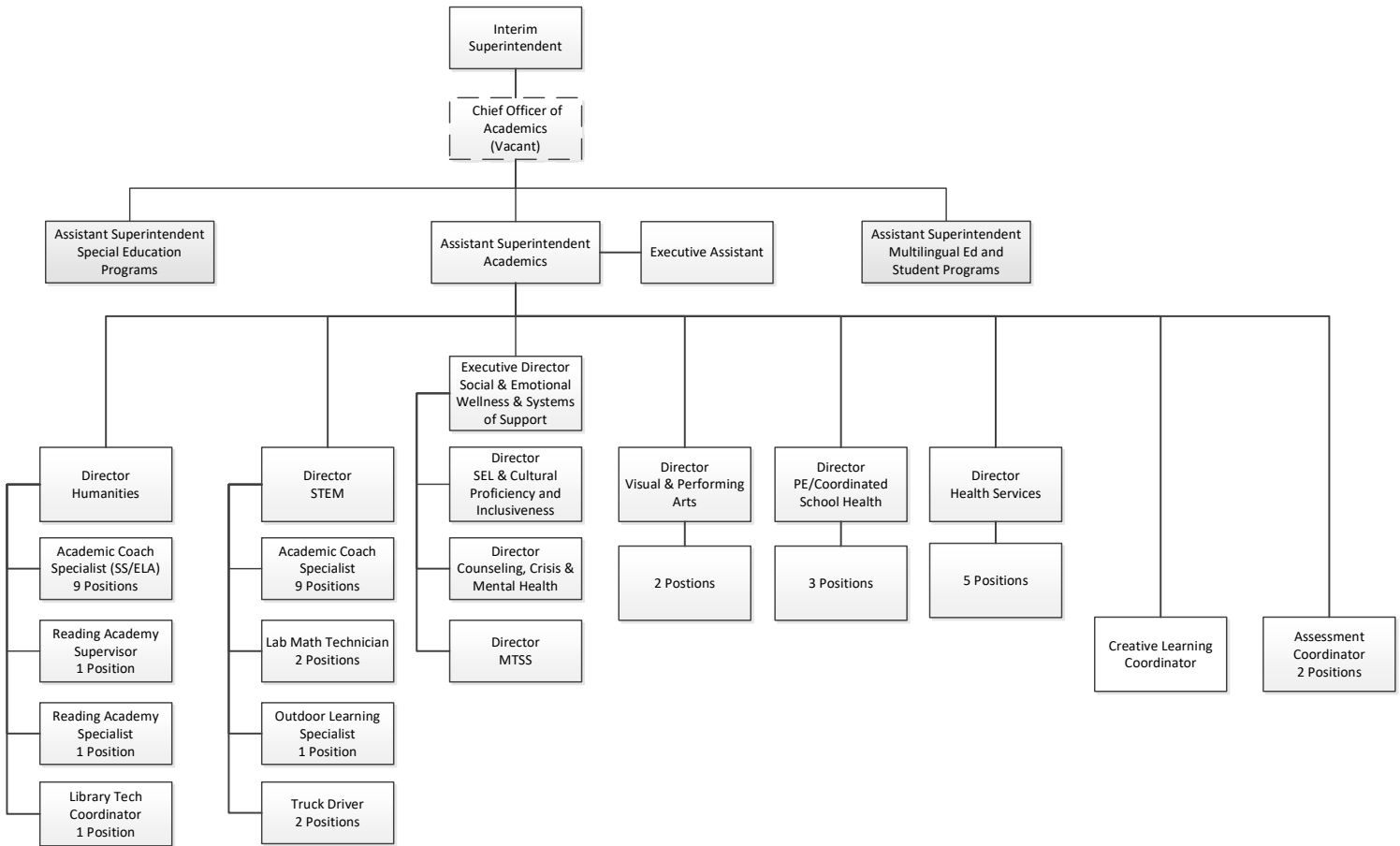
The assistant superintendent for academics is an executive administrator for the district's curriculum and instructional programs and provides leadership, assistance, and supervision for the efficient operation of units and elements of the organization involving curriculum, multilingual education, technology integration, humanities, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Other relevant duties include:⁵

- Providing leadership to all personnel in curriculum (all content areas) and ensuring all departments are coordinating efforts to provide efficient and effective educational services;
- Ensuring the ongoing evaluation and improvement of the district's curriculum program by directing the systematic review of curriculum and instruction offerings and recommending revisions;
- Assisting the CAO in establishing board policies and procedures related to curriculum areas;
- Overseeing budget preparation for the Office of Academics, administering the curriculum and instruction budget based on documented program needs, approving departmental budgets, and determining allocations for staff, supplies, and equipment;
- Overseeing the coordination of instructional materials acquisition and the textbook adoption process;
- Overseeing the development, implementation, and monitoring of the long-range instructional goals of the district to improve instructional outcomes as measured by state and national standards; and
- Working closely with the executive director for accountability and assessment and related program evaluation staff to promote a systematic approach for improvement.

Figure 18 presents the organizational structure of the Office of Academics within the Academics Department for 2022-23. Descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of key positions are described below. (The roles and responsibilities of staff within the HC Department Office of Professional Learning is discussed in *Chapter 5: Professional Learning*).

⁵ AISD assistant superintendent for academics job description (last revised February 1, 2021).

Figure 18. Austin ISD Office of Academics Organizational Chart, 2022-23



Source. Developed by Gibson based on positions data, existing organizational charts, and interviews

Nine positions and an administrative assistant reported directly to the assistant superintendent of academics. A brief description of their scope of responsibilities is presented below:⁶

- The **executive director of social and emotional wellness and systems of support** supervises three director-level positions and provides vision and leadership in the areas of response to intervention (RTI), multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives, district counseling, crisis prevention, intervention responses, child study systems, and cultural proficiency and inclusiveness (CPI) programs.
- The **director of humanities** supervises 12 positions and is responsible for leading the development of reading/ELA and social studies curricula to support the delivery of instruction that centers programmatic priorities such as dual language, blended and personalized learning, and accessibility for all students.
- The **director of STEM** supervises 15 positions and is responsible for leading the development of science and math curricula to support the delivery of instruction that centers programmatic priorities such as dual language, blended and personalized learning, and accessibility for all students.

⁶ AISD job descriptions.

- The **director of visual and performing arts (VAPA)** supervises two positions and is responsible for supervising, developing, and facilitating the district curriculum and preK-12 fine arts programs and supporting campus implementation of these programs.
- The **director of physical education (PE) and coordinated school health** supervises the PE and health team, which includes three positions. This position is responsible for leading the development of PE and health curricula to support the delivery of integrated instruction aligned to the district's instructional framework.
- The **director of health services** supervises five positions and oversees the district's medical/school nursing services, clinical mental health services, public health, and COVID-19 response efforts. Additionally, this position is responsible for the development, supervision, innovation, and evaluation of the district's comprehensive health, clinical mental health, and public health services.
- The **creative learning coordinator** supervises one position and is responsible for the implementation of the Creative Learning Initiative (CLI) program activities in AISD schools and vertical teams, including managing, coordinating, and supporting on-campus CLI programs with planning, professional development, and implementation of CLI strategies and programs.
- The two **assessment coordinators** are responsible for coordinating the district's formative assessment program and currently do not supervise any positions.

Office of School Leadership

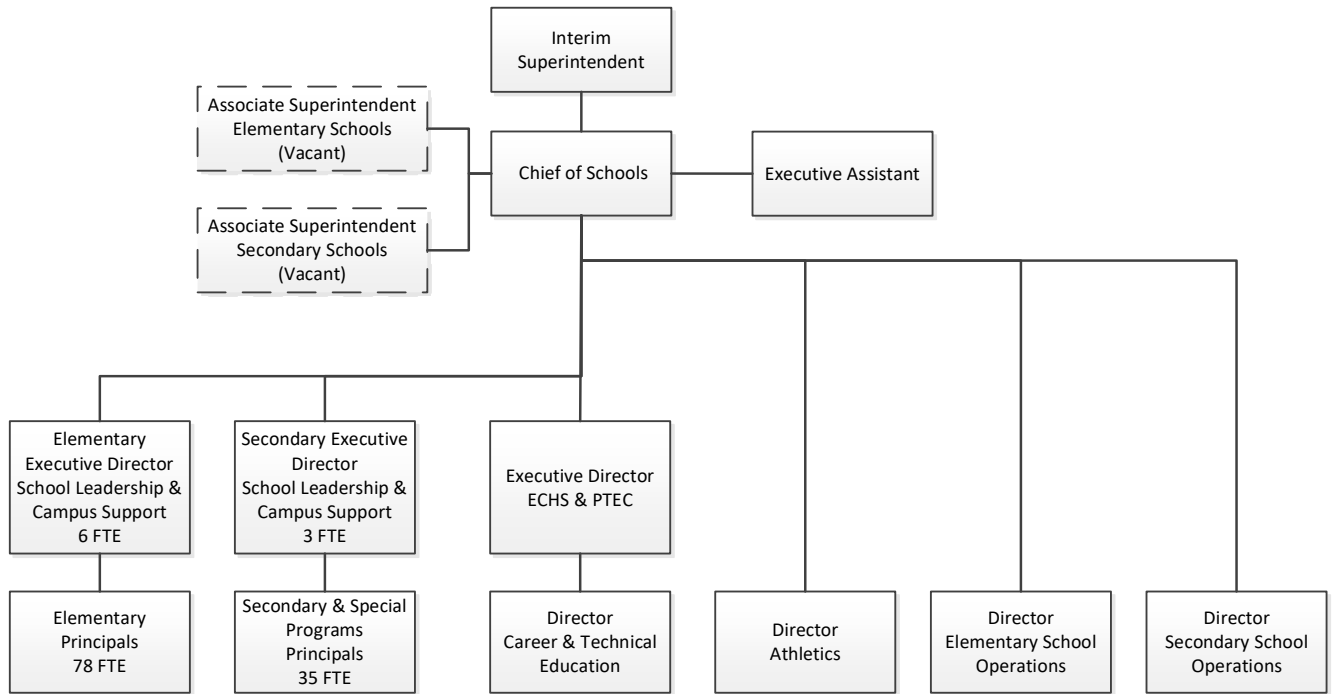
In 2022-23, the OSL was led by a chief of schools who reported to the interim superintendent and serves on the ELT. The chief of schools was responsible for directing and coordinating broad administrative activities, including the planning, development, and implementation of policies, practices, and programs as assigned in support of the OSL. Other relevant duties include:⁷

- Supervising and directing the principal supervisors and the implementation of the district's instructional and curricular programs, assessments, and pedagogical approaches in all campuses; developing PLCs with principals focused on leadership practices and use of leadership tools that improve teaching and learning; and developing campus plans designed to improve student achievement for all student groups;
- Supervising and directing the development of CIPs designed to maintain continuous progress in student achievement and meet the targeted district goals;
- Supervising and directing the development and implementation of a continuum of LD programs designed to support veteran and novice principals; and
- Conducting regular campus visits that include leading and participating in learning walks led by principals, conferring with principals, reviewing CIPs, and assessing student achievement progress.

⁷ AISD chief of schools job description (last updated August 28, 2020).

Figure 19 below shows the organizational structure of the OSL for 2022-23.

Figure 19. Austin ISD OSL Organizational Chart, 2022-23



Source. Developed by Gibson based on positions data, existing organizational charts, and interviews.

Thirteen positions and an administrative assistant currently report to the chief of schools. A brief description of their scope of responsibilities is presented below:⁸

- The nine **executive directors of school leadership and campus support** are responsible for providing direction, supervision, and review of all aspects of educational programming for their assigned schools. This position works with, supervises, and evaluates assigned principals, and collaborates with other departments and leaders in the central office to provide and broker necessary resources and support to ensure principals improve student achievement and academic outcomes for all students.
- The **executive director of Early College High School (ECHS) and Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) programs** is responsible for project management and coordination with a variety of partners, including Austin Community College, Austin technology and business corporations, and other industry partners implementing educational programs in the schools. This position assures board policies and the strategic plan are fully carried out.
- The **director of athletics** is responsible for supporting the facilitation and implementation of program areas within the Athletics Department and for aligning athletic programs at the middle school and high school levels (Grades 6-12).

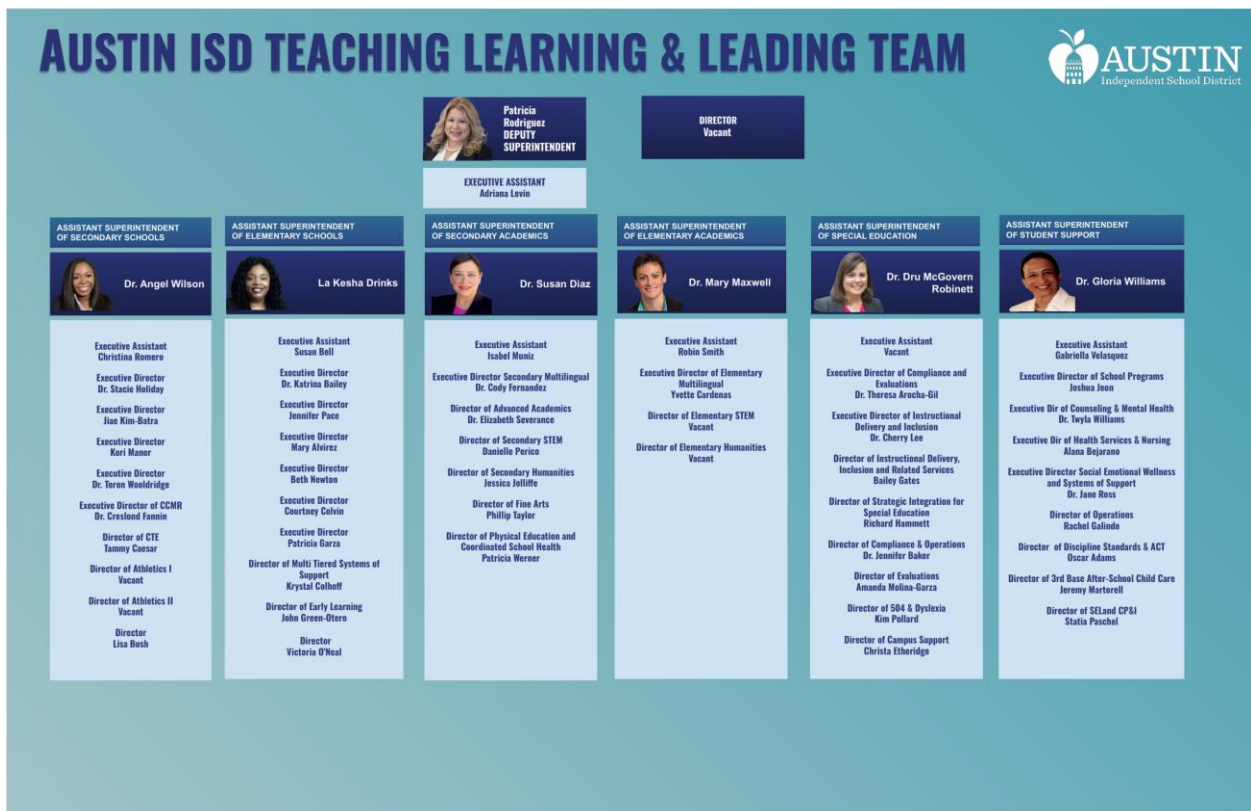
⁸ AISD job descriptions.

- The two **directors of elementary and secondary school operations** serve as the district-level liaisons for all operations and instruction in the elementary and secondary schools, including the monitoring of all compliance-related issues. The daily work of this position focuses on fostering the relationship between quality instruction, rigorous and relevant content, and student engagement within the district’s vision to reinvent the urban school experience.

Commendation 1: AISD’s new reorganization of academic program management represents best practice.

The audit team received an updated organizational chart from AISD in September 2023, several months after audit field work was concluded. This reorganization reflects an alignment of academics and school leadership under an academic deputy superintendent position. Figure 20 presents the September 2023 reorganization.

Figure 20. AISD Academic Program Management Organizational Structure, September 2023



Source. Austin ISD teaching & learning organizational chart, September 2023

This new organizational structure should yield many benefits not realized under the previous structure:

- Consistent, singular academic direction to schools. Combined with the decision-making framework defining areas of principal autonomy (recommended above), the organizational consolidation of the Office of Academics and OSL under a senior academic leadership position should provide consistent direction regarding instructional programming and decision-making. During the audit, there were recurring staff perceptions within schools and the central office of the disconnect between the Office of Academics and OSL, resulting in organizational silos. An example cited by multiple staff during interviews was the use of BLEND courses. BLEND courses provide a remote learning curriculum and the opportunity for delivery in a hybrid learning model. They were instrumental in addressing the learning needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a blueprint checklist, teachers can develop their own courses. BLEND classes continue to be utilized in face-to-face delivery, particularly at the secondary level. During 2022-23, the Office of Academics promoted their use; the OSL did not. There was a broad perception among stakeholders interviewed during this audit of a lack of shared accountability for curriculum and instruction across these two organizational units.
- A more logical alignment of academic programs and services. Several academic and school leadership functions were previously misaligned. The Health Services and Nursing Department, which is responsible for the district's medical and school nursing services, clinical mental health services, and public health services, is not directly related to the core functions of curriculum and instruction and was not logically aligned under academic programs. This unit now reports to the deputy superintendent position, which is responsible for academic programs, school oversight and support, and student services. In another example, the ECHS and P-TECH programs were organized under the OSL and were the only instructional programs not aligned under the Office of Academics.
- Improved hierarchy of reporting. Under the previous structure, multiple levels of positions reported to the same leadership position. The assistant superintendent of academics previously had three different position levels reporting to it: executive director, director, and coordinator positions. It is not unusual for executive director and director positions to report to an assistant superintendent, but when some coordinator positions – and not others – report to senior leadership positions, real or perceived inequities may result. Under the new structure, only executive director and director positions report to assistant superintendent positions.
- Improved spans of control. The spans of control (number of direct reports) for administrator positions within the Office of Academics and the OSL were previously wide-ranging across position type categories. Table 17 below shows the spans of control that existed for director positions and higher within the Office of Academics and OSL.

Table 17. Span of Control by Position Type, 2022-23

Position	Office of Academics	OSL
Chief	3	8
Associate Superintendent	N/A	0
Assistant Superintendent	9	N/A

Position	Office of Academics	OSL
Executive Director	3	1 to 14
Director	3-14	0 -12

Source. AISD position data

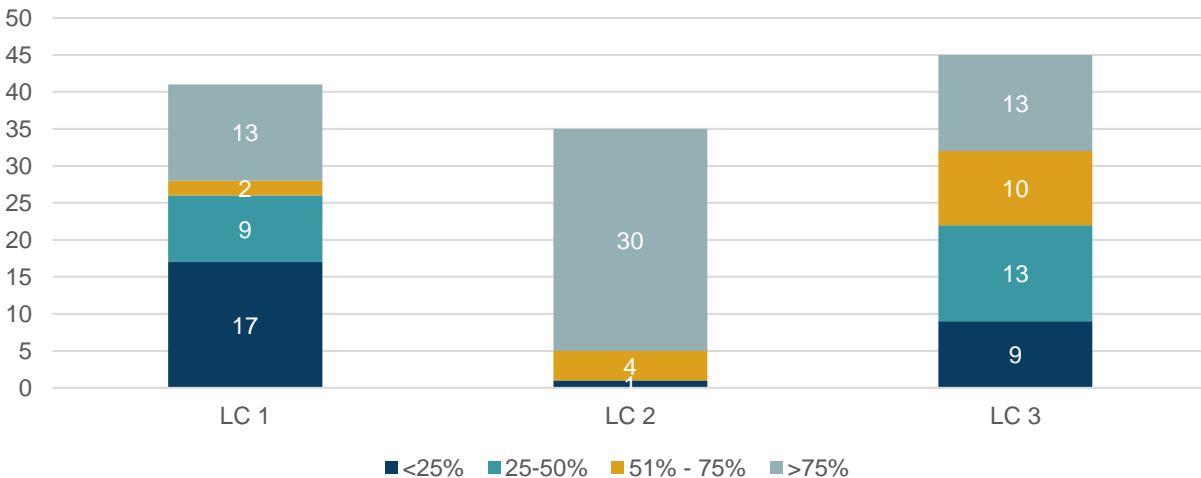
Systems of School Support

This section addresses the systems, structures, and processes by which the central office in AISD supports the differentiated needs of schools and school leaders, and then holds them accountable for student performance.

Finding 2: The levels of central office school support and oversight do not adequately consider school or student needs.

All schools in AISD are organized into one of three Learning Communities (LCs), a structure that generally correlates to the geographic positioning of school feeder patterns. Many of the schools that serve historically marginalized student populations are geographically located on the eastern side of the district. As a result, a high percentage of high-need campuses (i.e., lower performing and/or having a higher percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged) tend to be clustered in LC 2. Figure 21 presents the number of schools in each LC according to the percentage of students at each campus who are economically disadvantaged (i.e., less than 25%, between 25-50%, between 51-75%, or greater than 75%).

Figure 21. Number of Schools by LC and Percentage of Students who are Economically Disadvantaged, 2022-23



Source. AISD LC organization and 2021-23 TAPR

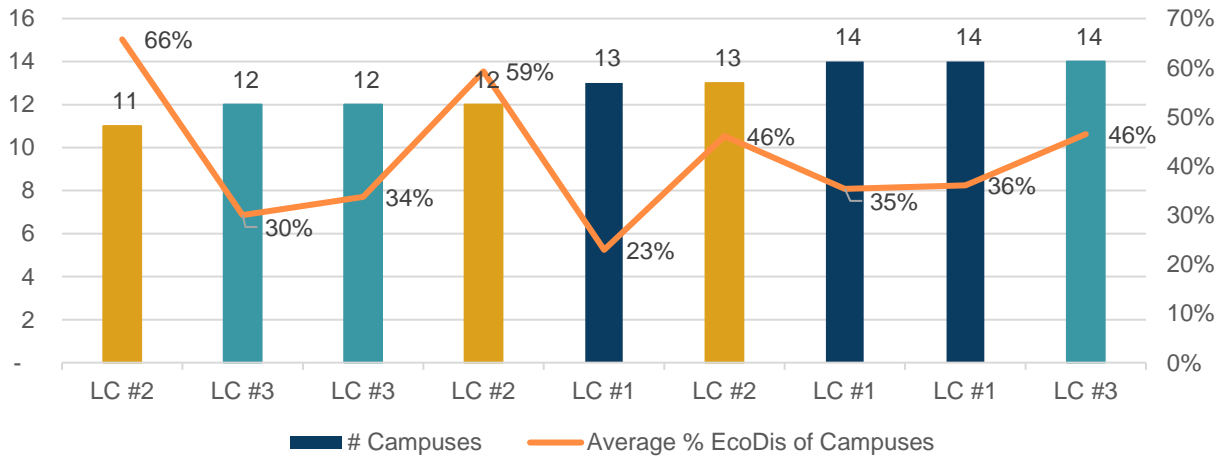
Each LC is supported by two elementary executive directors of school leadership and campus support and one secondary executive director of school leadership and campus support, and principals report to one of the three executive directors within their LC. In addition to the OSL executive directors, other service team members assigned to support one of the three LCs include: four academic coach specialists (ACSs), a

special education coordinator, a licensed mental health professional (LMHP), a multilingual education team (MET) specialist, and an SEL/CPI coordinator. Although the number of positions assigned to support elementary or secondary campuses varies, they are the same across LCs. In other words, each LC is assigned the same number of service team members regardless of the differing needs of the principals or schools within each LC. There was broad consensus expressed during interviews that the needs of schools in LC 2 greatly outweigh those in LC 1 or LC 3, and that resources assigned to LC 2 were insufficient (even though there are fewer schools in LC 2).

The number of school principals reporting to executive directors over those schools does not consider student need, either. In 2022-23, the number of principals supervised by each of the nine executive directors ranged from 11 to 14, a fairly narrow and reasonable range of oversight and support responsibilities based on the number of schools. However, the designation of the number of direct reports does not consider student needs at each school. Figure 22 presents the number of schools reporting under each executive director (and each LC), along with the average percentage of economically disadvantaged students across schools.

As shown below, the average percentage of economically disadvantaged students at schools ranges from 23% to 66%. The current approach to forming LCs – and, as a result, the span of control for executive director positions over schools – does not establish lower spans of control for executive director positions who support the highest-need campuses. During group interviews, executive directors expressed concerns that the assignment of schools are unbalanced, with some executive directors (mostly those assigned to LC 2) having to support a higher concentration of high-need campuses and/or novice principals.

Figure 22. Executive Director Span of Control (# of Principals) and Average Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students at Campuses Supervised



Note. LC = Learning Community.

Source. AISD LC organization

Recommendation 2: Consider student and school needs in determining central office support and oversight of schools.

The allocation of central office resources to AISD's three LCs should be based on student need. Currently, LC 2 has more highly (>75%) economically disadvantaged schools than the other two LCs combined. While LC 2 has fewer schools overall, 85% of the schools in this LC are highly economically disadvantaged. These attributes, and perhaps other need-based factors determined by AISD, should impact the distribution of central office staff to LCs. Moving into the 2023-24 school year, district management indicated that it would be implementing changes to the LC structure.

Similarly, the span of control for executive directors should consider the needs of schools. Executive directors who oversee more higher-need schools should have fewer schools reporting to them than those who do not. Similar to the LCs, other need-based factors could be considered by AISD. This approach will better match school resource needs with the staff resources to support them.

Finding 3: School principal assignments do not sufficiently map to student needs.

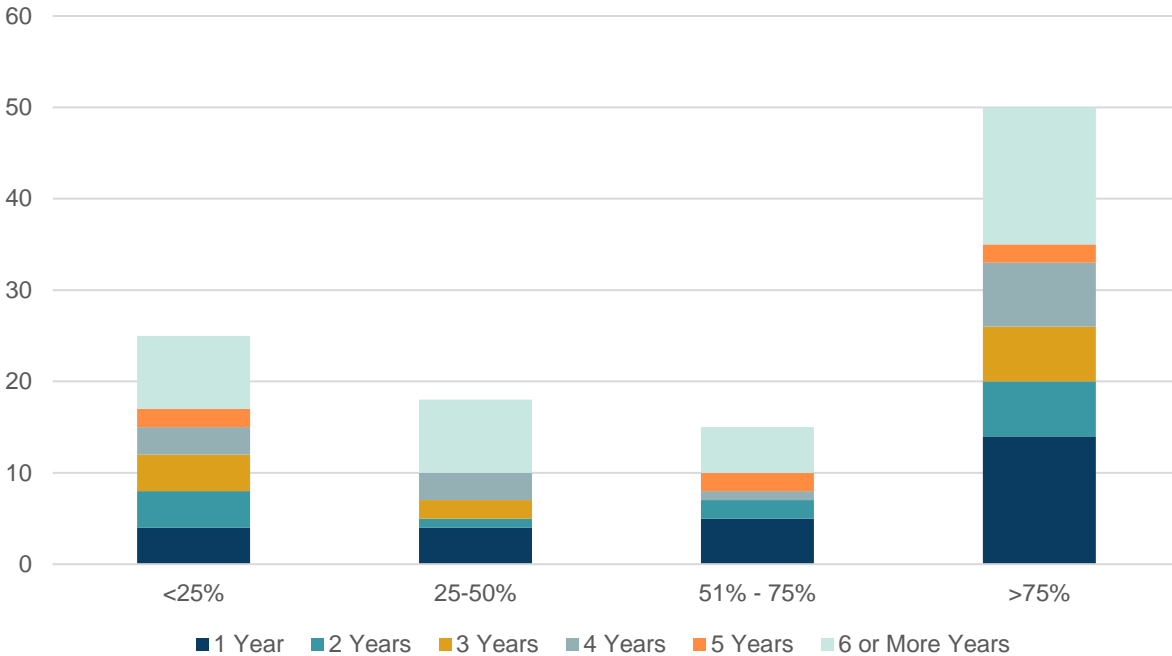
AISD assigns novice principals (i.e., individuals with no prior experience as a principal) to high-need campuses that might otherwise warrant a principal with more experience. Research shows that effective school leaders have positive impacts on student achievement and attendance, as well as teacher satisfaction and retention.⁹

Contrary to research and best practice, however, AISD routinely assigns less-experienced principals to its highest-need campuses. Figure 23 below shows the distribution of principals by their years of experience in the principalship in AISD and the percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged at their campus.¹⁰ Of the 108 principals, 37% (40) have been in the principalship for two years or fewer. Of these, one-half (20) are assigned to highest-need campuses (i.e., campuses where the percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged exceeds 75%). Further, 40% of schools with greater than 75% of students who are economically disadvantaged are led by principals with fewer than two years of experience in the principalship.

⁹ The Wallace Foundation <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/how-principals-affect-students-and-schools-a-systematic-synthesis-of-two-decades-of-research.aspx>.

¹⁰ This analysis used “years of experience in the principalship” as a proxy for principal effectiveness and “the percentage of students who are considered economically disadvantaged” as a proxy for campus need.

Figure 23. Principal Years of Experience in AISD Principalship and Campus Economically Disadvantaged Percentage, 2022-23



Source. AISD position data and 2021-22 TAPR

Research shows that novice principals who are placed at low-performing schools are more likely to leave their schools after one or two years on the job.¹¹ AISD does not offer incentives for its high-need schools to attract and retain principals or teachers who have a demonstrated track record of improving student performance at their campuses. Without district incentives, it may prove challenging for AISD to ensure that the highest-need schools are staffed with the most experienced and high-performing principals.

Recommendation 3: Implement financial incentives to attract more experienced principals to high-need schools.

The new deputy superintendent over academics and schools and the Talent Strategy Department should develop and implement financial incentives to attract and encourage highly experienced principals to serve at the district’s highest-need campuses. Incentives could include higher salary ranges, stipends, and allowing principals to recruit high-performing school administrators and teachers from within the district to staff their schools. This approach would better align district staffing resources to school needs.

The AISD LRP contains other non-monetary incentives for principals, such as the flexibility to recruit staff from other campuses, but does not offer any monetary incentives.

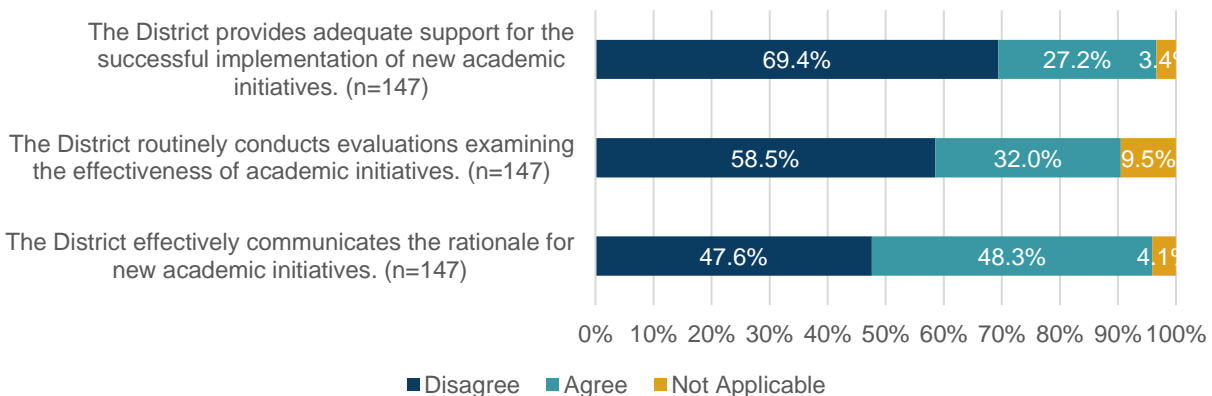
¹¹ RAND Corporation, “First-Year Principals in Urban School Districts: How Actions and Working Conditions Relate to Outcomes.”

Finding 4: There have been pockets of resistance to major AISD initiatives, adversely affecting their implementation.

In addition to the organizational changes described above, there have also been a significant number of new district initiatives that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic which have collectively impacted staff at all levels of the organization. Major district initiatives include: rewriting the district’s curriculum (currently underway and discussed in more depth in the following Chapter), implementing Frontline (the district’s new Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP] information system) and School City (the system used to create and administer student assessments), and rolling out MAP (an assessment used to measure student growth in math and reading). In addition, new state laws—such as House Bill (HB) 3, which requires all K-3 teachers and principals to attend HB 3 Reading Academies, and HB 4545, which requires districts to support students performing below grade level on the STAAR or EOC exams with a master teacher or 30 hours of supplemental instruction (i.e., tutoring)—have also had a significant impact on staff in AISD. This list does not include any non-instructional initiatives led by other departments that may also be impacting district and school-based personnel.

The audit team received consistent feedback from interviewees at all levels in the organization that the number of major new initiatives within AISD, particularly during the pandemic and in the context of high staff turnover, are not well planned or implemented. The primary concern mentioned by most staff interviewed is the lack of time and resources to implement new initiatives. As shown in Figure 24 below, nearly 70% of campus administrators who responded to the survey do not feel that the district provides adequate support for the successful implementation of new academic initiatives, and nearly half of campus administrators do not feel that the rationale for new initiatives is effectively communicated. This feedback is important for the district to consider because pockets of resistance to change can derail progress. Rates of agreement to these statements were generally lower for campus administrators at secondary schools.

Figure 24. Principal Survey – Academic Initiatives



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

AISD does not have a formal change management program for major initiatives. Major initiatives should be carefully planned in consideration of anticipated staff resource requirements to implement them, and the change management process should begin six to 12 months before the major initiative is underway. There are several elements of an effective change management process:

- Conducting a readiness assessment;
- Developing and distributing a communications plan;
- Providing a sponsor roadmap;
- Providing coaching and training;
- Developing strategies to manage resistance;
- Estimating the impact of the initiative on daily position responsibilities and providing back-fill support for routine operations through other AISD positions and/or outside contractors;
- Collecting stakeholder feedback during the initiative and analyzing the results;
- Developing a corrective action plan, if needed;
- Recognizing success; and
- Conducting a post-initiative assessment of what went well and what went wrong – to be applied to future initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Integrate change management practices for all major district initiatives.

The success of many of the district's initiatives will depend on the ability of the organization to effectively absorb and manage change. Change management is defined as the process, tools, and techniques to manage the people side of change in order to achieve a desired business outcome. Change management incorporates the organizational tools that can be utilized to help individuals make successful personal transitions resulting in the adoption and realization of change.¹²

AISD should establish a visible change management function within the district as a first step, and developing a change management strategy and plan should soon follow. For each major initiative, AISD should ensure that change management practices are integrated as part of the implementation. As part of this recommendation, the district should also look to develop strategies to manage the number of initiatives schools and/or staff are expected to implement at one time.

Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement

Policy AE (LEGAL) requires school districts to adopt a vision for education in the district and comprehensive goals to achieve that vision. The vision statement should capture the purpose and vision of the ideal district and guide formulation of changes to achieve that ideal. The vision of Austin ISD states: *We are Austin's home for inclusive learning: high expectations for all children, high outcomes for every student.* In addition to this vision, Austin ISD's mission, values, and priority focus areas serve as the framework to guide all of the district's strategic planning efforts (Figure 25).

¹² <https://www.prosci.com/resources/articles/change-management-definition>.

Figure 25. Austin ISD 2020-25 Strategic Framework



Source. Austin ISD

Commendation 2: AISD’s LRP reflects major strategic shifts in how it will serve students and support staff.

Policy BQ (LEGAL) requires that boards ensure that a DIP and CIPs are developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students. This policy also outlines the required components of both the DIP and the CIP. AISD’s *Policy AE (LOCAL)* requires the district to have a strategic plan. In order not to have two plans that accomplish a similar purpose, AISD has chosen to have a long-term strategic plan that also satisfies the annual state DIP requirements. AISD’s 2020-25 strategic plan, which is posted on the district’s website, consists of the following elements:¹³

- **Strategic Framework** (depicted in Figure 25 above) includes the district’s mission, vision, values, and four priority focus areas: Student Well-Being and Achievement, Teacher and Employee Well-Being, Culture of Respect/Customer Service, and Fiscal Stewardship and Prioritization. It is intended to provide high-level strategic direction and is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees.
- **Goals and Scorecards** provide tools to establish targeted outcomes and measure progress against them. It is comprised of 19 goals and annual progress measures organized around the four priority focus areas of the strategic plan framework, as well as the measurable performance objectives disaggregated by student groups (including students in special education), which are required components of the DIP. The goals on the scorecard were developed collaboratively

¹³ Austin ISD website: <https://www.austinisd.org/strategic-plan#framework>.

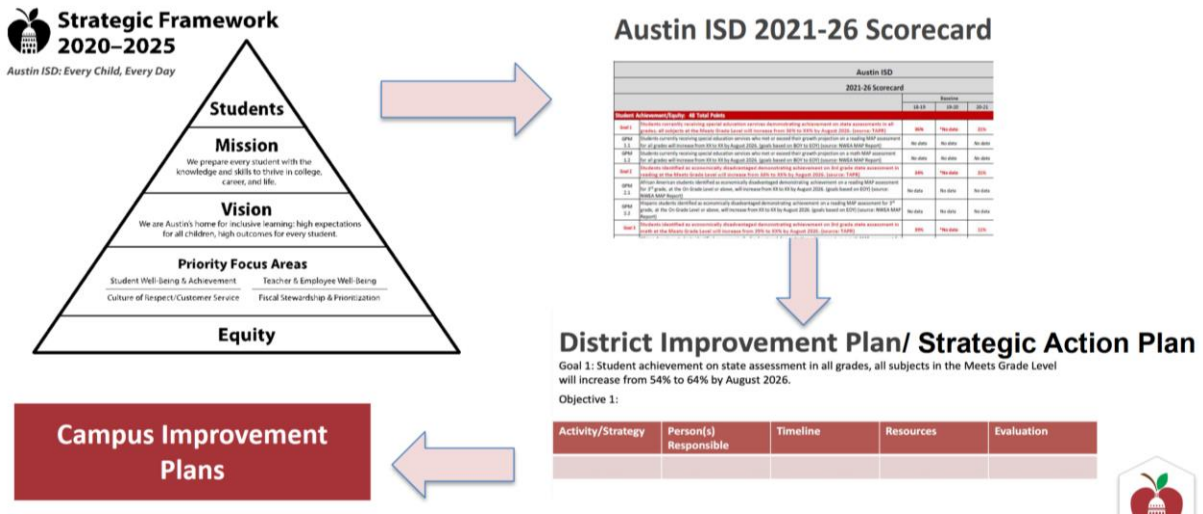
between the board and the superintendent (the most recent scorecard was approved in December 2021) and are reviewed regularly to assess progress against scorecard indicators.

- **Strategies and Actions** are identified by the superintendent and administration to guide their work to make progress against the priorities and scorecard indicators. There are nine broad strategies organized into the following three categories: Academic Excellence, Culture and Climate, and Reflective and Inspirational Leadership. The administration is responsible for identifying action steps for each strategy and monitoring progress throughout the year.

AISD’s strategic framework is illustrated in Figure 26 below.

Figure 26. Austin ISD Strategic Framework and Plans, 2023

District Strategic Framework and Plans



Source. Austin ISD

The Austin ISD Equity Action Plan was developed by the district’s Equity Office in 2021. It informs the district’s strategic plan and makes clear that meeting the needs of historically underserved students and communities is the cornerstone of systemic change in AISD. Based on stakeholder input that was collected throughout the 2019-20 school year, this plan identifies practices that stakeholders perceive as inequitable, recommended responses to those inequities, and actions district leaders are taking (or will take) to respond to those inequities. The Austin ISD 2021 Equity Action Plan is presented in a series of tables and aligned to the Board of Trustees’ four priority focus areas.

The community-driven Equity by Design process was used to complete the district’s first comprehensive LRP, which is focused on improving facility conditions and programmatic strategies to address historically underserved communities’ needs. The ultimate goal for the 2020 LRP is to foster the seven conditions for student success, as defined by Austin ISD:

- Culturally proficient, experienced teachers and staff;
- Recognition and cultivation of gifts, talents, and interests;

- High expectations and support to meet those high expectations;
- Positive relationships with teachers and peers;
- A sense of belonging, empowerment, connection, and identity safety;
- Rigorous, relevant, and inclusive curricula centering their language, racial, and cultural identities; and
- Well-maintained facilities that support state-of-the-art instruction and support cultural identities and safety.

The 2020 LRP includes a prioritized list of 66 goals and approximately 457 strategies organized by the seven planning categories: Academics and Career and Technical Education (CTE); Athletics; VAPA; Facilities; Safety, Security and Resiliency; Transportation, Food Service, and Maintenance; and, Technology. District leadership is responsible and accountable for implementing strategies that are within their purview and for periodically reporting publicly on their progress. The Board of Trustees signed a resolution to recognize the significance of the LRP in April 2023, and has incorporated its elements into the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

With the strategic plan serving as the foundation, the LRP charts a course toward an equitable investment of resources, opportunities, and support to ensure the success of students at every level of every community.¹⁴

As described above, strategies and actions extend plans into practice. Three strategies have been developed by the superintendent and the administration that are particularly applicable to the scope of this Academic Program Management Audit:

Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationships and the community for every child, every day.

Strategy 2: Serve more young learners from communities that are marginalized with quality early childhood instruction.

Strategy 3: Provide teachers and principals with ongoing coaching to foster reflection, analyze disaggregated student data, and continuously improve culturally-responsive, rigorous, and relationship-centered instruction.

Perhaps one of the most notable elements of AISD's strategic planning effort is that it actually reflects major strategic shifts. In a 2011 publication by McKinsey and Company, an international consulting firm, three particularly salient points were made about strategy:

- "The US education system is rich with targets and standards but poor at comprehending and countering the sources of underperformance."

¹⁴ Austin ISD 2022 LRP.

- “Bad strategy covers up its failure to guide by embracing the language of broad goals, ambition, vision, and values. Each of these elements is, of course, an important part of human life. But, by themselves, they are not substitutes for the hard work of strategy.”
- “A good strategy does more than urge us forward toward a goal or vision; it honestly acknowledges the challenges we face and provides an approach to overcoming them.”¹⁵

AISD’s development of the Equity Action Plan identified major problems with respect to students’ equitable access to instruction and services, and the LRP subsequently identified major strategic changes to ensure that all students have such access. The audit team believes this strategic plan and these strategic shifts have great potential to make a difference for all AISD students.

Commendation 3: AISD’s CIP process was redesigned to be more efficient and effective.

Pursuant to *Board Policy BQ (LEGAL)* and *BQ (LOCAL)*, the principal of each school campus, with the assistance of a campus-level committee, is responsible for annually reviewing and revising the CIP for the purpose of improving student performance for all student populations, including students in special education programs. The CIP process is intended to be a year-long cycle that includes the collection and analysis of data for development of a comprehensive needs assessment (CNA), which is the means by which campuses identify their educational strengths and areas in need of improvement. The CNA guides the development of the CIP and provides benchmarks for its formative and summative evaluation. Also, because different performance results on campuses trigger different interventions under state and federal law, some campuses are also required to develop a targeted improvement plan (TIP).

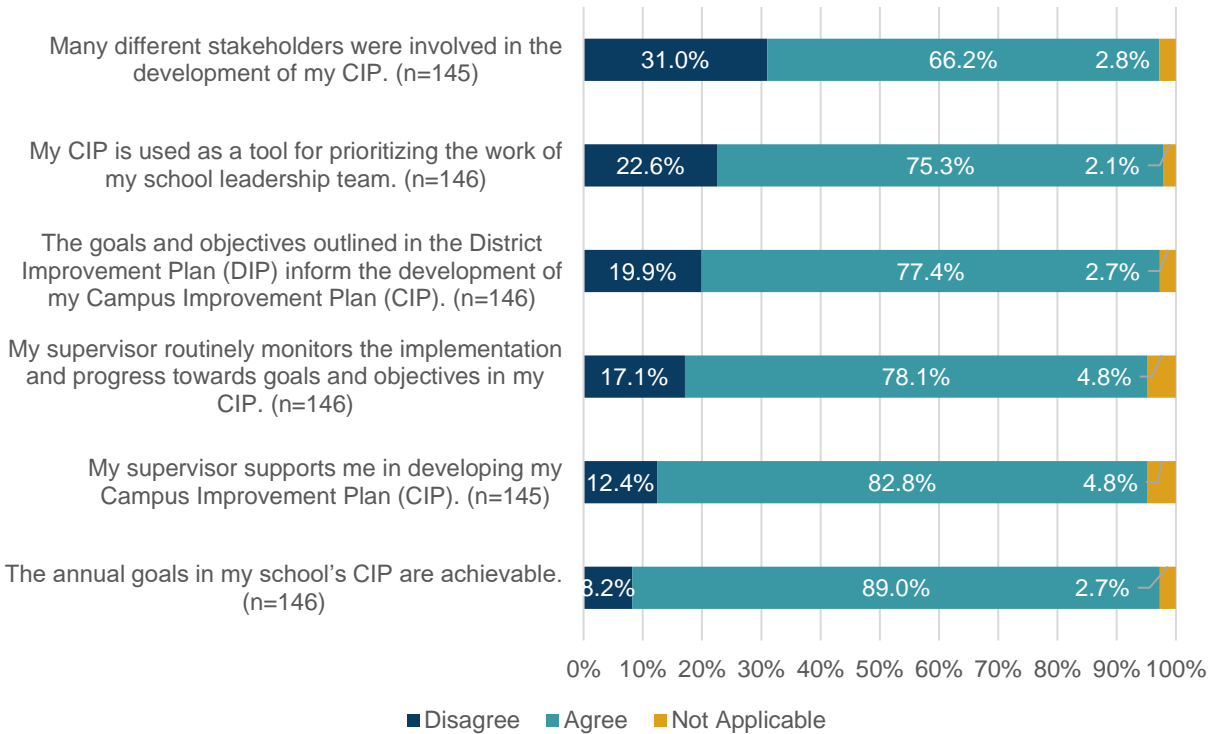
In January 2023, the Office of Campus and District Accountability (CDA) and OSL collaborated to launch a redesign of the CIP process. The overarching goals of this initiative were to make “school improvement planning ‘less’ work with ‘more’ impact” and to ensure that campus improvement planning “is supported through systems and not silos.” Several proposed changes to the CIP process were recommended and will be implemented beginning in the 2023-24 school year. They include:

- A revised timeline that allows for CIP development to begin in late spring and continue throughout the year with guided quarterly data reflection workshops. Previously, the CIP process did not begin until late summer or early fall, which many principals felt limited the use of the CIP as an effective planning tool in the current school year.
- Leveraged use of existing meeting structures to provide more real-time support to campus administrators.
- Use of a single district-wide platform, Plan4Learning, for developing and maintaining both CIPs and TIPs. Plan4Learning digitizes and automates the school improvement plan creation process, eliminating the cumbersome and inefficient process associated with submitting CIPs and managing assignments using BLEND (the district’s LMS).
- Improved alignment between the CIPs and the district strategic plan, including the alignment of priority focus areas, initiatives, and resources and ensuring an equity lens through the process.

¹⁵ The Perils of Bad Strategy, McKinsey & Company, June 1, 2011.

Agreement rates from campus administrators who responded to the survey were mostly favorable with regard to the development of CIPs (Figure 27). Overall, more than 90% of campus administrators agreed that the goals in their CIP are achievable, while more than 75% of campus administrators agreed that their supervisor supports them in developing their CIP, routinely monitors the implementation and progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in their CIP, and that the CIP is used as a tool for prioritizing the work of the school leadership team. Two-thirds of respondents agreed that many stakeholders were involved in the development of their CIP.

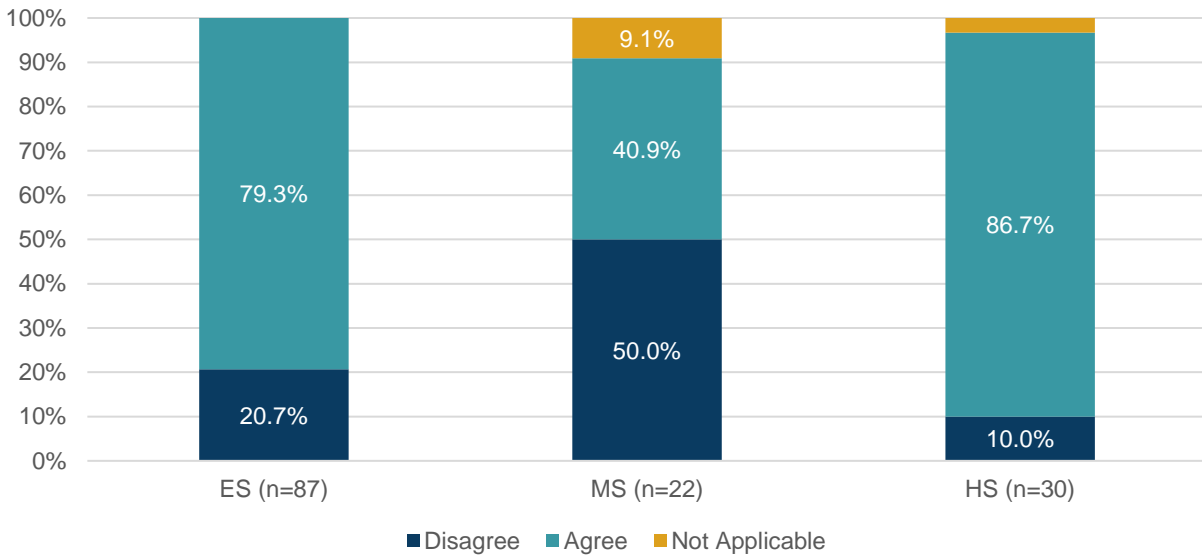
Figure 27. Campus Administrator Survey – CIPs



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Rates of agreement to these statements varied across school levels, with campus administrators at middle schools reporting much lower rates of agreement with these statements than campus administrators at elementary and high schools (Figure 28). While the changes described above will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of developing and monitoring CIPs and are commendable, the results of the survey suggest that middle school principals may need to strengthen their CIPs with additional guidance and support from their respective supervisors (i.e., executive director of campus and school support).

Figure 28. Campus Administrator Survey – My CIP is used as a tool for prioritizing the work of my school leadership team.



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Chapter 4: Curriculum Management

Curriculum management refers to a structured set of activities to assess and adjust a district's curriculum. This Chapter addresses the district's written curriculum, taught curriculum, assessed curriculum, and monitoring of curriculum implementation.

Austin ISD Theory of Action

A theory of action is a hypothesis about what will happen when a set of strategies is implemented. *Policy AE (LOCAL)* specifies managed instruction as the district's theory of action for teaching and learning. Managed instruction promotes the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional development.

The district facilitates the alignment of resources to provide differentiated services to campuses, close student achievement gaps, graduate students on time, and prepare them for college, career, and life. Additionally, the district's managed instruction theory of action is aligned to support students' development of social and emotional learning competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

While the theory of action provides the global organization for how the district approaches teaching and learning, there are more granular levels that ultimately impact what happens in the classroom. Moving from global to granular, these terms are discussed in this Chapter:

- **Instructional Frameworks** – An instructional framework identifies elements in exemplary teaching and provides teachers, school administrators, and district staff with a common language to recognize and communicate those elements.
- **Models of Instruction** – Models of instruction are guidelines or sets of strategies on which the approaches to teaching are based. Models of instruction organize strategies into a suggested and specific sequence of activities and provide a framework for how a teacher plans a lesson with identified methods teachers and students use to achieve the learning target.
- **Unit Plans** – A unit plan consists of concepts and learning goals that are taught over a longer time; a unit plan can include several lessons, and a well-developed unit plan supports the transition into a weekly/daily lesson plan. Unit plans typically cover multiple weeks of instruction.
- **Lesson Plans** – A lesson plan is a detailed guide that outlines the teacher's objectives for what students will accomplish during the lesson and how they will learn it. Creating a lesson plan involves setting goals, developing activities, and determining what resources will be used. Lesson plans are typically developed for a week at a time.

Written Curriculum

The written curriculum articulates 'what' to teach and outlines the standards, big ideas, essential questions, and learning progressions for each content area. The Office of Academics is responsible for developing

and managing the AISD curriculum, including writing the curriculum and overseeing the periodic review and revision process.

AISD develops its own curriculum. The process is led through the Office of Academics under the direction of the assistant superintendent of academics. The curriculum documents are developed, updated, and maintained by a staff of 10 ACSs representing the four core content areas of reading/ELA, science, social studies, and math. The ACSs have a process for enlisting the support of teachers throughout the district to assist them with curriculum updates under their guidance and interfacing with other departments, such as Multilingual Education and SEL. Teachers are given specific assignments, and their work is tracked and approved through a process managed in Google Docs. In addition to maintaining the district's curriculum, the ACS position provides professional development related to their content areas and, beginning in the 2022-23 school year, work with designated schools under the guidance of the executive directors of school supervision and campus support in the OSL.

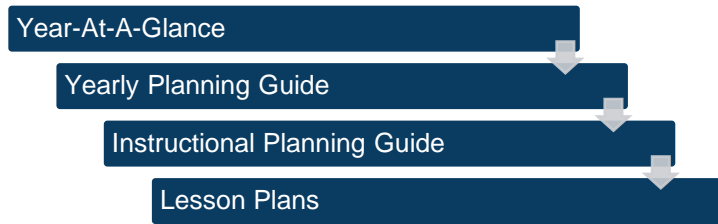
All grade levels and courses in AISD include a specific subject-area curriculum. Curriculum documents are accessed through the AISD portal and stored digitally on a district Google website. The audit team was granted access to the curriculum accessed through the AISD portal. To assess the scope and quality of the district's written curriculum, the audit team examined the curriculum components housed in the AISD portal and documents and resources accessible via links to the various curriculum components.

The following content areas are represented in the district's curriculum documents:

- STEM Math and Science K-12
- Humanities K-12 (ELA, Spanish Language Arts [SLA], and Social Studies)
- Early Childhood PK 3-4
- MET – Biliteracy Curriculum PK-5
- Health and PE K-12
- VAPA K-12
- CTE 6-12

Each content area has a dashboard page that directs teachers through accessing the district curriculum documents. In addition to the access link and instructions, there are links to other content-related information such as news and updates, digital textbooks, assessment calendars, and Lead4Ward Field Guides, a district-contracted resource to support planning and delivery of instruction. The curriculum documents move from a high-level overview with the Year At A Glance (YAG) to the granular level of daily lessons. Figure 29 illustrates the progression of the curriculum documents.

Figure 29. District Curriculum Components



Source. AISD

The following content provides an overview of each of these documents with illustrations from different content areas and grade levels.

Year-At-A-Glance (YAG)

The YAG provides the "big picture" overview of the units of instruction to be covered over the course of the academic year. Figure 30 shows the third grade humanities YAG for the first nine weeks. The YAG establishes the pacing of instruction and serves as the district's primary curriculum scope and sequence. Teachers link from the YAG into the more detailed Yearly Planning Guide (YPG) and the Instructional Planning Guide (IPG).

Figure 30. Humanities Grade 3 YAG


AUSTIN Independent School District		3rd Grade Year-At-A-Glance								
PERIOD	WEEK	DATES	DAYS	3RD READING	3RD WRITING	3RD DUAL LANGUAGE, SLA	3RD DUAL LANGUAGE, ELA/SS	3RD SOCIAL STUDIES	3RD MATH	3RD SCIENCE
1ST NINE WEEKS	1	Aug. 15 - 19	5	Reading Workshop	Writing Workshop	Taller de lectura y escritura	Workshop and Community Building	Community Building	Unit 1: Establishing Math Mindset (5 days)	Intro to Science
	2	Aug. 22 - 26	5				What is Social Studies?	Intro to Social Studies		
	3	Aug. 29 - Sept. 2	5	Character Relationships	Identity and Oral Storytelling	Idea central y evidencia	Character relationship & Communities	Types of Communities	Unit 2: Representation & Comparison of Whole Numbers (12 days)	
	4	Sept. 6 - 9	4	Figurative Language	Starting Personal Narratives	Características de los textos informativos	Figurative Language & Community Needs	How Communities Meet Our Needs		
	5	Sept. 12 - 16	5	Plot	Drafting Personal Narratives	Características de los textos informativos e idea central	Plot & Freedom Week	Celebrate Freedom Week		
	6	Sept. 19 - 23	5	Text Features	Publishing & Celebrating Personal Narratives	Elementos de la poesía	Text Features & The U.S. Constitution	The U.S. Constitution	Unit 3: Addition & Subtraction of Whole Numbers (21 days)	Unit 1: Physical Properties of Matter
	7	Sept. 26 - 30	5	Retell & Key Ideas	Starting Poetry	Lenguaje figurado	Retell & Key Ideas	Declaration of Independence		
	8	Oct. 3 - 7 (ER Fri)	5	Central Idea & Message	More Poetry	El tema en la poesía	Central Idea & Message & The Bill of Rights	The Bill of Rights		
	9	Oct. 10 - 13	4	SCA & Reflection	Celebrating Poetry	SCA #1 y Reflexión	Short Cycle Assessment	Purpose of Government	SCA	SCA1

Source. AISD

Yearly Planning Guide (YPG)

The YPG provides additional detail for the teacher by describing the high-leverage TEKS, complementary TEKS, and process and embedded TEKS that will be taught during the unit of instruction. The YPG is organized in nine-week intervals with links to the supporting units of instruction. Figure 31 illustrates the teacher's view of the YPG for fifth grade ELA and social studies for the first nine weeks of instruction.

Figure 31. Humanities Grade 5 Emergent Bilingual Arts & Social Studies 2022-23 YPG

Humanities	5th Grade	English Language Arts & Social Studies		
2022-2023 Yearly Planning Guide				
Austin ISD believes in preparing students for college, career, and life by individualizing teaching and learning so that every student can succeed. When using AISD Curriculum Planning Guides, teachers should consider the whole child and create opportunities for social and emotional growth and student-centered learning that develops innovation and creativity. The Yearly Planning Guide (YPG) is designed to show the pacing of instruction and to provide resources for teachers to leverage when teaching particular groups of TEKS.				
Year-At-A-Glance		Literacy & Biliteracy Instructional Agreements		Reading Language Arts & Social Studies Suggested Schedules
5th Grade Humanities Lesson Plans Navigation Menu				
1st Nine Weeks - Identity & Community	2nd Nine Weeks - Curiosity	3rd Nine Weeks - Change	4th Nine Weeks - Growth & Reflection	
Week 1 August 15-19 (5 days)	Week 10 October 17-21 (5 days)	Week 19 January 10-13 (4 days)	Week 28 March 20-24 (5 days)	
Week 2 August 22-26 (5 days)	Week 11 October 24-28 (5 days)	Week 20 January 17-20 (4 days)	Week 29 March 27-30 (4 days)	
Week 3 August 29 - September 2 (5 days)	Week 12 October 31 - November 4 (5 days)	Week 21 January 23-27 (5 days)	Week 30 April 3-6 (4 days)	
Week 4 September 6-9 (4 days)	Week 13 November 7-11 (5 days)	Week 22 January 30 - February 3 (5 days)	Week 31 April 10-14 (5 days)	
Week 5 September 12-16 (5 days)	Week 14 November 14-18 (5 days)	Week 23 February 6-10 (5 days)	Week 32 April 17-21 (5 days)	
Week 6 September 19-23 (5 days)	Week 15 November 28 - December 2 (5 days)	Week 24 February 13-17 (5 days) Early Release on Friday	Week 33 April 24-28 (5 days)	
Week 7 September 26-30 (5 days)	Week 16 December 5-9 (5 days)	Week 25 February 21-24 (4 days)	Week 34 May 1-5 (5 days)	
Week 8 October 3-7 (5 days) Early Release on Friday	Week 17 December 12-16 (5 days)	Week 26 February 27 - March 3 (5 days)	Week 35 May 8-12 (5 days)	

Source. AISD

Instructional Planning Guide (IPG)

The IPG provides teachers with unit plans that link to daily lesson plans that teachers can use as either a resource for designing their own lesson or as their actual lesson. Teachers can download copies of the IPG into their AISD Google Drive and customize as needed.

Each unit plan includes the following:

- TEKS to be taught (during the unit) by high-leverage and complementary standards;
- Vertical alignment with previous grade TEKS (to help teachers identify prerequisite skills) and with future grade TEKS (to help teachers plan for enrichment);

- Learning goals for the unit;
- Topic listing with a suggested pacing and links to supporting lessons in the IPG;
- Blended model suggestions; and
- End-of-unit assessment.

Figure 32 is an example of a seventh-grade math unit as presented in the district's IPG/lesson plan.

Figure 32. IPG/Lesson Plan

Austin Independent School District Instructional Planning Guide / Lesson Plan			
7th Math Unit 7: Two Dimensional Figures Cluster 1: Angles & Triangles			
Content Objectives			
High Leverage TEKS		Complementary TEKS	
		The student applies mathematical process standards to solve one-variable equations and inequalities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7.11C write and solve equations using geometry concepts, including the sum of the angles in a triangle, and angle relationships 	
Vertical Alignment			
Previous Grade TEKS		Future Grade TEKS	
6.8A extend previous knowledge of triangles and their properties to include the sum of angles of a triangle, the relationship between the lengths of sides and measures of angles in a triangle, and determining when three lengths form a triangle		8.8D use informal arguments to establish facts about the angle sum and exterior angle of triangles, the angles created when parallel lines are cut by a transversal, and the angle-angle criterion for similarity of triangles	
Learning Goals		Apply knowledge of solving equations to determine missing angle measures	
Overview	Days 1-2 Mon/Tues	Days 3-4 Wed/Thur	Day 5 Fri
Topic	Angles in a Triangle	Equations & Angle Relationships	Equations w/ Geometric Concepts Practice
Blended Model	Whole Group Rotations or Station Rotations	Whole Group Rotations or Station Rotations	Whole Group Rotations or Station Rotations
End of Unit/Subunit Overall Assessment			
n/a			

Source. Austin ISD

Daily Lessons

The units of instruction are supported by daily lessons anchored in the TEKS addressed in the unit. Although the lesson may span more than one day, there are instructions for launching and closing the lesson for each day. The lesson is organized by teacher directions and, where appropriate, student

directions. Lessons typically include learning goals, student success criteria, language objectives, recommendations for blended learning work, and a formative assessment in the form of an exit ticket. There are also links to instructional resources such as PowerPoint slides and activities.

BLEND

In addition to the described curriculum, AISD has developed BLEND courses delivered through the Canvas LMS (also named BLEND). The BLEND courses provide a remote learning curriculum and the opportunity for delivery in a hybrid learning model. BLEND courses were instrumental in addressing the learning needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a blueprint checklist, teachers can develop their own courses. BLEND classes continue to be utilized in face-to-face delivery, particularly at the secondary level.

Finding 5: The district's LMS is cumbersome and challenging to navigate.

The district's curriculum documents are stored on a Google Drive referred to as the AISD portal. Teachers have a login ID that allows them to access the curriculum documents and associated resources. An examination of the AISD portal by the audit team revealed the following:

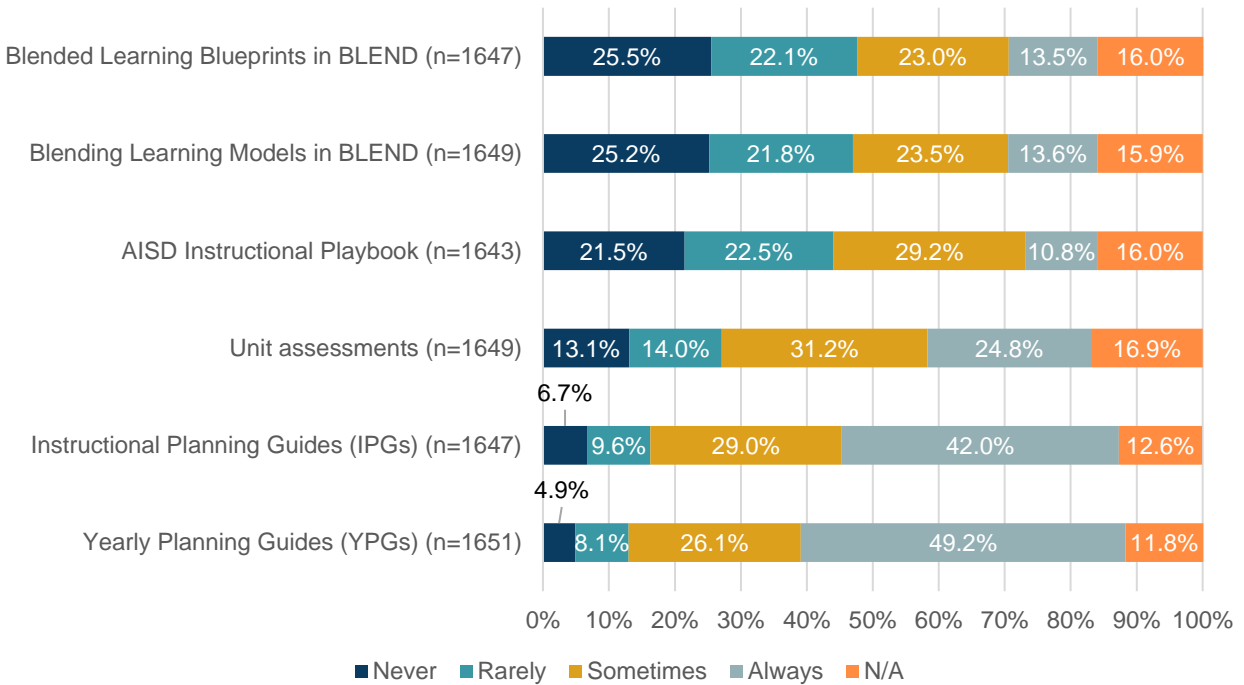
- *Lack of consistency in the organization of curriculum components.* The four core content areas are inconsistent in the organization of the curriculum resources. For example, the elementary ELA/social studies units of instruction in the YAG are organized around essential questions, while the math units are organized around days of instruction with no reference to essential questions. This can be particularly challenging for elementary teachers who teach multiple content areas.
- *Difficult to navigate.* Teachers must navigate through multiple levels (i.e., five “clicks”) to locate their grade level and content area YAG. Once they locate the YAG, more navigation is needed to reach the level of curriculum documents that inform the weekly and daily teaching cycle.
- *Too much content.* The density of the content provided makes it overwhelming to understand, and for the curriculum writers, it makes it difficult to maintain. This was confirmed with anecdotal comments during the teacher and principal focus groups.
- *Difficult to access resources.* Based on input received through interviews and focus groups, logins to digital resources are not administered to teachers in a timely manner, and some links to instructional resources are broken.

Writing and maintaining a curriculum at the individual lesson level is complex and requires extensive time to respond to changes in state mandates, new standards, and technology implementation. It also requires more work to write lessons that reflect the diverse needs of students across the district. Some teachers have many second language learners in their class, while others may have none. Comments such as *“The lessons are too detailed,” “A lesson has too many pages,”* and *“It's hard to navigate and understand”* were heard from multiple stakeholders in the interviews and focus groups. ACSs charged with writing the lessons noted the challenge of keeping them current and responding to requests to make changes. For these reasons, the new curriculum will not include daily lessons but will instead stop at the unit level.

When a district curriculum is challenging to navigate and perceived as overwhelming, it can lead to low usage levels as a guide for planning and delivering instruction. Figure 33 illustrates the extent to which

teachers who responded to the teacher survey use the various curriculum documents when planning the delivery of a unit of instruction.

Figure 33. Teacher Survey – When planning a unit of instruction, how often do you use the following components of the district curriculum system?

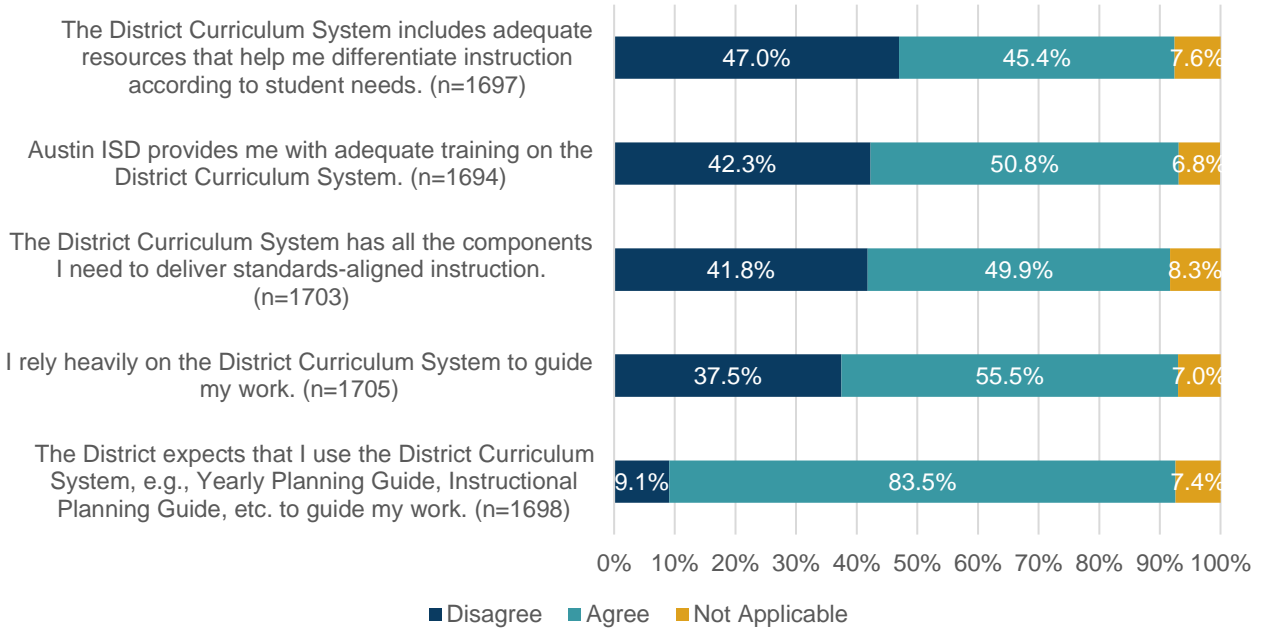


Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

There have been ongoing changes in senior leadership within the Office of Academics with shifting philosophies of what constitutes a comprehensive yet user-friendly curriculum system. The result is an overly complex curriculum system with weak levels of implementation.

Figure 34 illustrates that, while teachers understand they are expected to use the district curriculum system, 37.5% of teachers responding to the survey indicated that they rely on something other than the district curriculum system to guide their work. This may be due to several factors:

- 47% of teachers indicated that the district's curriculum system lacks adequate resources they need to plan instruction;
- 41.8% of teachers disagreed that the district's curriculum system has all of the components necessary to plan instruction; and
- 42.3% of teachers disagreed that the district provided adequate training on the curriculum system.

Figure 34. Teacher Survey Results – District Curriculum System

Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

Recommendation 5: Redesign the AISD portal navigation to increase accessibility and usage.

The development of the new K-8 curriculum provides an opportunity to address many of the issues perceived as deficiencies in the existing curriculum system. The gap between curriculum development and classroom implementation is shortened when teachers have easy access to curriculum plans, assessments, pacing guides, and instructional resources. When teachers have readily accessible curriculum learning targets, pacing guides, and aligned resources, they can select the learning activities that will engage learners in achieving the curricular goals.

When redesigning the LMS, factors to consider include:

- Create a unified design for all core content areas. This is especially important for elementary teachers who plan instruction in multiple content areas and must navigate different layouts and designs;
- Minimize the number of "clicks" it takes teachers to access the documents they need to begin their planning process;
- Reduce the "noise" by only including essential documents and resources. This will address the issue of too much content that makes it hard to find what's most important; and
- Poll teachers about the features they want to keep and the ones they want to eliminate.

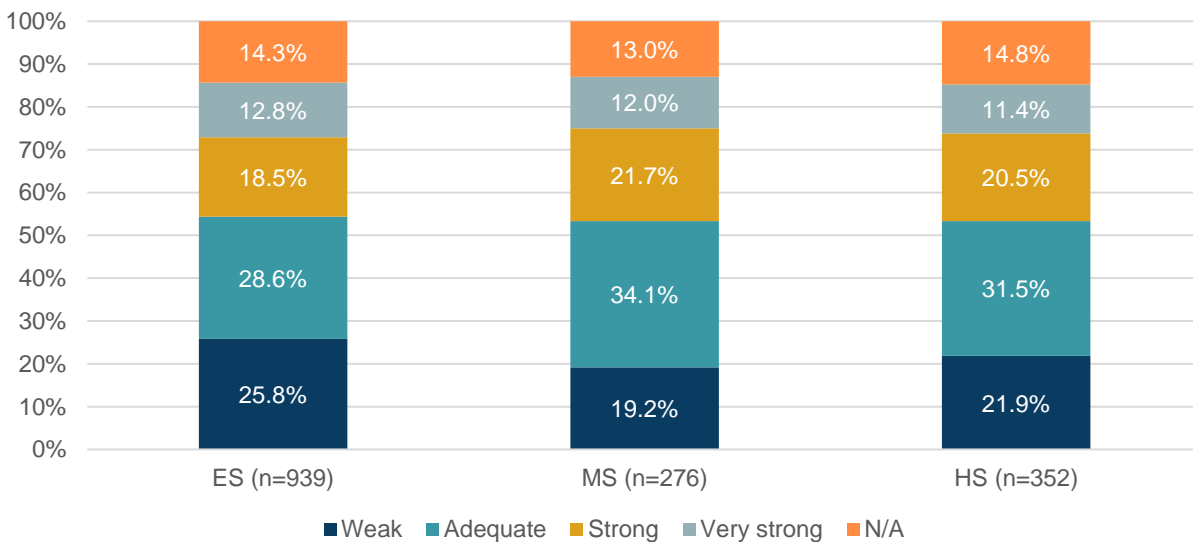
Finding 6: The current professional development strategy is insufficient for building teacher competency in the use of the district curriculum.

There are four primary ways in which AISD teachers learn about and remain up to date on the curriculum system:

- AISD CONNECT - Teacher Induction Program – This program is led by the Talent Acquisition and Development team in Human Resources. Curriculum and Instruction staff serve as presenters during "kickstart" week and, upon invitation, present at ongoing PL sessions.
- Summer Curriculum and Instruction Conference – This PL is led by the Talent Acquisition and Development team in Human Resources in collaboration with the Curriculum and Instruction team in the Office of Academics. Attendance at the sessions is voluntary and sessions are offered in 90-minute segments.
- BLEND – An asynchronous course is offered in BLEND with follow-up access to Curriculum and Instruction staff through "Zoom office hours." This course is designed to be completed within the PLC structure.
- Campus-based Staff Development Days – Curriculum and Instruction staff respond to requests to present at schools during campus-based staff development days.

Figure 35 illustrates teachers' responses to the survey question: *What is your overall assessment of the quality of professional learning you have received this school year on utilizing the district Curriculum System?* Rates of agreement were similar across school levels. More than one-third (33.7%) of middle school teachers rated PL as strong or very strong, followed by 31.9% of high school teachers and 31.3% of elementary teachers. Conversely, more than 25% of elementary teachers rated the quality of PL on the district curriculum system as "weak."

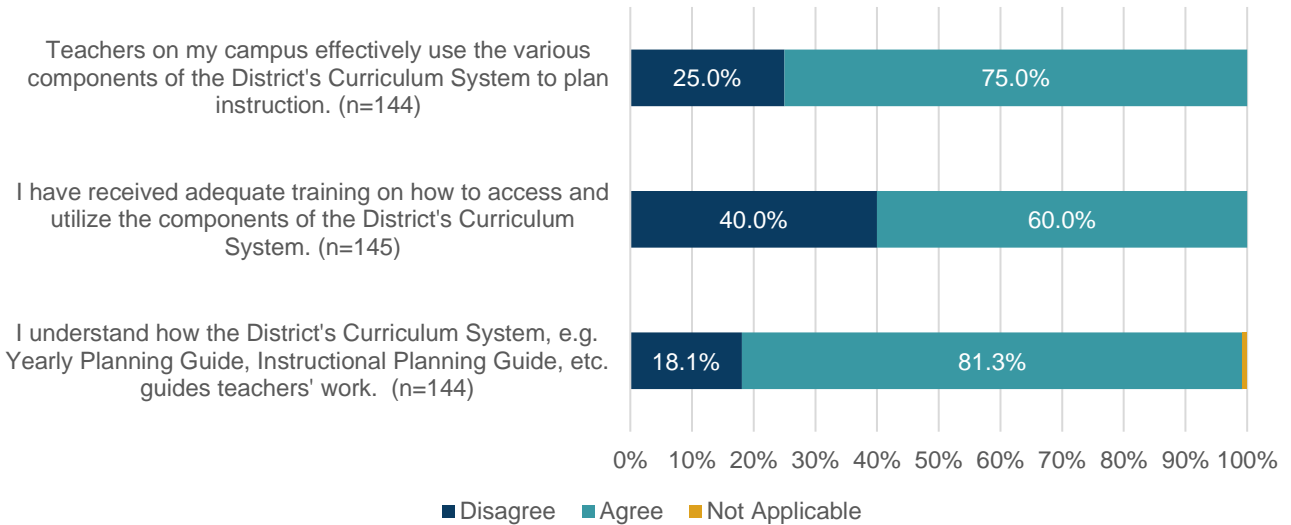
Figure 35. Teacher Survey - What is your overall assessment of the quality of professional learning you have received this school year on utilizing the district curriculum system?



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

Principals perceive that the amount of instruction they have received to understand, access, and utilize the district curriculum system needs to be increased, and there is a need to support teachers better to effectively use the components of the district curriculum system when planning instruction. Figure 36 shows that 40% of principals who responded to the survey disagreed that the training they have received is adequate, 18.1% disagreed that they understand how to use the curriculum system to guide their teachers' work, and 25% disagreed that their teachers can effectively use the components of the district's curriculum system to plan instruction.

Figure 36. Campus Administrator Survey Results – District Curriculum System



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Recommendation 6: Provide more effective PL for teachers and principals to enhance their understanding of the new curriculum.

During the audit, the audit team learned that the district is engaged in a process to develop and launch a new curriculum for K-8 in the 2023-24 school year. The district has contracted with the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) for 15 days of professional support to guide curriculum development. The ICLE model (*Rigorous Curriculum Design*) is based on the work of Larry Ainsworth and is recognized as a best-practice approach to curriculum design.

As AISD launches the new curriculum for the 2023-24 school year, the Offices of Academics, School Leadership, and Professional Learning should collaboratively plan a robust strategy to deepen teachers' and principals' understanding of the new curriculum. Recommended strategies include:

- Strengthen the onboarding of PL for new teachers and principals. Embed practice and application activities that require participants to "use" the curriculum documents rather than just familiarize themselves with the content of the curriculum.
- Redesign the format of the Curriculum and Instruction Conference to have longer sessions that include time for practice and application. The ACSs indicated during focus groups and interviews that the current design of the PL sessions does not provide adequate time for application activities.

- Develop school-based "curriculum champions" to facilitate department and PLC team meetings. This creates a smaller number of individuals to target with in-depth training who can then support the use and application of the curriculum at school sites. Curriculum champions should draw from department chairs, content team leaders, and grade-level chairs.
- Include curriculum implementation in the PL curriculum for the district instructional coaches, whose positions are being reinstated in 2023-24.

Finding 7: AISD's curriculum system is missing requisite components to support teachers in differentiating instruction.

A comprehensive district curriculum should include adaptations and modifications to address the learning needs of all students. The University of Virginia has a nationally recognized school transformation program, Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE).¹⁶ The PLE, built on research-based best practices, identifies the components of a comprehensive curriculum system at three levels of development:

- **Foundational Execution** defines, at a minimum, what a district must have in place, both in terms of curriculum components and design strategy to support standards-based instruction.
- **Core Execution** builds on the foundation by adding additional curriculum components, such as aligned instructional resources, units of instruction based on a solid design (e.g., backward planning), differentiation strategies, sample formative assessments, and exemplars of student work.
- **Deep Execution** is more challenging to achieve and reflects an advanced district response to providing teachers with a rigorous curriculum with all the resources necessary to plan and deliver high-quality instruction. This level includes components such as cross-curricular connections, technology integration, enrichment, re-teaching strategies, and a design process providing a structured annual review that includes opportunities for stakeholder input.

At the core level of execution, a curriculum should have identified differentiation strategies for special populations, such as EB/EL students, G/T students, and students with an IEP. During interviews and focus groups, the audit team heard several concerns regarding the lack of explicit strategies to address the needs of EB/EL or special education students. This was especially noted by educators serving schools with a high representation of EB/EL students. Teachers indicated that it was up to them to find and make any necessary modifications. As a result, teachers said they found it more efficient to design their own lessons rather than use the district's curriculum resources, which is problematic.

A similar concern was expressed by educators serving campuses implementing accountability improvement plans, where the curriculum was perceived as not adequately addressing the needs of their students. In addition to the grade-level curriculum, teachers need access to adapted materials and strategies for curriculum areas that scaffold students from where they are into the grade-level standards.

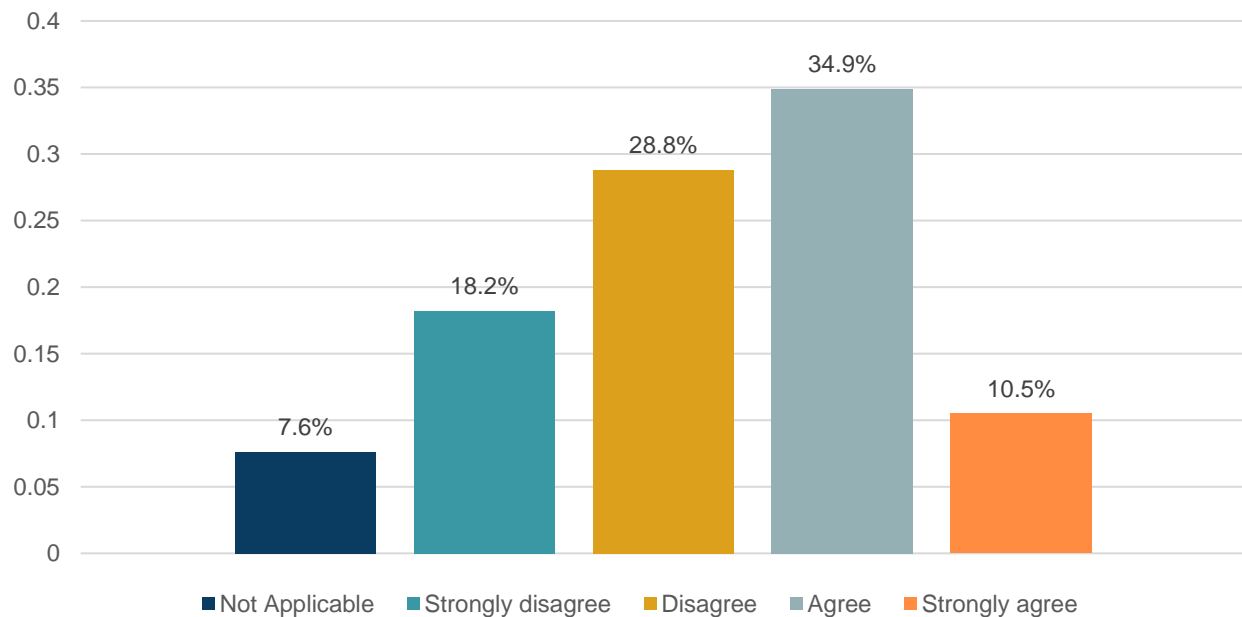
¹⁶ The University of Virginia has a nationally renowned school transformation program that partners with school district leadership teams to address the district conditions, systems, and processes essential for schools to thrive and improve.

For example, for students who have difficulty reading grade-level written material, there might be one-page summaries or study guides that identify key ideas and terms in the reading assignments.

When these elements are missing from the curriculum or require linking to external resources, teachers spend valuable time locating resources outside of the curriculum system, developing lessons that may or may not align with the district's curriculum, or appropriately differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students they serve.

As shown in Figure 37, 47% of teachers responding to the teacher survey disagreed that the district curriculum system has adequate resources to help them differentiate instruction according to student needs.

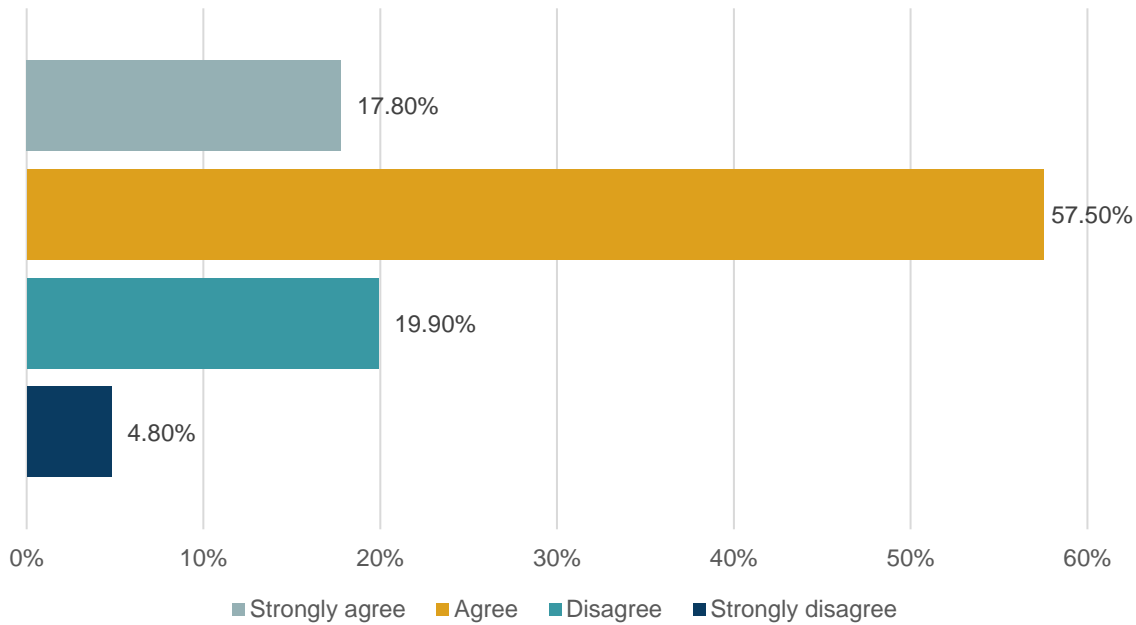
Figure 37. Teacher Survey – *The district curriculum system includes adequate resources to help me differentiate instruction according to student needs (n = 1,697)*



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

Figure 38 illustrates the extent to which teachers struggle to adapt the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not grade-level proficient. More than 25% of principals disagreed with the statement: *"Most of the teachers on my campus can effectively adapt the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not grade-level proficient."* Anecdotal comments from teachers and principal interviews and focus groups echoed this concern.

Figure 38. Campus Administrator Survey – Most of the teachers on my campus can effectively adapt the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not grade-level proficient. (n = 146)



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Recommendation 7: Embed resources and exemplars for accommodations and modifications in the new district curriculum to support teachers' scaffolding instruction for special populations.

As the Office of Academics works with ICLE and teacher leaders from across the district to write new curricula, there is an opportunity to address this shortcoming in the existing curriculum documents. Teachers are looking for specific examples of strategies that allow them to differentiate instruction for their students, rather than broad suggestions that cause them to go outside of the curriculum to research and find them on their own.

Finding 8: The effort around rewriting the curriculum is under-resourced and not broadly supported.

Curriculum development should follow a well-articulated process that is shared and understood by all major stakeholders and include the resources essential for successful implementation. For example, ICLE, the consulting group guiding the development of the new curriculum, suggests that districts developing curricula address the following seven criteria before beginning the creation of curricular units of study:

- What is our curriculum philosophy? Does it reflect our school system's mission statement and provide the ways and means for fulfilling our educational mission?
- What is the current state of our existing curricula? Are all content areas in equal need of revision, or do we need to prioritize them? Which ones must come first?

- Do we have the necessary resources (time, personnel, budget) and the committed support of the leadership (system level and school level) to begin the work and see it through to completion?
- What do we want our revised curricula to be and do? For example, if our curricula were indeed more rigorous, engaging, and relevant to all students, what would the impact be on their day-to-day motivation and achievement?
- What should the various components of our curricula include?
- What do we want to retain from our existing curricula? What do we want to add or revise?
- What kind of structure, template, or framework will we use? Should it be content-area specific, grade-span specific, or more universal to promote consistency across the school system?

During interviews and focus groups, feedback was provided to the audit team that suggested that several of these criteria were not met prior to the new curriculum's creation. For example:

- There is a lack of shared belief within the Office of Academics regarding the need to develop a new curriculum. Some of the curriculum staff charged with writing the new curriculum expressed doubts about the need for a new curriculum. This is not unexpected, given their role as authors of the current curriculum, which would typically generate a sense of pride of ownership.
- ACSs charged with curriculum writing are spread too thin. They have been assigned to the executive directors in the OSL to provide school-based support four days per week. During the summer months of curriculum writing, they are also responsible for planning and delivering summer PL.
- The process for gathering stakeholder input is fragmented. Some "school listening sessions" took place at the elementary level, but none were held at middle schools, and the new curriculum is for Grades K-8.
- Not all schools have teachers participating in the summer curriculum writing sessions. The goal of having at least one teacher from each school was a strategy to help with acceptance and support at the campus.
- The audit team heard differences of opinion between OSL and the Office of Academics regarding the preference for timing of the rollout of the new curriculum. Members of OSL expressed concern that the 2023-24 school year is too soon (*"There has been such a lack of consistency, and now we're going to throw something new at them"*). However, the Office of Academics sees it as important to launch the new curriculum for K-8 at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year.

These issues increase the risk of delayed implementation of the curriculum and/or lack of fidelity in implementation.

Recommendation 8: Develop a curriculum management plan that better aligns resources to support a successful implementation.

A curriculum management plan should communicate the intentions of a district in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A school district with a robust curriculum management system has a written plan that outlines and guides the design and delivery of the curriculum. A comprehensive plan should

articulate the curriculum development, adoption, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision process for all courses of study. *Policy EH (LOCAL) Curriculum Design* recognizes the need and value of an ongoing curriculum review and development cycle.

The new curriculum provides an opportunity for AISD to do a reset in terms of how it launches and supports new initiatives. The following is recommended:

- Develop a formal, written curriculum management plan that explicitly addresses the processes for curriculum development, adoption, implementation, monitoring and the evaluation and revision process for all courses of study.
- Create a working group that includes leadership from the Office of Academics, OSL, Professional Learning, and Assessment and Accountability. Include all key stakeholders, such as principals and teachers, to identify needed district, school leadership, and teacher support for curriculum implementation.
- Build capacity by designating “curriculum champions” at each school to attend PL that prepares them to facilitate PLC meetings using the new curriculum to plan and assess instruction in their grade level and/or content teams.
- Provide PL for instructional coaches to use the curriculum in the teacher PLC meetings.
- Identify the systems that will be impacted and strategies to address potential unintended consequences (e.g., assessment - SCAs).
- Include systems for monitoring implementation fidelity that are reflective of board policy and consistently applied across and within the schools.
- Create/identify exemplar sites that can be highlighted in principal meetings and learning walks.

Taught Curriculum

The taught curriculum represents the content knowledge, skills, attitudes, and processes or strategies that a teacher uses to deliver instruction to students. It represents what teachers actually teach day by day. While the written curriculum guides the taught curriculum, what teachers actually teach is also guided by textbooks, programs, assessments, and sometimes teacher preferences. This section focuses on the components of the curriculum that assist teachers in planning and delivering instruction.

Instructional Frameworks

An instructional framework is a set of powerful and effective teaching and learning practices that are consistently implemented with fidelity in every classroom in a school.¹⁷ An instructional framework identifies elements found in exemplary teaching and provides teachers, school administrators, and district staff with a common language to recognize and communicate those elements.

¹⁷ What Is An Instructional Framework? Referenced from:

https://www.davidson.k12.nc.us/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=799489&type=d&pREC_ID=1776846.

Additional benefits of an instructional framework are that:

- It establishes expected professional practices, and this ensures that there is a common understanding of what constitutes effective teaching.
- It ensures greater consistency across the district. A well-articulated, common instructional framework provides greater consistency of instruction from classroom-to-classroom, grade-to-grade, and school-to-school.
- It provides a guide for improving teaching practices. The common language and shared meaning of an instructional framework builds a clear definition of effective practices and their expectations among teachers, administrators, and instructional support team members. When teachers engage in conversations organized around a common framework, teachers can learn from one another.

Finding 9: The district lacks an instructional framework that defines what students should know and be able to do upon graduation.

School leaders should have a clear understanding of what good instruction looks like. AISD lacks an instructional framework to provide this foundation for PL, teaching and learning, and LD, resulting in high levels of variation in implementation. Without a clear definition of high-quality instruction, teachers lack a target to guide the planning and delivery of instruction. When there is no clear framework for aligning PL for teachers, there tends to be an over-reliance on interventions, and students receive inconsistent instructional experiences within and across schools.

The impact of not having an instructional framework surfaced during interviews, as school leaders expressed the need for more guidance. Representative comments included:

- *"I used to know what good instruction looked like in each content area and a base level that every teacher will have, such as accountable talk, word wall, etc. That doesn't exist now."*
- *"Without an academic vision we struggle...we can't point to this is what we believe, this is what we're working towards."*
- *"We need a stronger academic vision. What does quality instruction in AISD mean?"*
- *"There isn't a consistent long-range plan for each content area...it's responding to fires and looking for immediate results."*

Recommendation 9: Develop a "Portrait of a Graduate" and define the essential components of an instructional framework that represent the goals of AISD.

A "Portrait of a Graduate" is essentially a set of skills, knowledge, attributes, and competencies that a school district wants its students to possess upon graduation. It is important because it guides the district's curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices and helps ensure that the district is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. A "Portrait of a Graduate" for AISD should be developed with input from parents, students, staff, and community members.

The development of the new district curriculum allows AISD to establish a clear vision of the "AISD Way." An instructional framework clarifies what district leaders, principals, and teachers agree is the definition of high-quality instruction in AISD. A well-designed instructional framework identifies the components of effective instruction that, regardless of the content area, can be found in every classroom.

Once a definition is established and agreed upon, the following steps should include aligning PL to support implementation and establishing consistent processes, such as school leadership observation and feedback cycles and district-led school learning walks to monitor implementation. Existing teacher appraisal documents should also be leveraged. For example, the rubrics may serve as a starting place to translate multi-page rubrics into a compelling graphic that communicates, "*This is how we teach in AISD.*"

Instructional Models

Instructional models (or models of instruction) are guidelines, or sets of strategies, on which the approaches to teaching are based. Instructional models organize strategies into a suggested and specific sequence of activities and provide a framework for how a teacher plans a lesson with identified methods that the teacher and students use to achieve the learning target.¹⁸ Instructional models are most effective and more readily adopted by teachers when the model is specific to best practice in a given content area, rather than one-size-fits-all. Like instructional frameworks, models of instruction provide a structure for organizing and focusing classroom observation, feedback, and PL.

The audit team identified models of instruction for elementary reading/ELA and math in the form of recommended blocks of instruction. Each model provides a lesson flow with a suggested sequence of activities. The following is a list of instructional models provided by AISD to the audit team.

- The Recommended 180-Minute Reading Language Arts and Social Studies Block (Grades K-2)
- The Recommended 145-Minute Reading Language Arts and Social Studies Block (Grade 5)
- The Recommended 60-Minute Math Block (Grades K-2)
- The Recommended 90-Minute Math Block (Grades 3-5)
- The Recommended 150-Minute Bi-Literacy Framework (Grades 3-5)

For example, the AISD K-2 literacy model describes the sequence of the lesson and the strategies for each phase of the 180-minute literacy block. Figure 39 represents sequentially what teachers should be doing within the first 55 minutes of literacy instruction.

¹⁸ <https://www.nsba.org/ASBJ/2022/december/models-of-instruction>.

Figure 39. Literacy Grades K-2 Model of Instruction

The Recommended 180 Minute Reading Language Arts and Social Studies Block (Grades K-2)		
Reading Language Arts Foundational Skills (30 minutes)		
Phonological/Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, Spelling, Fluency		
30 min	Instructional Setting	Purpose
	Whole Group Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide explicit and systematic instruction using a daily instructional routine from HMH Into Reading or Literacy Resources by Dr. Heggerty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach the relationships between letters and sounds, spelling patterns to decode Teach the identification and spelling of high frequency words and irregular words
	Guided Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunity to practice the week's focus TEKS Check for understanding and address misconceptions
Reading Focus Lesson (15 minutes)		
15 min	Instructional Setting	Purpose
	Whole Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide mini lesson instruction using read aloud or shared reading, modeling to demonstrate a strategy Facilitate collaborative groups Follow the grade level TEKS in the YPGs Address comprehension, print/book awareness, and response to reading Provide students choice in the way they demonstrate their knowledge and skills through formative assessment Provide feedback on students' progress toward the learning goals, success criteria, and the use of language objectives Provide oracy instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and teach explicit academic vocabulary Promote and model the use of academic oral language Apply academic vocabulary during activities throughout the week
Guided Reading/Literacy Stations (40 minutes)		
40 min	Instructional Setting	Purpose
	Guided Reading (Small Group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide students as they practice reading Provide targeted small group instruction Provide support for specific literacy skills and strategies as well as for the focus strategy

Source. AISD

Finding 10: AISD's implementation of its literacy instructional model is not contributing to the reduction of significant achievement gaps in reading/ELA performance.

There are significant achievement gaps in literacy performance among student subgroups at AISD. Table 18 presents the percentage of AISD students meeting grade level or above expectations on STAAR Reading/ELA for Grades 3, 5, 8, and all grades combined. Performance data is provided for White, African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students. The results show significant achievement gaps, with White students achieving more than double the passing rates in most comparisons to other student subgroups, regardless of grade level.

Table 18. AISD Students Scoring at "Meets Grade Level or Above" on STAAR Reading/ELA, 2021-22

Student Group	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8	All Grades
White	80%	87%	81%	82%
African American	33%	41%	43%	36%
Hispanic	40%	51%	45%	42%
Eco Dis	34%	45%	40%	36%

Source. 2021-22 AISD TAPR

One of the likely contributing factors to these achievement gaps is that the AISD literacy model is recommended but not required to be used by schools. The decision is left to the principal. (See related discussion of AISD's decision-making framework in Chapter 3).

The audit team also identified other factors that may be influencing results:

- *Insufficient district-level staff dedicated to leading literacy improvement.* There is no designated coordinator or director of literacy in the central office, which is very atypical for a district the size of Austin ISD. A strong literacy program that begins at pre-K and continues into secondary takes dedicated planning, collaboration with school leadership at the district and school levels, and a long-term PL strategy. There was a director position designated for literacy before a recent reorganization combined reading/ELA and social studies into humanities.
- *No dedicated, fully-resourced literacy improvement initiative.* Despite lower reading/ELA passing rates across all grade levels for economically disadvantaged and non-White students, there is no evidence of a literacy improvement strategy that is understood, accepted, and consistently executed. A review of district documents provided by AISD indicated a long-term literacy strategy that was part of a document developed in 2015.¹⁹ However, the plan is no longer reflective of the current state as it relates to district-level support for literacy.
- *Limited teacher professional development focused on literacy.* In AISD, no literacy PL curriculum is required for teachers other than the mandated Texas HB 3 Reading Academies for teachers and principals in Grades K-3. The Reading Academies are delivered online and are focused on foundational knowledge to teach reading and writing. Growing and supporting effective literacy instruction requires dedicated PL over time with support and follow-up. A best practice observed by the audit team in another Texas school district is requiring teachers to complete a literacy PL pathway that is differentiated based on years of experience. The PL pathway includes coaching and follow-up support at the school site.

Table 19 presents literacy professional development offerings (beyond the state Reading Academies) along with enrollment for each course during 2022-23. According to district records received, two of three trainings offered had participation, and one of those had four attendees.

Table 19. Literacy Professional Development, 2022-23

Session Title	Date	Enrollment
AISD Literacy Framework Cohort 1 Kick-Off	10/14/22	46
Elementary Literacy Instruction	10/17/22	4
Elementary Literacy Instruction	10/24/22	0

Source. AISD 2022-23 professional development catalog

In addition to the professional development offerings listed above, the district offers a series of Leadership Learning Pathways, coordinated and led by the Talent Acquisition and Development team within the HC Department. A Leadership Learning Pathway is two years in length and is focused on building in-depth

¹⁹ AISD Academic Vision.

knowledge and skill in a given focus area. Participation is voluntary and participants earn a stipend. In return, participants are expected to provide PL leadership in their focus area. A review of the 2022-23 professional development catalog identified two Leadership Learning Pathways focused on literacy. Table 20 presents the number of participants for each of the two Leadership Learning Pathways. Based on information provided by AISD, one of the offered Leadership Learning Pathways (Cultivating a Literacy/Biliteracy Classroom) had no participants.

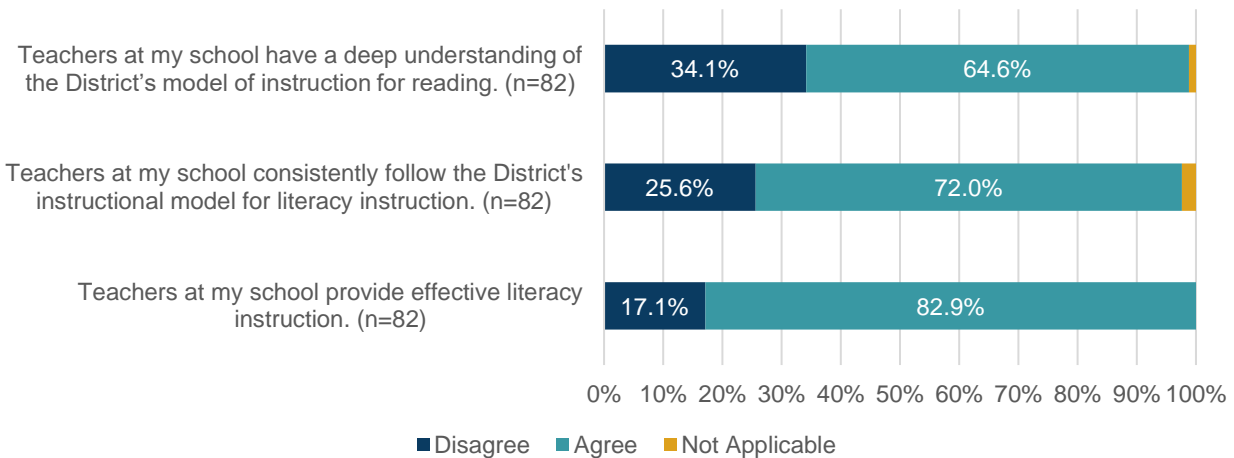
Table 20. Leadership Learning Pathways and Participation, 2022-23

Leadership Learning Pathway	Total Participation for all Sessions
Framing Literacy/Biliteracy Pathway	79
Cultivating a Literacy/Biliteracy Classroom Pathway	0

Source. AISD 2022-23 professional development catalog

Figure 40 illustrates principals' perspectives on their teachers' understanding of the district's model of instruction for reading, the consistency of implementation, and their perception of the provision of effective literacy instruction. While 34.1% of principals indicated that teachers at their school lack a deep understanding of the district's model of instruction for reading, 82% indicated that their teachers provide effective literacy instruction. These perceptions run counter to actual reading/ELA performance among economically disadvantaged, African American, and Hispanic/Latino students.

Figure 40. Campus Administrator Survey – Elementary Literacy Instruction



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

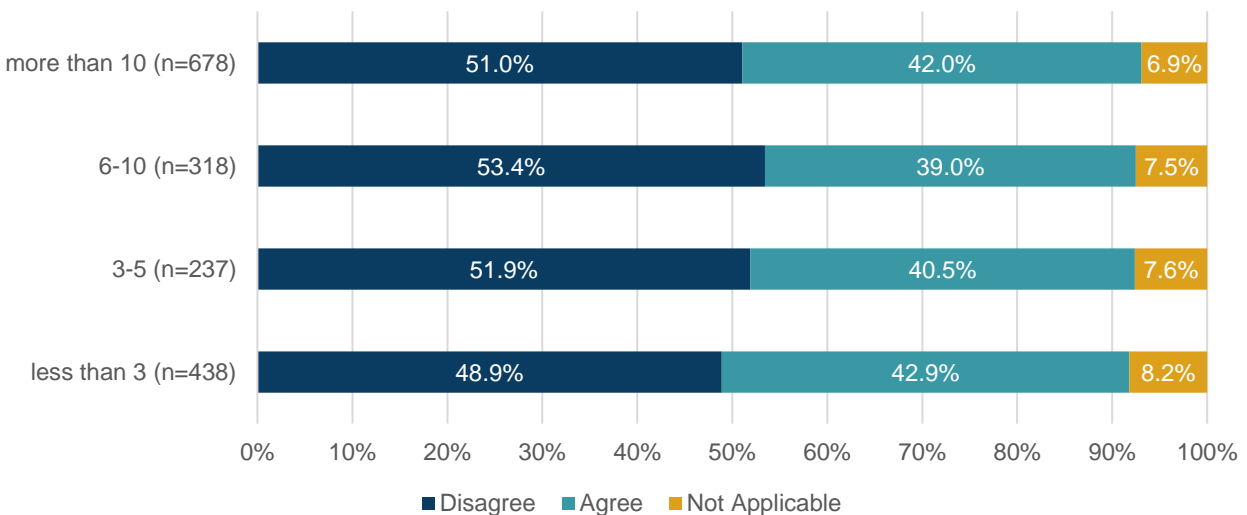
As noted above, the gaps in third grade continue into the secondary grades, where students have fewer opportunities for direct reading instruction or reading interventions. This has a far-reaching negative impact on students. For example, only 26.75% of Travis ECHS students met the standard in the 2022-23 school year to enroll in college credit courses with Austin Community College due to their inability to pass the reading screening standard; the majority of these students are students of color. During the site visit to Travis ECHS, the audit team learned there is no reading intervention program, such as double blocking,

that specifically targets these students to get them ready by their junior year to participate in college credit courses.

There is also a negative impact on teachers' ability to provide standards-aligned instruction when students cannot access grade-level instructional resources. Teachers need to adapt and scaffold the curriculum to support students unable to read at grade level. This takes additional planning time and a level of expertise that many teachers need help to achieve. The audit team heard numerous references to this challenge during the individual interviews and focus groups.

More than half of all teachers who responded to the survey do not feel that AISD supports them in adapting the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not on grade level (Figure 41). Responses were consistent for teachers with all levels of teaching experience.

Figure 41. Teacher Survey – AISD provides support to teachers in adapting the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not on grade level.



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

The systemic impact of low literacy achievement is far-reaching. The following is a list of some of the most immediate outcomes of an ineffective literacy strategy:²⁰

- Students' ability to access rigorous, grade-level instruction is negatively impacted;
- The district experiences increased referral rates for special education services;
- Teachers are challenged to adapt instruction to meet the needs of students reading below grade level;
- Schools experience increased discipline problems; and
- There is increased stress on the RTI program with too many students in Tier 2.

²⁰ <https://online.regiscollege.edu/blog/child-illiteracy/>.

Recommendation 10: Implement strategies to address literacy achievement gaps.

The audit team recommends adding two director-level positions, one for elementary and one for secondary, to provide leadership for literacy in AISD. The job requirements for these positions should include demonstrated experience improving literacy from a district-level perspective. While understanding the research and strategies of effective literacy instruction is necessary, the expertise of leading systems-level change is crucial if AISD is going to change the trajectory of student performance.

With the addition of the two literacy leadership positions in place, the district should develop and execute a strategic literacy improvement initiative. An effective improvement plan should, at a minimum, include the following: measurable goals, clear action steps, necessary supports (such as ongoing PL), systemic use of data, aligned instructional resources, plan for progress monitoring, and explicit expectations that schools will develop literacy improvement plans that address each area outlined in the district plan.

The district should also investigate strategies that similar districts have used to break the cycle of low reading performance, especially for historically under-performing student populations. For example, one large Texas district created a pilot program that established a regional Kindergarten literacy campus to serve students from multiple pre-K programs who were identified as at risk for reading as they entered Kindergarten. The literacy center provides intensive reading instruction by skilled reading specialists. Students completing the program return to their home school for first grade. The program has been so successful that the district is opening additional sites. Innovative models like this can help to change the trajectory of student achievement for AISD's most at-risk students.

Curriculum Implementation

A guaranteed and viable curriculum, supported by effective teaching in every classroom, is essential to ensure that every student can learn in an academically rigorous classroom. Having a comprehensive, high-quality curriculum is insufficient if there are inadequate systems to support implementation at the classroom level. Consistent curriculum implementation is defined as teachers in the same grade and subject area being at approximately the same point in the YAG/scope and sequence at a given time.

Principals in AISD are primarily responsible for monitoring curriculum implementation on their campus through various strategies, such as reviewing unit and lesson plans, conducting classroom walkthroughs, evaluating teachers as part of the appraisal process, and analyzing assessment data.

Policy EH (LOCAL) specifies the board's expectations for curriculum implementation: "Teachers shall be expected to follow the curriculum developed for their teaching assignments. Administrators shall be expected to assist teachers in effectively implementing the district curriculum." The audit team examined district practices that ensure the district's curriculum is implemented with fidelity. These include:

- Teachers' use of curriculum documents such as the YPG and IPG in the instructional planning process;
- Campus administrator expectations for use of the district curriculum;
- Campus administrator participation in PLC meetings; and

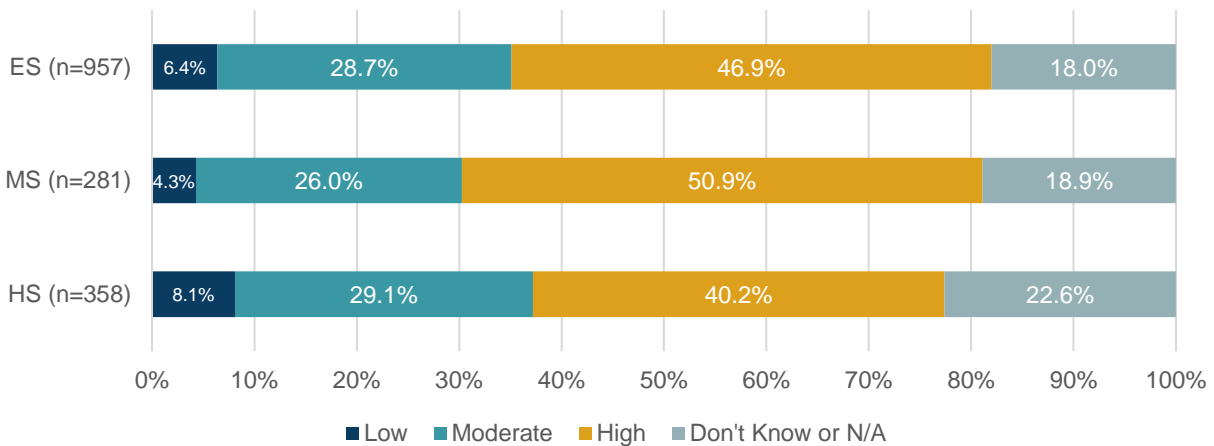
- Classroom walkthrough documents.

In addition, the audit team observed for selected instructional practices reflected in the curriculum documents as part of the school visit and classroom observation process.

Finding 11: Austin ISD does not adequately monitor the fidelity of curriculum implementation.

On the teacher survey, fewer than half of the teacher respondents reported high levels (i.e., more than two-thirds) of consistency in implementing the curriculum in their content area and/or grade level (Figure 42). Middle school teachers were more likely to report high rates of consistency than elementary or high school teachers.

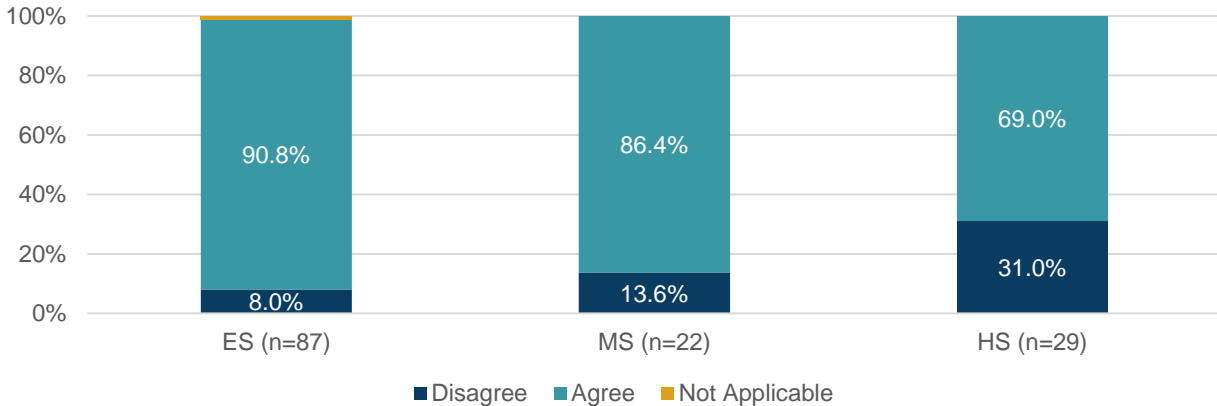
Figure 42. Teacher Survey – How would you rate the consistency of curriculum implementation in your content area/grade level on your campus?"



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

On the campus administrator survey, 90.8% of elementary principals indicated that they expect their teachers to use the district's curriculum system, while rates of agreement were lower for secondary principals (Figure 43). This response pattern is typical of most districts. As the curriculum becomes more course-specific at the secondary level, teachers rely primarily on the course textbook rather than curriculum documents such as units of instruction. The discrepancy between teacher and principal responses is notable, however. For example, nearly 91% of elementary principals indicated that they expect their teachers to use the district's curriculum system to guide their work, yet only 47% of teachers agreed that there is a high consistency of use of the district curriculum system in their content area and/or grade level.

Figure 43. Campus Administrator Survey – In my school, I expect teachers to use the district's curriculum system to guide their work.

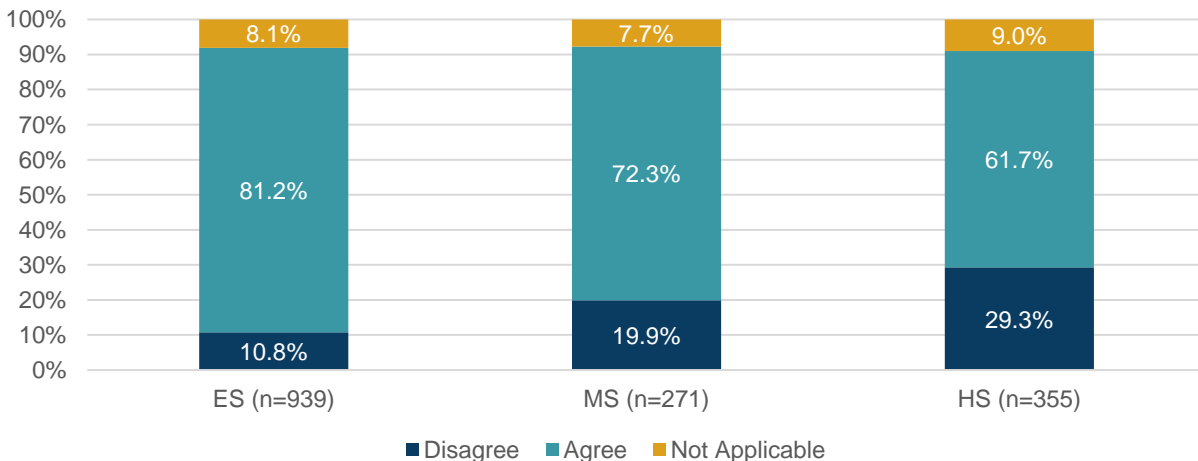


Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

During the principal focus groups and school visits, principals indicated that they and members of their administrative team rely primarily on the work that takes place in the teacher PLCs as the vehicle for monitoring curriculum implementation. When campus administrators attend PLC meetings, they can observe teachers' use of district curriculum resources, the development of lesson and unit plans, and watch teachers analyze student learning.

Feedback on both the teacher and campus administrator surveys indicates that the frequency of attendance at PLC meetings varies across school levels. Elementary teachers reported higher rates of agreement (81.2%) than middle (72.3%) or high school (61.7%) teachers when asked if a campus administrator routinely attends their PLC meetings (Figure 44).

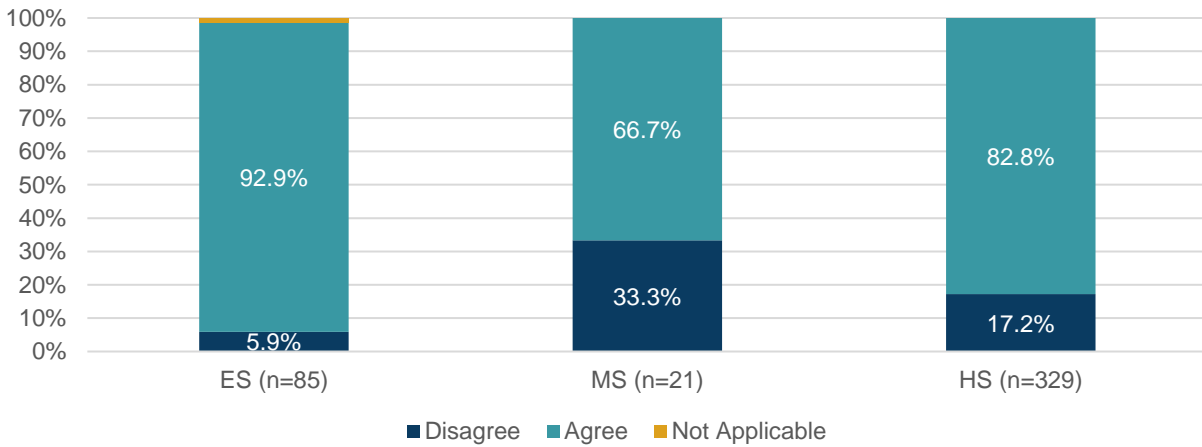
Figure 44. Teacher Survey – Campus administrators routinely participate in PLC meetings.



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

As shown in Figure 45 below, middle school principals who responded to the survey indicated that they were less likely to routinely participate in PLC meetings.

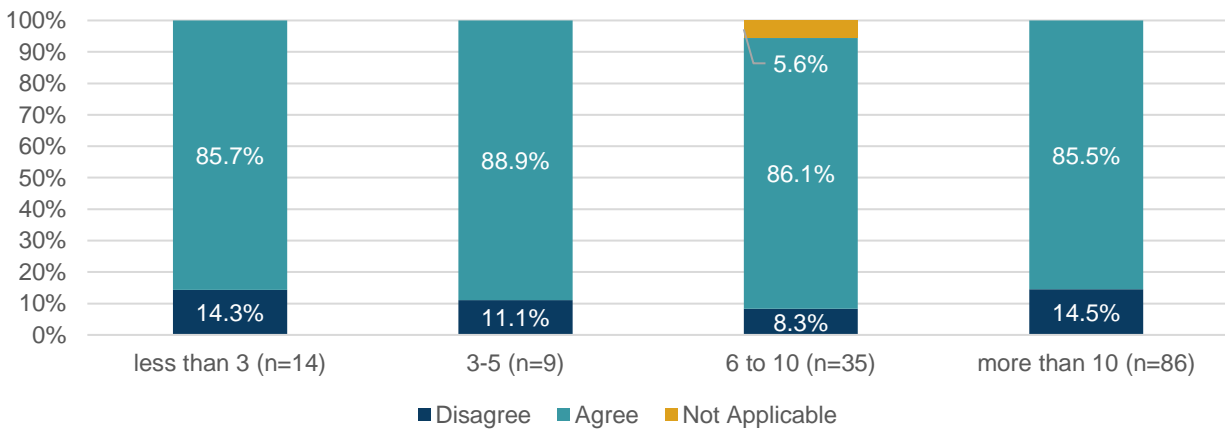
Figure 45. Campus Administrator Survey – I and/or other school leaders routinely participate in teacher PLC meetings.



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Principal attendance at PLC meetings was consistent for all respondents regardless of their years of experience in the principalship (Figure 46).

Figure 46. Campus Administrator Survey – I and/or other school leaders routinely participate in teacher PLC meetings.



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

An examination of the AISD classroom walkthrough form that informs the teacher appraisal system, Professional Pathway for Teachers (PPfT), found that, while there is a reference to the pace of the lesson delivery, the instrument does not reference whether the teacher is on pace and working in alignment with the district's curriculum scope and sequence (i.e., YAG).

Recommendation 11: Modify the district walkthrough rubric to include curriculum implementation.

As AISD implements the new curriculum beginning in 2023-24, adding this element to the walkthrough instrument would provide an additional data point for principals and principal supervisors to monitor the implementation fidelity of the new curriculum.

Unit and Lesson Planning

Policy EH (LOCAL) Curriculum Design states that unit/lesson expectations and formative assessments are to be developed at each campus with the guidance of the principal. This policy was last updated on June 9, 2017.

A unit plan consists of concepts and learning goals that are taught over a longer period of time; a unit of instruction can include several lessons, and a well-developed unit plan supports the transition into a weekly/daily lesson plan. A lesson plan is a detailed guide that outlines the teacher's objectives for what students will accomplish during the course of the lesson and how they will learn it. Creating a lesson plan involves setting goals, developing activities, and determining what resources will be used. Lesson plans are typically developed for a week at a time.

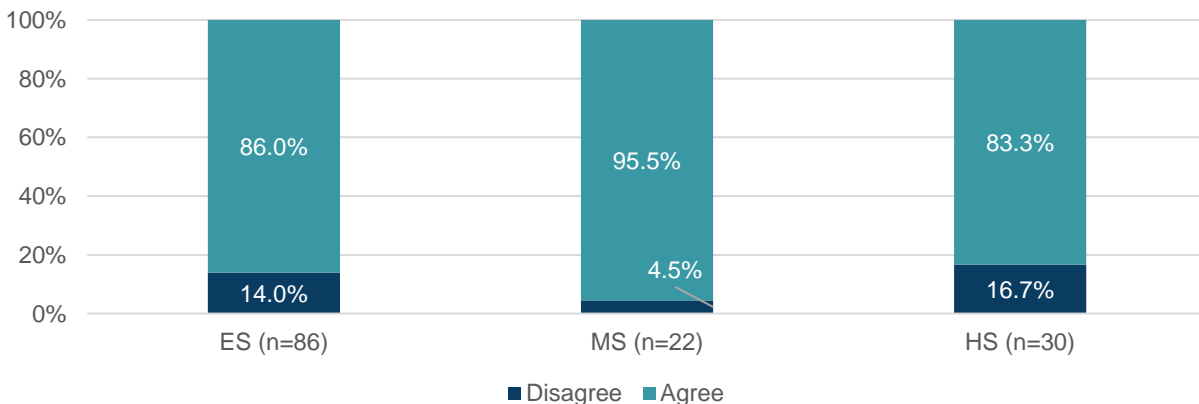
Both the existing AISD curriculum and the new curriculum that is currently being developed incorporate unit plans to guide the delivery of standards-aligned instruction. As mentioned earlier, the new curriculum will no longer include daily lesson plans, but rather teachers will have the autonomy to translate the units of instruction into daily lessons that better reflect the unique context of their classroom and their students.

Finding 12: The district lacks lesson plan templates or a list of components to support effective core content area instruction.

Effective lesson planning contributes to successful learning outcomes for students in several ways. A well-designed lesson plan helps students and teachers understand the goals of the lesson and allows the teacher to translate the curriculum into learning activities. Planning helps to make the lesson clear, well-timed, and more likely to keep students active and interested.

According to feedback on the campus administrator survey, the vast majority of principals expect their teachers to develop lesson plans for each unit of instruction (Figure 47).

Figure 47. Campus Administrator Survey – In my school teachers are expected to develop lesson plans for each unit of instruction.



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

The district does not provide lesson plan templates nor a list of recommended components of a lesson plan to the schools in AISD. Given that all schools have the autonomy to develop their own lesson plan expectations, the audit team found that practices vary widely across the district. Lesson planning takes time and, for teachers such as self-contained elementary teachers who may plan for four content areas, having subject-specific lesson plan templates can save valuable time.

Recommendation 12: Develop lesson plan templates for the core content areas.

For a lesson plan to serve its intended purpose, it should have the requisite components that support a well-constructed lesson. This can be supported by the district by providing lesson plan templates and/or a list of required components.

When lesson plan templates support an effective model of instruction for a given content area, it is much easier and more meaningful for teachers to use the templates to guide their instructional planning. For example, the design of the delivery of instruction for the reading/ELA block looks different from math. In addition, the template can help to guide best practices in content-specific instructional pedagogy. Many districts use a model template and then allow the school site to customize its own template based on faculty input, as long as the required components are addressed in the locally developed template.

Regardless of format, effective lesson plans generally contain the following minimum components:²¹

- Introductory matter – Information such as the grade level of the students, content area, name of the unit of which the lesson is a part, the standards being addressed, or other information that communicates “where” in the curriculum the teacher is.
- Instructional objective – What is to be learned?
- Prerequisites – What must the student already know or be able to do in order to be successful with the lesson?
- Instructional procedures – What will the teacher do to teach the lesson, including how the lesson will be introduced, activities and instructional strategies, and how the lesson will be closed?
- Materials and equipment – What materials and/or equipment are needed by the teacher and students to complete the lesson?
- Assessment/evaluation – How will the teacher determine the extent to which the students have attained the instructional objective?
- Differentiation strategies – How will teachers modify instruction to meet the needs of EB/EL students, G/T students, and/or students with disabilities?
- Post-lesson reflection – What went well? What needs to be adjusted to improve the lesson?

Additional components may include information such as the use of instructional technology and/or blended learning activities and more detail about the lesson itself, such as opening and closing activities.

21 Stout, J., Kachur, D., & Edwards, C. (2010). *Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Teaching and Learning*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

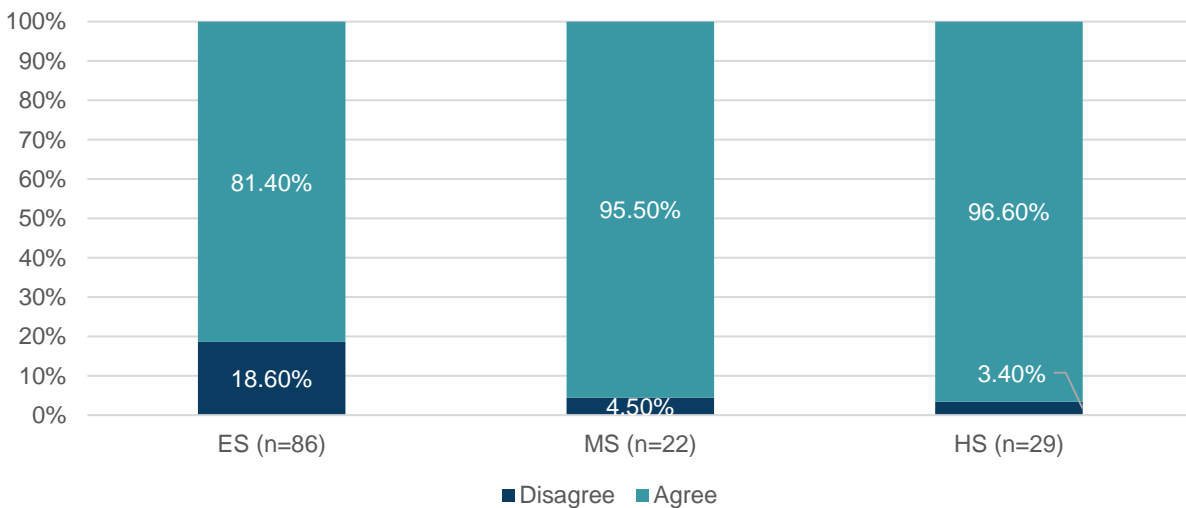
Finding 13: Campus administrators do not routinely provide feedback to teachers on unit plans, missing an opportunity to improve teacher performance.

Developing lesson and unit plans is one of the core activities that should occur within a PLC. This practice leverages the benefit of teacher collaboration and supports the analysis of formative assessment results. If students did poorly on the formative assessment, teachers could reflect on the instruction that occurred within the lesson to determine weaknesses in the design of the delivery of instruction.

Research suggests that principal feedback on unit plans is more effective for improving teacher performance than collecting and attempting to provide feedback on weekly/daily lesson plans.²² Unit plans are richer and deeper than daily lesson plans; they form the foundation for lesson planning, and an effective review can head off misconceptions before they occur and support teacher learning needs necessary to effectively deliver the unit plan's instructional goals.

Figure 48 indicates that the vast majority of principals in AISD expect teachers to complete their unit plans within the context of their PLC, although rates of agreement were slightly lower at the elementary level than at the secondary level.

Figure 48. Campus Administrator Survey – In my school, teachers are expected to develop unit plans with their PLCs.

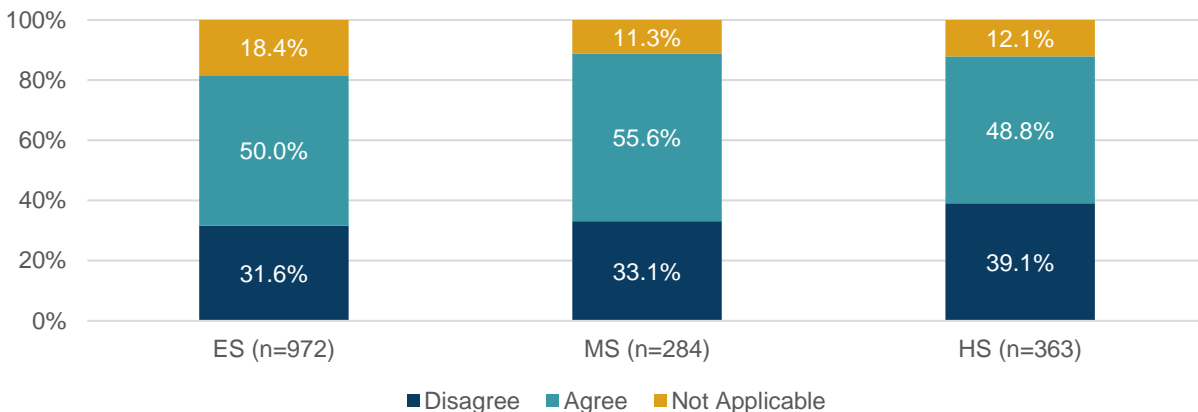


Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Despite the value that administrator feedback can contribute to teachers' unit plans, more than one-third of all teachers who responded to the survey indicated that they do not receive feedback on their unit plans (Figure 49).

²² Kim Marshall, *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation* (2013).

Figure 49. Teacher Survey – A campus administrator routinely provides feedback on my unit plans.



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

Recommendation 13: Consistently review and provide feedback on unit plans.

Unit planning provides a scaffold to weekly lesson planning and is a best practice for planning instruction. Good unit planning leads to good lesson planning, and principal involvement in teachers' unit planning is a high-yield investment of time. Also, the task of explicitly identifying teacher learning needs to ensure they have the skills necessary to successfully teach the unit is a best practice if consistently addressed by campus leadership, either through attending planning PLC meetings or reviewing and providing feedback on unit plans. AISD should require that principals and/or other campus administrators formally review the unit plans as they are developed during PLCs.

Assessed Curriculum

Assessments play a critical role in improving educational outcomes by measuring student learning, the quality of instruction, and the effectiveness of district, school, and classroom instructional programs and resources. The goal of an assessment strategy is to create a system that includes formal and informal assessments that provide stakeholders with the information they need, at the time they need it, to make informed decisions to improve student achievement. This requires a range of assessments, from daily, in-the-moment student checks for understanding to state- and federal-mandated assessments.

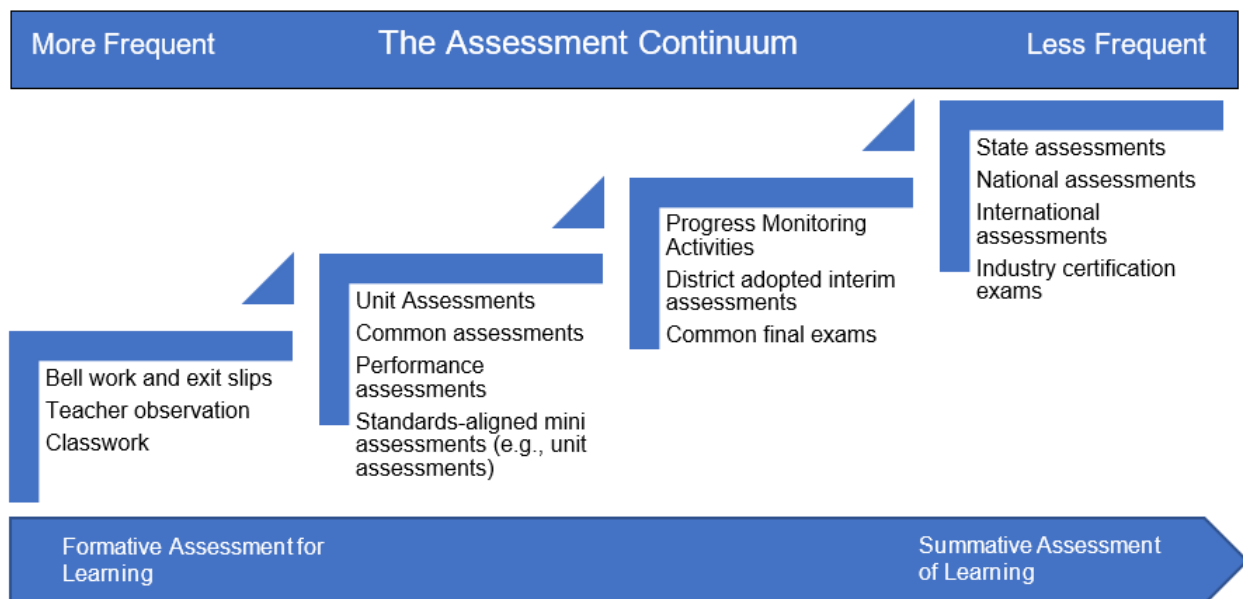
Current research and discussions of approaches to assessment make the distinction between two purposes of an assessment system: (1) assessments "for learning" (Brookhart, 2007), which includes assessment activities that assist teachers in improving instructional practice and student learning; and (2) assessments "of learning" to provide information for education accountability purposes. Formative assessments, such as daily checks for understanding and SCAs, are examples of assessments *for learning*. In contrast, summative assessments like EOC and STAAR tests are examples of assessments *of learning*.

Many assessments serve both purposes depending on the user and the timing of the assessment. Formative assessments *for learning*, such as unit assessments, can be used at the classroom level but can provide evaluative learning information when aggregated at the school and district levels. Interim assessments occupy the middle ground between SCAs and summative assessments. Well-designed

interim assessments assist the district with a system-wide look at student achievement, including identifying patterns and trends across the district as well as providing an advance look at how well students are prepared for state summative assessments. With the timely turnaround of data, the right level of reporting, and a deep data analysis process, interim assessments can provide a robust assessment “for learning” and “of learning.”

Figure 50 highlights the interrelationships between formative, interim, and annual assessments in a comprehensive, balanced assessment system. The learning targets assessed by frequent formative assessments in the classroom build toward the longer-term targets addressed by periodic interim assessments. Interim assessment data inform teaching and learning that occurs before the annual assessment, which in turn transfers into subsequent years of teaching, learning, and assessment.

Figure 50. Interrelationships Between Assessments



Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Commendation 4: AISD has a comprehensive assessment system that includes diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, interim assessments, and state/national assessments.

AISD has representative assessments from each category of assessments supported by an assessment calendar that includes testing windows and, where appropriate, designated time for analysis and action planning.

While diagnostic assessments are essential to identify students with specific learning needs, and state summative assessments report student proficiency against grade-level content standards, the discussion of the district's assessment strategy presented in this report is focused on the district's formative and interim assessments for learning. A brief overview of each type of these assessments in AISD follows:

- **Formative Assessments** – Teachers in AISD utilize a variety of formative assessments to drive instruction and promote student growth. These include pre-assessments, teacher rubrics, student

checklists, common formative assessments (CFAs) developed within their teacher PLC meetings, and unit assessments included in the district curriculum.

- **Interim Assessments** – Typically administered three times per year at nine-week intervals, interim assessments help teachers and school leaders identify students on or off track for success on end-of-year summative assessments and where to provide extra support (if needed). AISD is currently using two different and unique interim assessments:
 - *Short Cycle Assessments (SCAs)*. During the 2022-23 school year, SCAs were provided for all STAAR-tested grades and subjects. Tests are provided in English and Spanish, with optional tests for science in Grades 3 and 4 and for accelerated math in Grades 6 and 7. Each SCA is designed to assess student mastery of student expectations (SEs) taught during the corresponding nine weeks of the YPGs. While the assessment is titled a “short cycle assessment,” it is a curriculum-based, interim assessment. Curriculum-based, interim assessments are one of the most challenging assessments to develop. Several criteria must be met for the assessments to meet a standard of validity and reliability. They must be aligned with the taught curriculum for teachers to view them as an accurate representation of their teaching efficacy. Additionally, if the assessments do not correlate with student performance on end-of-year state summative assessments, teachers and administrators may lose faith in the value of the time and effort associated with administration, analysis, and action planning.
 - *Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) MAP*. MAP is a nationally normed, computer adaptive assessment that measures student growth against state standards and helps teachers and school leaders set individual student growth targets. The district uses MAP to assess progress in reading and math for all students in Grades K-8. There are separate reports for the campuses’ projected STAAR proficiency (Grades 3-5) and the percentage of students who met their growth targets (Grades K-5). Reports are by subject and language administration (English/Spanish).

In a computer-based adaptive test, every time the student answers an item, the computer re-estimates their ability based on all the previous answers and the difficulty of those items. The computer then selects the next item, which gives the student a 50% chance of answering correctly. As the student correctly answers, the questions become more difficult. Because the test is tailored to the student’s current achievement level, it allows the student to show what they know and can do.

During the audit, the audit team learned that AISD is canceling the SCA in Grades K-8 for 2022-23 while staff from the Office of Academics is engaged in writing and supporting the new district curriculum.

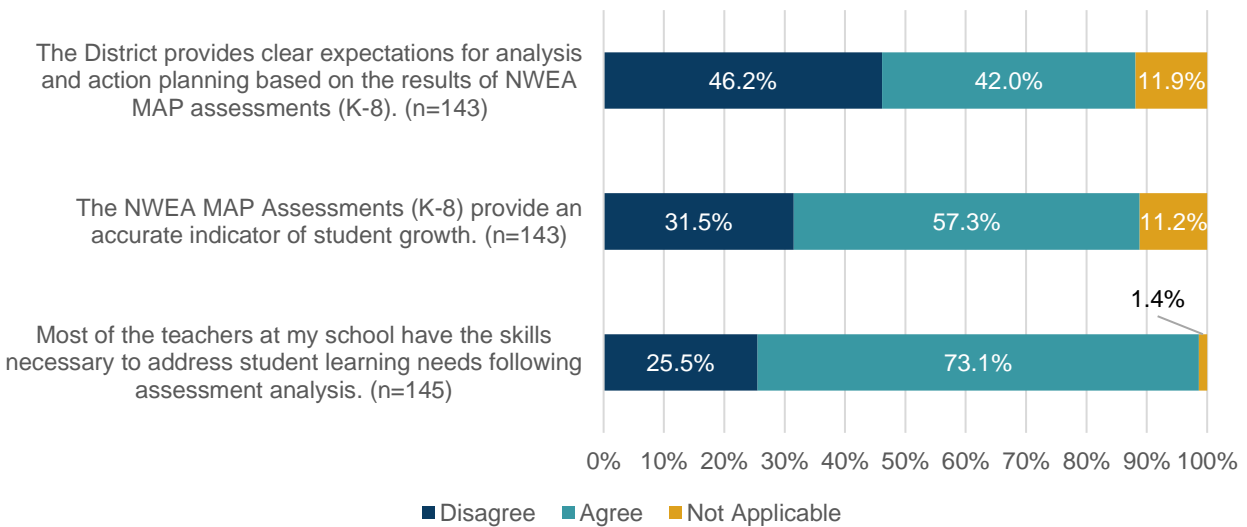
Finding 14: Due to implementation issues, MAP has not yet yielded the intended benefits.

MAP assessments were launched in AISD in 2020-21, pursuant to the district’s 2020-25 strategic framework, and they are the primary student achievement metric referenced in the 2021-26 scorecard. Because both MAP and SCA assessments were applied through 2022-23, significant efforts at the district and campus levels were required to implement and use MAP while also using SCAs. This created three primary challenges for AISD, which are discussed below.

Map Implementation

Because MAP was implemented during COVID-19, all initial training was provided online. This may have contributed to the lack of a deep understanding and proficiency in using the assessment. Figure 51 illustrates principal perceptions of several aspects of the MAP implementation. Just under one-third of principals (31.5%) disagreed that *MAP Assessments (K-8) provide an accurate indicator of student growth*. This likely demonstrates a lack of understanding of how to analyze the various reports generated by the assessment and a lack of guidance from the district on expectations for analysis and action planning following test administration. Nearly half (46.2%) of all principals who responded to the survey indicated that there is a lack of clear expectations and action planning following the assessment, and 25.5% of principals indicated that their teachers need additional support to address student learning needs following assessment analysis.

Figure 51. Campus Administrator Survey – MAP Assessment



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

An examination of AISD’s Summer 2022 EDU professional development catalog found that, while the district offered 20 professional development sessions focused on teachers’ understanding of MAP reports and student growth and goal setting, the sessions were poorly attended, with 11 of the 20 sessions having no registrants (Table 21).

Table 21. Teacher Attendance at Summer 2022 NWEA MAP Professional Development Sessions

Number of Sessions Offered	Total Number of Registrants	Number of Sessions with 0 Registrants
20	41	11

Source. AISD 2022-23 professional development catalog

Testing Days

Two interim assessments required excessive testing days for students. Table 22 illustrates the number of days in the 2022-23 school year testing calendar during which a middle school campus may be engaged in testing reading and math performance on the two district interim assessments. The total number of days is 58, with 24 days devoted to SCA testing and 34 days devoted to MAP testing. These days are for all grades tested at a middle school (Grades 6-8) and include days designated for analysis with students and, in the case of SCAs, a day for reteaching following each assessment. While no classroom is testing every day during the testing window, the school is testing multiple days to ensure they meet the district requirement for testing a minimum number of students within the testing window. The audit team heard several teachers and administrators express concern about how long it took to meet the testing threshold of 85% of students, especially at schools with high mobility and absenteeism rates, with some schools stating it took as long as two weeks to get through the testing process.

Table 22. Middle School Assessment Calendar for MAP and SCA Testing, 2022-23

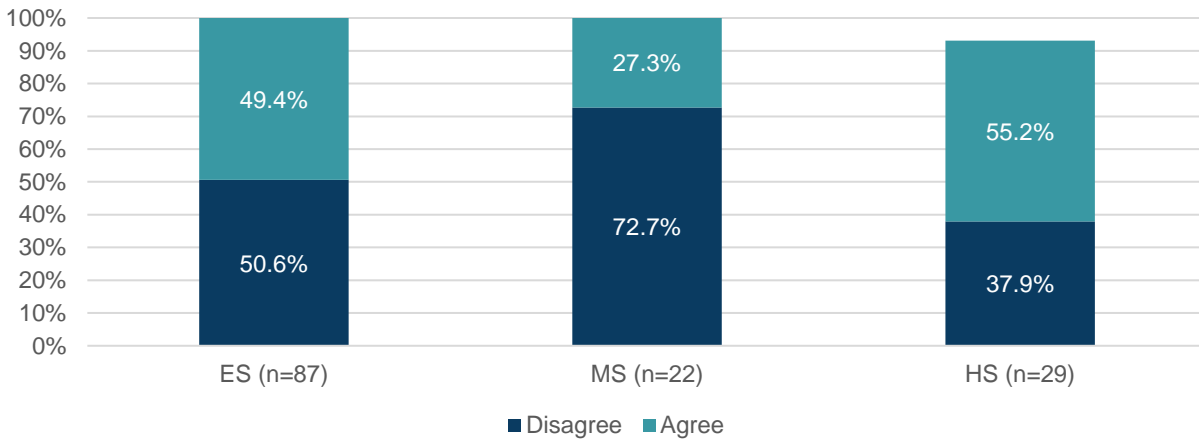
Assessment	Testing Dates	Days in Testing Window
MAP Beginning of Year	8/29-9/9/2022	11
SCA #1	10/13-10/19/2022	7
MAP Middle of Year	11/28-12/9/2022	10
SCA #2	12/8-12/21/2022	11
SCA #3	2/28-3/3/2023	6
MAP End of Year	3/20-4/6/2023	14
Total Days in Testing Window		59

Source. AISD 2022-23 assessment calendar

Analysis and Planning

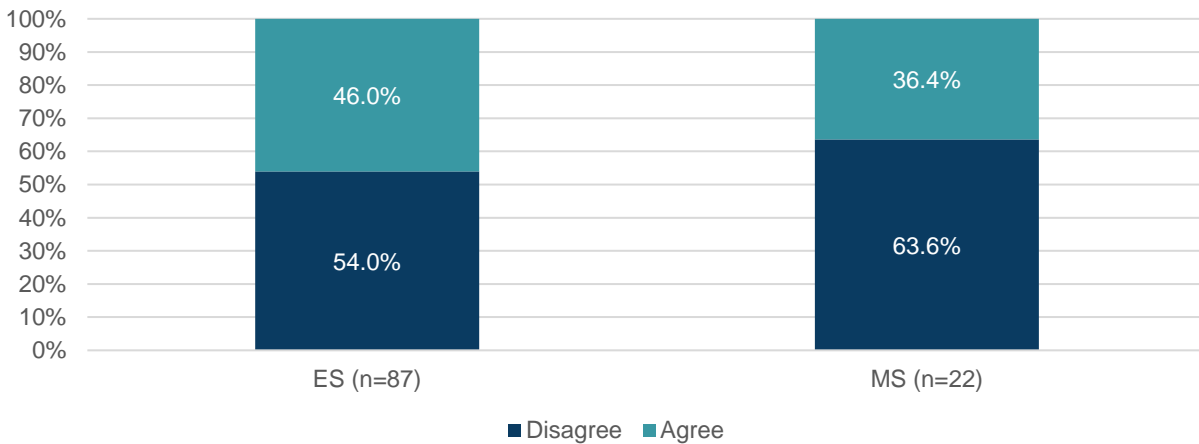
Two interim assessments also required double the effort to administer the assessments and to analyze the results. Even though the testing calendar indicates there was time allocated for analyzing and acting on the assessment data, teachers and principals did not find that to be the case with either of the assessments. Figure 52 and Figure 53 illustrate principals' responses to time for analysis and action planning following the SCA and MAP assessments. Across all levels, principals expressed high rates of disagreement. However, middle schools showed the highest level of disagreement, with 72.7% of principals disagreeing that there is adequate time for SCA analysis and action planning, and 73.6% disagreeing that there is adequate time for MAP analysis and action planning.

Figure 52. Campus Administrator Survey – The district pacing calendar provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following district short cycle assessments.



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Figure 53. Campus Administrator Survey – The district pacing calendar provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following NWEA MAP Assessments (Grades K-8).



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

The value of interim assessments is in the conversations and teacher action plans that result from a thoughtful and skilled analysis of the assessment's results. Without that, the assessment becomes a compliance activity rather than a process for improving teaching and student learning.

Recommendation 14: Fully invest in MAP as the singular, long-term assessment program for Grades K-8.

Given the burden on schools to administer two interim assessments in addition to all of the other required assessments, AISD should invest in NWEA MAP in Grades K-8 while also developing teachers' skills in the use of formative assessments. Well-constructed, curriculum-based formative assessments will help teachers make adjustments to daily and weekly instruction and more rapidly respond to student learning needs than waiting for information gleaned from the SCA assessments.

MAP assessments will help teachers and school leaders better understand students' achievement levels. Understanding a student's current achievement level helps teachers and school leaders set growth targets at the individual student level and monitor student academic progress. While often considered to provide more value at the school and district level than the classroom level, MAP growth can play a valuable role in planning for teaching and learning. For example, after developing the teaching plan for a unit of instruction, an awareness of student achievement levels can help teachers think about how to be more responsive to individual learner needs.

For a district like AISD with a high percentage of students not meeting grade level or above proficiency standards on the STAAR assessment, having a measure of growth is a high priority. Non-proficient students need to grow more than one academic year to achieve proficiency against grade-level standards. Additionally, growth can more accurately report the impact of effective teaching and leadership practices across schools than a simple measure of correct items on the SCA, which tends to penalize schools with more challenging student groups. Some schools and teachers may add value to student learning that is not reflected in the SCA assessments but would be noted in MAP.

Austin ISD's new curriculum (being implemented in 2023-24) will include unit assessments that, if supported, used well, and paired with MAP data, should be able to provide teachers and administrators with the information they need to determine if students are on track for success on STAAR.

This notwithstanding, losing access to the SCA for schools identified for improvement under the state's accountability system may concern principals and principal supervisors who rely on these assessments to determine if students are on track for passing the STAAR or EOC assessments. For these high-stakes schools, the district should consider the following:

- Consult with NWEA regarding the methodology to use student RIT scores as a predictor of success on state summative assessments in reading and math; and
- Use the interim assessments provided by the TEA as a mid-year assessment.

AISD will also need to strengthen school leaders' and teachers' understanding and use of MAP assessment data. MAP is a sophisticated assessment that generates multiple reports that, when used well, provide valuable information for school leaders.

To ensure successful implementation of MAP, the district will need to deepen principal and teacher understanding of MAP assessment data. Below are some suggested strategies:

- Create an orientation-level required course for onboarding new principals and teachers.
- Use principal meetings to break MAP into small learning "bites" by demonstrating one report and how to take action on the information. When possible, use principals who can serve as exemplars. Provide opportunities for practice by including time for hands-on application.
- Guide principals through the process of how to facilitate a post-assessment analysis and action planning meeting with their teachers. Include the ACSs and the new instructional coaches in the training.

- Create a cadre of MAP assessment champions by investing in PL for grade-level team leaders and department chairs to support effective facilitation within the PLC structure, including action planning on the data following assessment administration.
- Following administration, schedule vertical team meetings with half of the day focused on analysis and the second half of the day focused on PL and action planning.

Chapter 5: Professional Learning and Instructional Supports

This Chapter provides an overview of the policy framework that guides PL at the district, the various PL opportunities afforded to teachers and leaders, and other ways the district supports high-quality instruction. PL refers to the trainings and programs that employees participate in to build their own skills and competencies. Further, current research shows that ongoing, collaborative, and primarily job-embedded PL for administrators and teachers leads to an increase in student achievement.²³

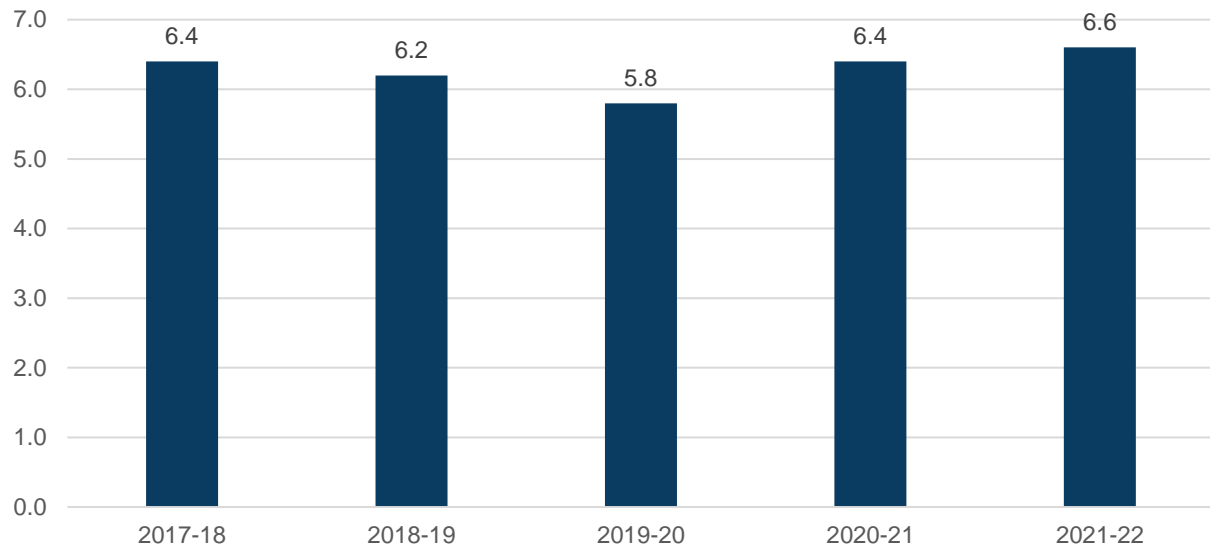
Principal and Teacher Profile

This section presents a profile of AISD principals, assistant principals, and teachers based on state-reported data. It includes analyses based on district trend data as well as peer comparisons. Below are summary observations:

- Current AISD principals and assistant principals are more experienced than past cohorts, but they still trail the experience levels of their peer district counterparts.
- AISD teachers, on average, have less experience than teachers in peer districts.
- The formal qualifications of AISD teachers (i.e., certification route, degree type) broadly mirror those of peer district teachers.
- Compared to peer districts, AISD beginning teachers earn lower salaries and turn over at a higher rate.

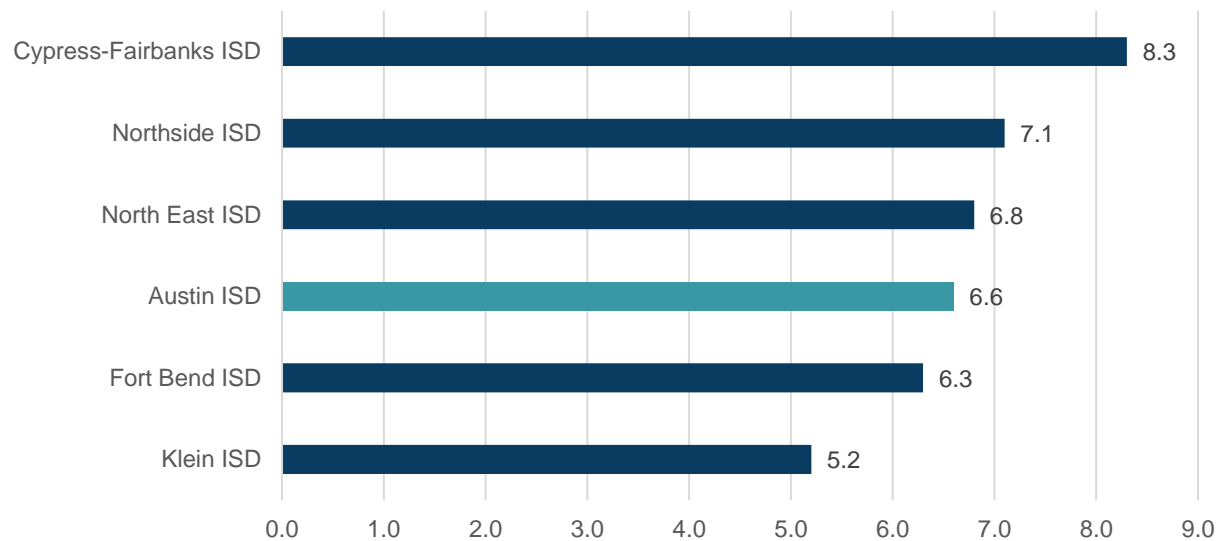
Figure 54 presents the average years of experience (YOE) of AISD principals between 2017-18 and 2021-22. Principal YOE steadily declined between 2017-18 and 2019-20, reaching a low of 5.8 years prior to climbing to 6.6 years in 2021-22.

²³ Learning Forward, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.

Figure 54. AISD Principal Average YOE, 2017-18 to 2021-22

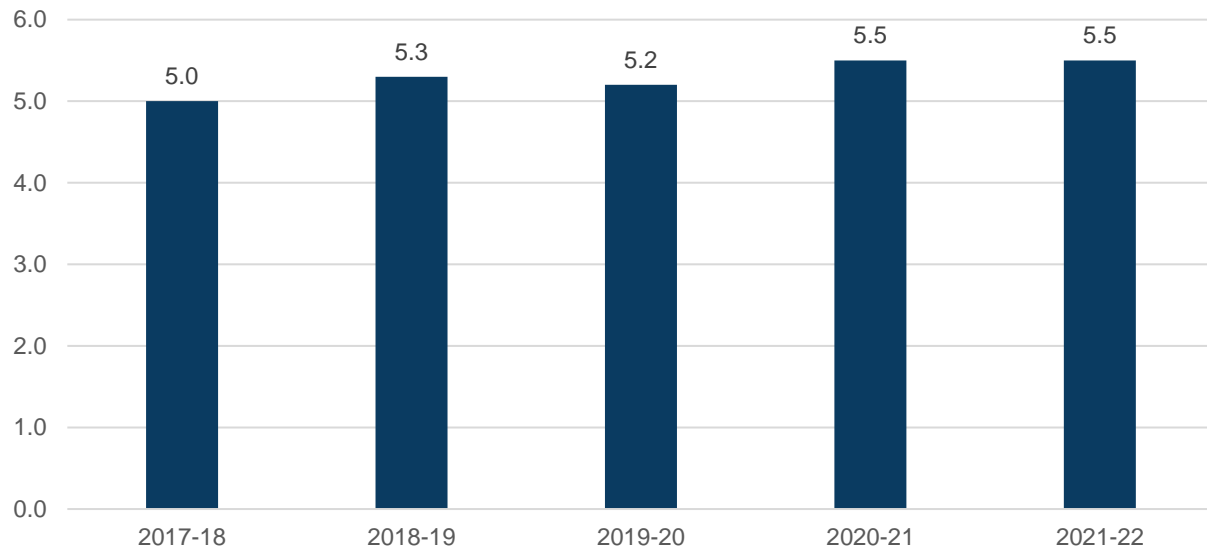
Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Figure 55 presents the average YOE of AISD and peer district principals in 2021-22. At 6.6 years, AISD falls close to the middle of its peers and 0.1 percentage points below the average YOE (6.7 years).

Figure 55. Principal Average YOE, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22

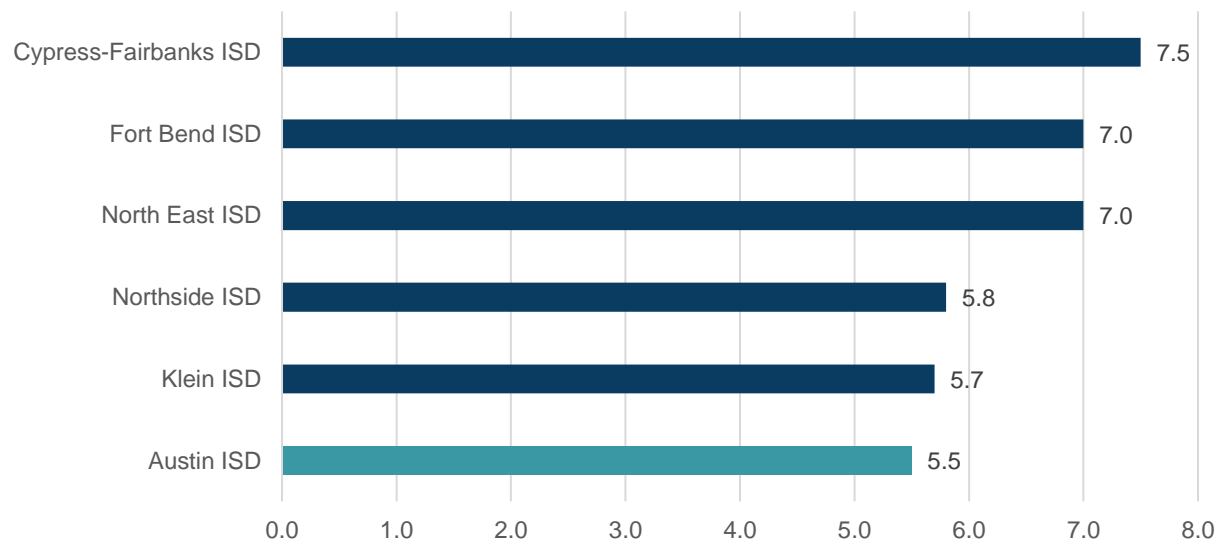
Source. TEA TAPR, 2021-22

Figure 56 presents the average YOE of AISD assistant principals between 2017-18 and 2021-22. Assistant principal experience levels fluctuated over this period but show an overall increase of 10%.

Figure 56. AISD Assistant Principal Average YOE, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Figure 57 presents the average YOE of AISD and peer district assistant principals in 2021-22. In 2021-22, AISD assistant principals had the least amount of experience among their peer district counterparts.

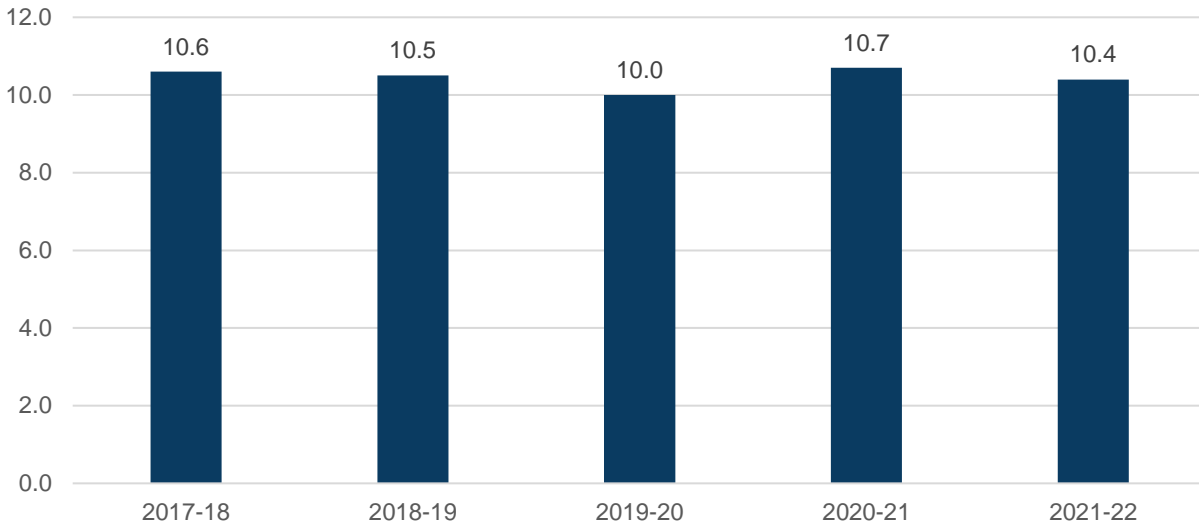
Figure 57. Assistant Principal Average YOE, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22

Source. TEA TAPR, 2021-22

There is extensive research demonstrating that teaching experience is associated with student achievement gains and other measures of success (e.g., school attendance), and that experienced teachers are more likely to confer benefits to their colleagues, their students, and the school as a whole.²⁴

Figure 58 presents the average YOE of AISD teachers between 2017-18 and 2021-22. The average fluctuated slightly during this period but remained between 10 and 11 years of experience.

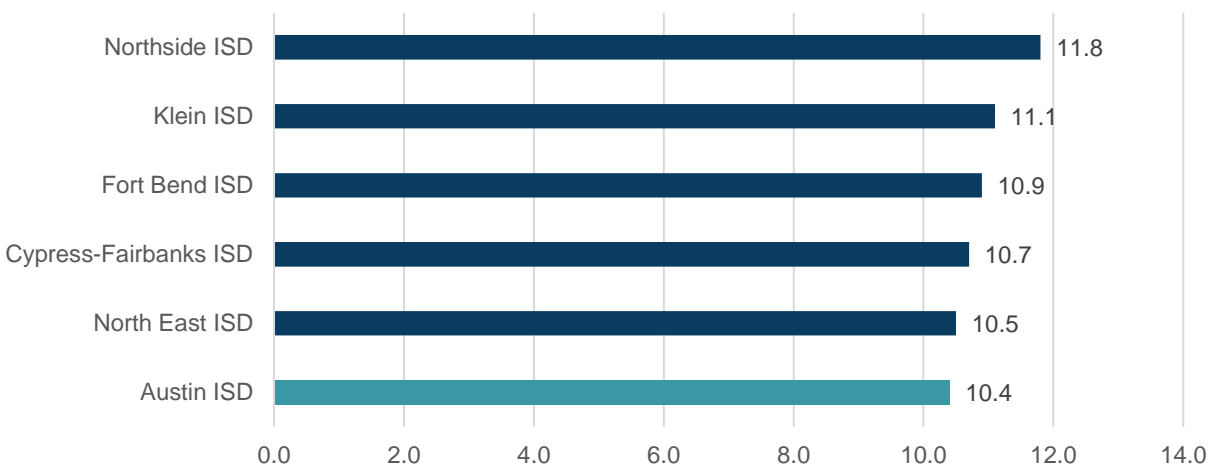
Figure 58. AISD Teacher Average YOE, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

At 10.4 years, AISD teachers have less experience than teachers at AISD's peer districts, as shown in Figure 59.

Figure 59. Teacher Average YOE, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22

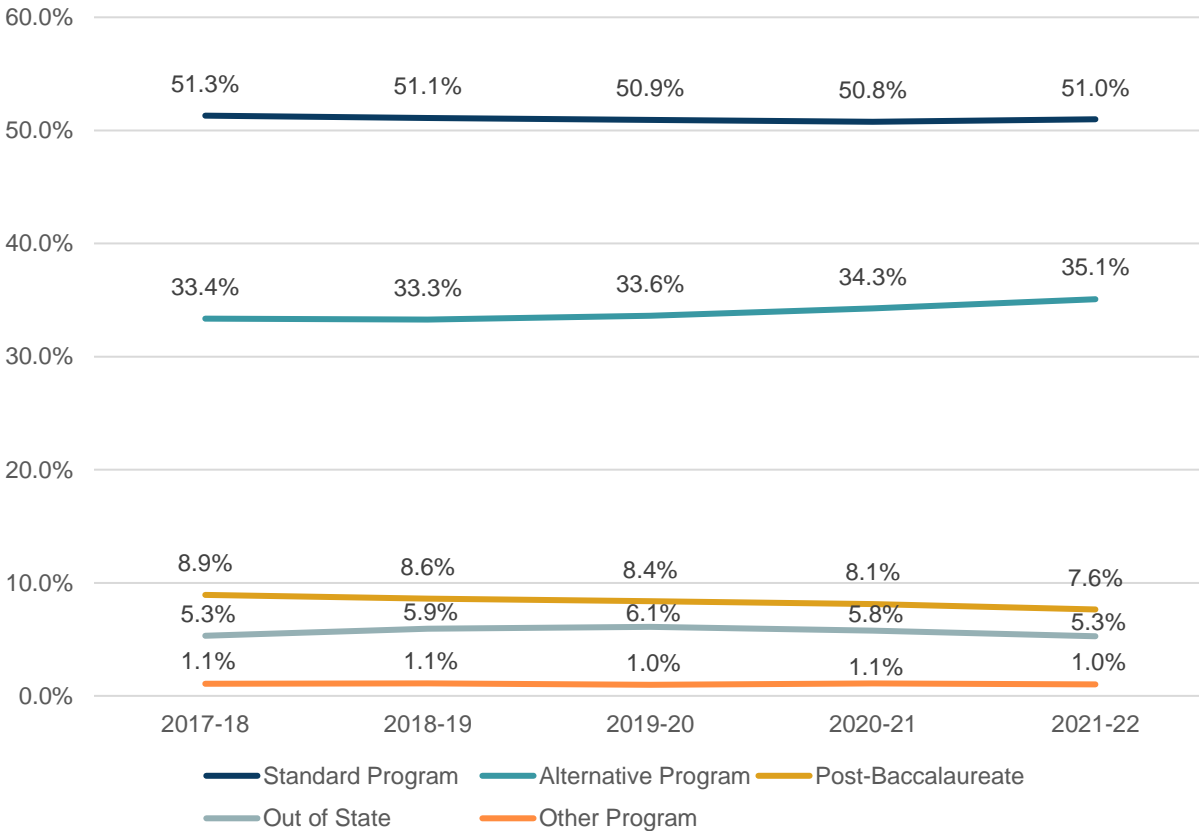


Source. TEA TAPR, 2021-22

²⁴ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/03/25/new-studies-find-that-for-teachers-experience.html>.

Since 1995, Texas law has allowed districts to hire teachers who have earned their teaching credentials through alternative certification programs. As shown in Figure 60, the percentage of AISD’s teachers who are alternatively certified has increased (1.7 percentage points) over the past five years, while the percentage of teachers who earned their teaching credentials through a standard program has decreased (0.3 percentage points).

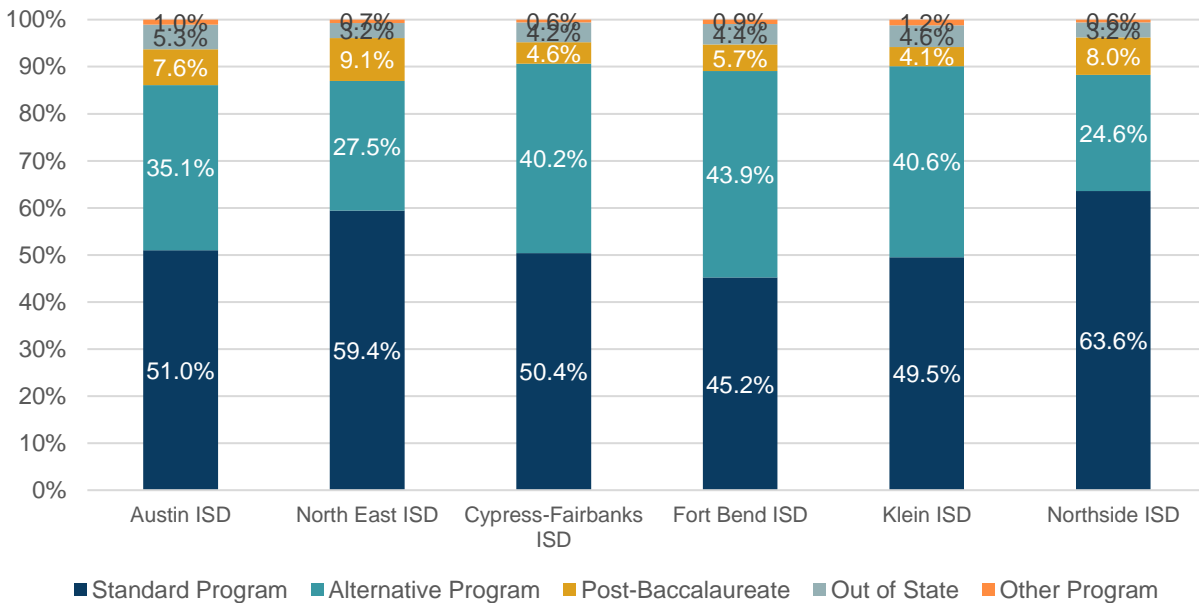
Figure 60. AISD Teachers Employed by Certificate Program, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. Texas Public Education Information Resource (TPEIR) Texas Education Reports, Teachers Employed by School District Certification and Classification Report

Figure 61 presents the percentage of teachers employed by certificate program for AISD and its peers in 2021-22. More than half (51%) of AISD teachers earned their teaching credentials through a standard program, which puts AISD in the middle of its peers.

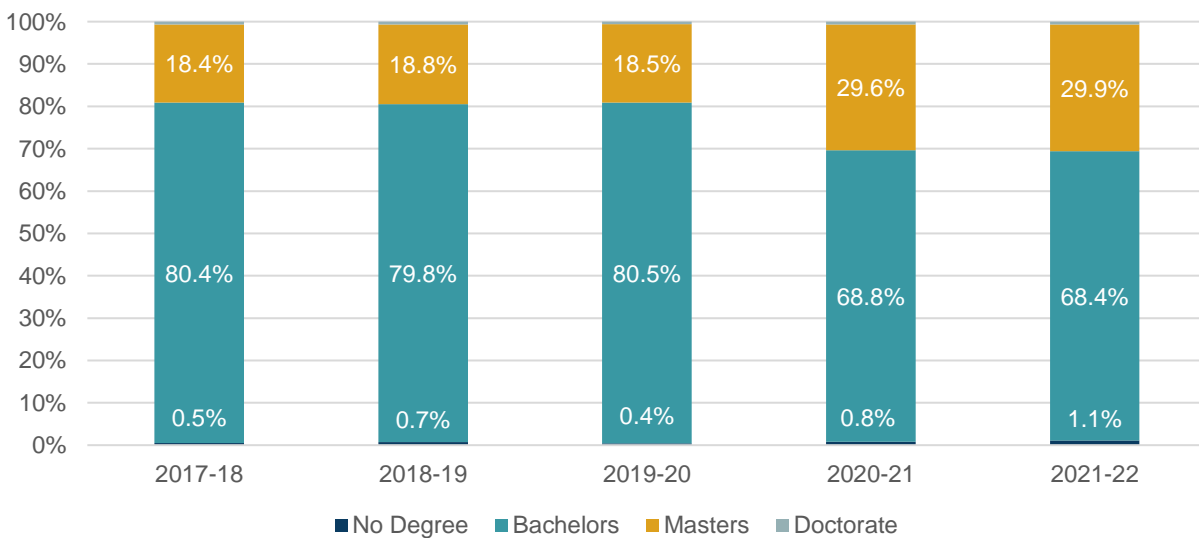
Figure 61. Teachers Employed by Certificate Program, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22



Source. TPEIR Texas Education Reports, Teachers Employed by School District Certification and Classification Report

Figure 62 presents the percentage of AISD teachers by the highest degree earned from 2017-18 to 2021-22. A drastic shift occurred between 2019-20 and 2020-21 involving a significant increase in the percentage of teachers with master’s degrees (11.1 percentage points) and decrease in those with bachelor’s degrees (11.7 percentage points).

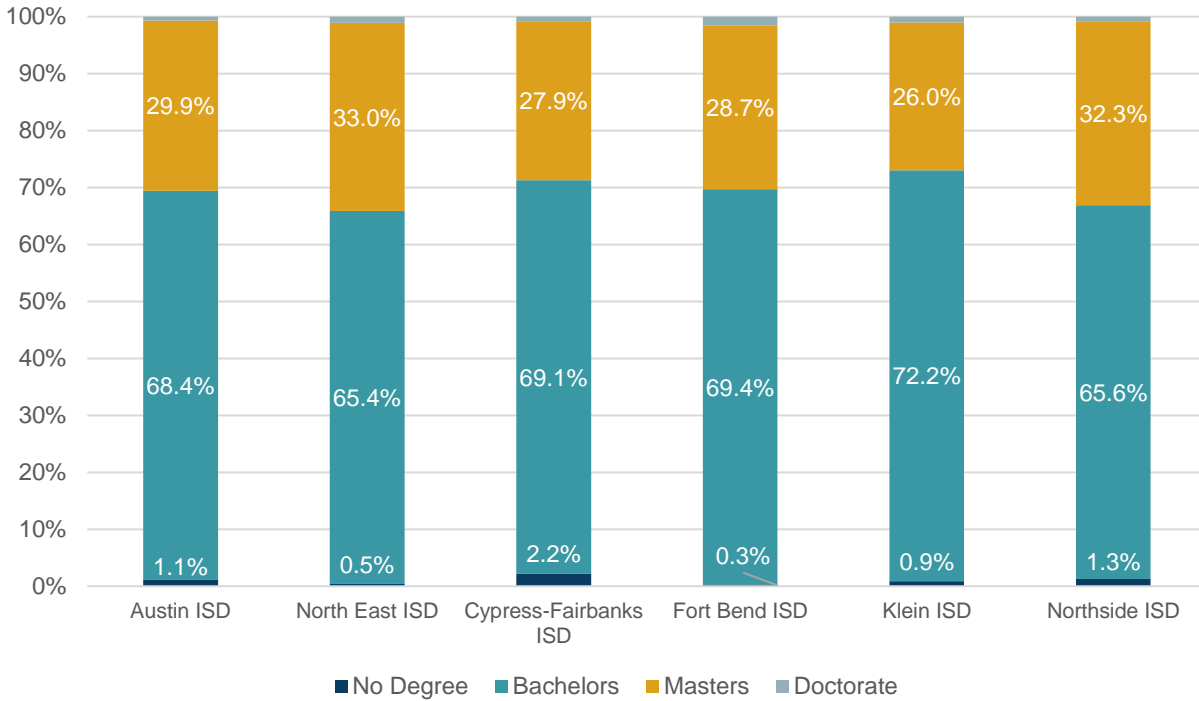
Figure 62. Percentage of Teachers by Highest Degree, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

The shift described above put AISD more in line with its peer districts, as shown in Figure 63. More than two-thirds (68.4%) of AISD teachers have a bachelor's degree (which ranks in the middle of its peers) and 30.6% have a master's or doctorate degree (third highest of its peers).

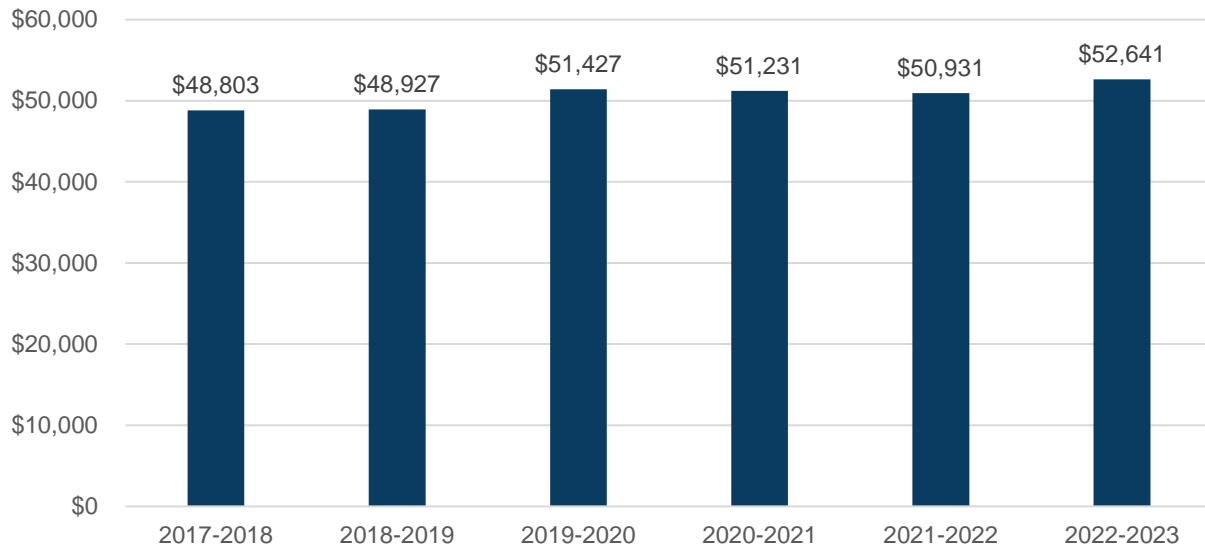
Figure 63. Percentage of Teachers by Highest Degree, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPR, 2021-22

Figure 64 presents the beginning salary for AISD teachers between 2017-18 and 2021-22. Salaries increased between 2017-18 and 2019-20 before beginning to steadily decline. Overall, the average beginning teacher salary has increased 7.9% between 2017-18 and 2022-23. Further, in May 2023, Austin ISD's Board of Trustees approved a compensation package which will increase teacher salaries by 7% in 2023-24.

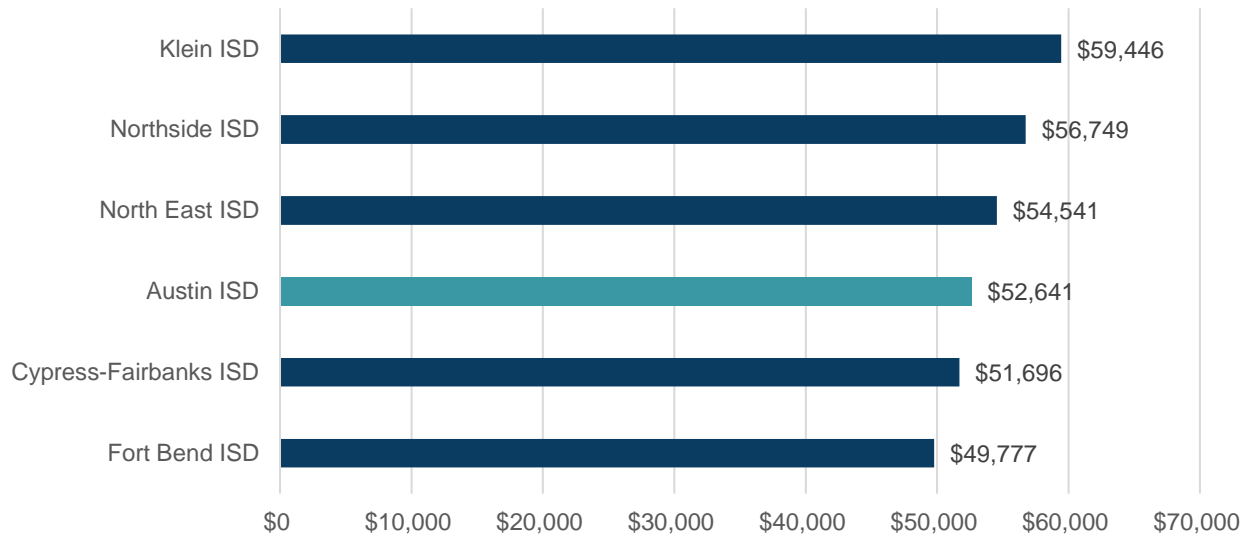
Figure 64. AISD Beginning Teacher Salary, 2017-18 to 2022-23



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22; TEA PEIMS standard report, 2022-23

Figure 65 presents the beginning teacher salary for AISD and its peer districts in 2022-23. At \$52,641, AISD ranks fourth among its peers.

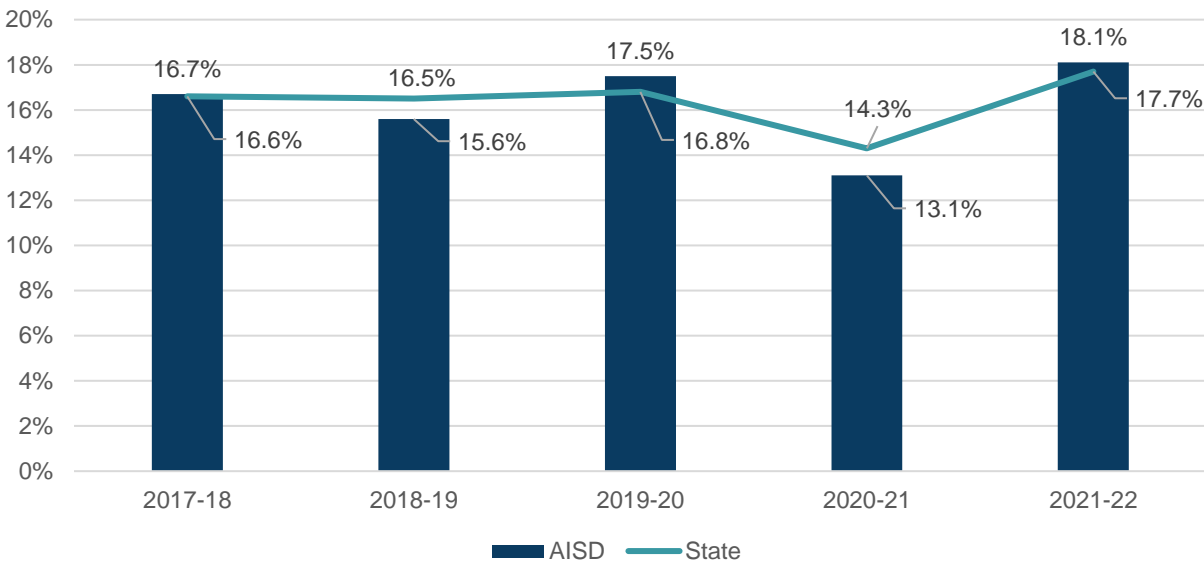
Figure 65. Beginning Teacher Salary, AISD and Peer Districts, 2022-23



Source. TEA PEIMS standard report, 2022-23

AISD’s teacher turnover rate has fluctuated over the past five years and has largely mirrored state trends. In 2021-22, AISD’s teacher turnover rate was 18.1%, which is 0.4 percentage points above the state average (Figure 66).

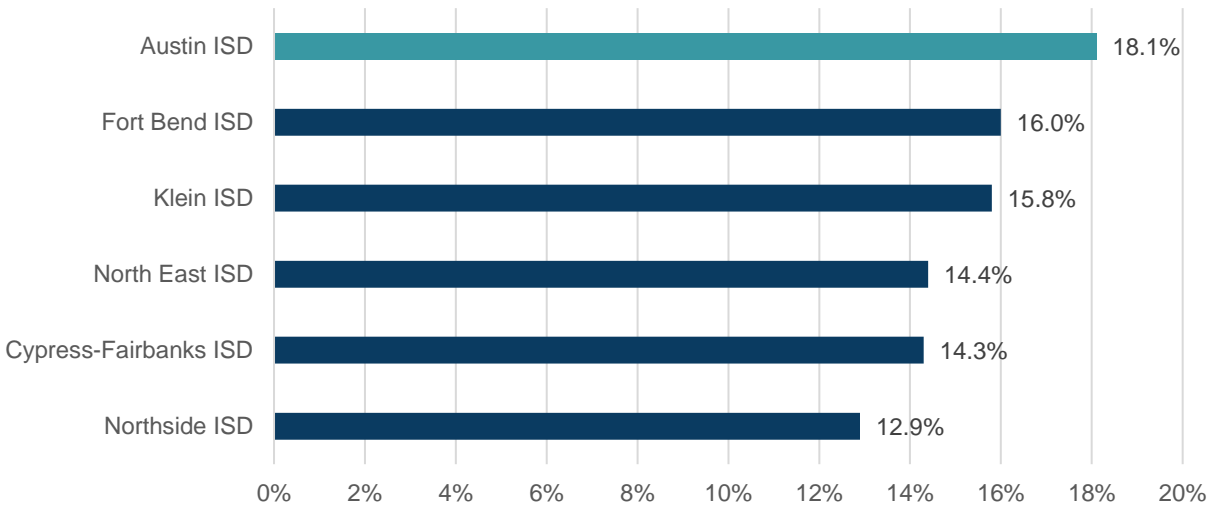
Figure 66. AISD Teacher Turnover Rate, 2017-18 to 2021-22



Source. TEA TAPRs, 2017-18 to 2021-22

Figure 67 presents 2021-22 teacher turnover rates for AISD and its peer districts. At 18.1%, AISD's teacher turnover rate is significantly higher than its peers', which have an overall average rate of 14.7%.

Figure 67. Teacher Turnover Rate, AISD and Peer Districts, 2021-22



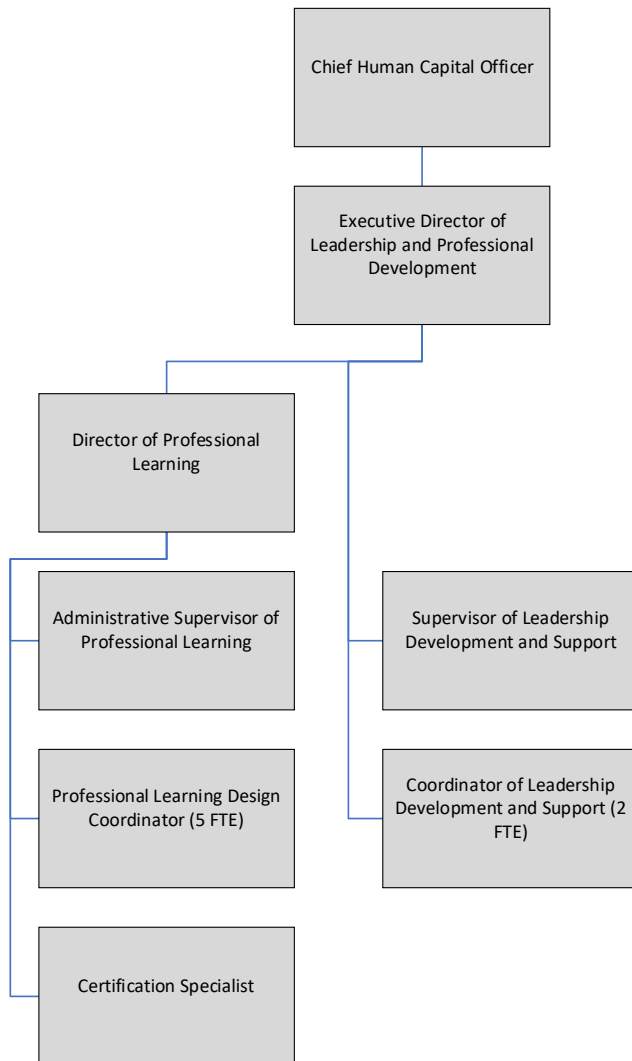
Source. TEA TAPR, 2021-22

Oversight of Professional Learning in AISD

There are multiple positions across several departments that are responsible for the learning and development of AISD's instructional leaders. Primarily, those positions are within the HC Department and the OSL.

The Leadership and Professional Development division within AISD's HC Department is responsible for the creation and facilitation of the district's PL programming. Additionally, this division coordinates the district's LD programs. The Leadership and Professional Development division includes 12 full-time equivalents (FTEs) and is led by the executive director of leadership and professional development, who reports to the chief human capital officer. Figure 68 presents the Leadership and Professional Development division of AISD's HC Department.

Figure 68. Human Capital – Leadership and Professional Development Organizational Chart, 2022



Source. AISD HC organizational chart, 2022-23

Table 23 presents the primary responsibilities of each of the positions in the Leadership and Professional Development division.

Table 23. Leadership and Professional Development Division Positional Responsibilities

Position	Primary Responsibilities
Executive Director of Leadership and Professional Development	Direct LD programs, including curriculum design and alignment to district-adopted leadership frameworks. Supervise and evaluate staff within the Leadership Development and Professional Learning Departments.
Director of Professional Learning	Maintain and communicate the vision for PL in Austin ISD and make that vision and its story public. Lead the implementation of national PL standards and best practices in PL to ensure high-quality learning opportunities for all Austin ISD employees. Maintain a multi-year plan for PL that is informed by data, input from focus groups, and aligned with the district's mission, vision, and strategic plan.
Supervisor of Leadership Development and Support	Design and coordinate PL opportunities for district-level administrators, assistant principals, principals, and aspiring administrators. Implement a robust pipeline of aspiring and acting administrators to strengthen the district's staffing and hiring strategy for leadership positions.
Coordinator of Leadership Development and Support	Coordinate LD programs including curriculum design and alignment to the district-adopted leadership framework and the district's strategic plan. Support the design and coordination of PL opportunities for district-level administrators, assistant principals, principals, and aspiring administrators.
Administrative Supervisor of Professional Learning	Support the implementation of national staff development standards and best practices in staff development. Design and implement high-quality professional development.
Professional Learning Design Coordinator	Implement a coordinated strategy for district PL aligned to the district vision and strategic plan, which includes supporting and guiding cross-functional and cross-departmental teams toward effective implementation. Coordinate, design, and execute all assigned employee programs to align with PL and growth at different stages of employee development.
Certification Specialist	Verify that all employees are highly qualified and meet the certification standards for the State of Texas. Collect, maintain, and update certification and records for district employees to ensure district compliance with state regulations.

Source. AISD HC job descriptions

The OSL is led by the chief of schools, who reports to the interim superintendent. This unit is responsible for “supporting and developing all elementary, middle, and high school principals in AISD.”²⁵

Table 24 presents the primary PL responsibilities of each of the positions in the Elementary and Secondary Departments of the OSL.

²⁵ <https://www.austinisd.org/osl>.

Table 24. OSL Positional Responsibilities

Position	Primary Responsibilities
Chief of School Leadership	Supervise and direct the principal supervisors and the implementation of the district's instructional and curricular programs, assessments, and pedagogical approaches in all campuses. Develop PLCs with principals focused on leadership practices and use of leadership tools that improve teaching and learning.
Executive Director of Elementary Leadership Campus Support	Provide and broker high-quality, research-based strategies and professional development for principals based on individual and group learning needs as defined by the AISD Campus Administrator Performance Review (CAPR) standards and the district's vision and initiatives. Use evidence from a variety of sources to assess current levels of principals' practice, target areas for PL, and differentiate supports based on the needs of each principal and their campus.
Executive Director of Secondary Leadership Campus Support	Provide and broker high-quality, research-based strategies and professional development for principals based on individual and group learning needs as defined by the AISD CAPR standards and the district's vision and initiatives. Use evidence from a variety of sources to assess current levels of principals' practice, target areas for PL, and differentiate supports based on the needs of each principal and their campus.
Director of Elementary Schools	Coach and support elementary principals to develop future campus leaders. Provide direction and guidance for elementary school principals and staff, as appropriate.
Director of Secondary Schools	Coach and support secondary principals to develop future campus leaders. Provide direction and guidance for elementary school principals and staff, as appropriate.
Campus Principals	Ensure relevant and meaningful research-based PL with teachers and staff that address the unique socio-cultural needs of individual students and result in effective instructional practice/student growth.

Source. AISD HC job descriptions

In addition to positions within the HC Department and OSL, the ACS (which reports under the Department of Academics) has several key professional development responsibilities. According to the district job description, this includes “designing and delivering research-based professional learning in a variety of formats that include effective instructional practices, are based on data, and aligned with campus and department needs.”

There are two distinct functions in AISD related to the professional development of employees: PL and LD. The remainder of this Chapter provides background, commendations, findings, and recommendations on both, separated by functional area.

Professional Learning

The AISD professional learning guide defines PL as “a comprehensive, sustained approach to improve all employees' effectiveness in their role and enhancing professional career growth for the ultimate purpose

of supporting student growth and innovation.”²⁶ The guide also includes the district’s commitments related to PL, stating that AISD will provide PL to its employees that:

- Is culturally inclusive, respectful, and values diversity as an asset;
- Is aligned to the AISD Curriculum and Instruction program requirements, the core beliefs expressed in the strategic plan, and district initiatives and identified focus areas;
- Acknowledges the expertise and diverse experiences of staff and the power of connected learning through the transformative use of technology;
- Provides solutions and supports for AISD staff to achieve their professional goals and enhance their professional growth;
- Improves all employees’ effectiveness in their role and enhances professional career growth for the ultimate purpose of supporting student growth and innovation;
- Promotes a personalized approach to learning;
- Fosters collective responsibility for achieving AISD’s mission and vision; and
- Implements the National Staff Development Standards of Learning Forward.

There are several primary methods by which the district administers professional learning (this list is not exhaustive):

- **AISD Connect: Teacher Induction Program** – Held annually in August, this program provides orientation on district initiatives to new-to-AISD teachers and campus professional staff.
- **AISD Mentoring Program** – This program supports teachers in their first and second years in the teaching profession. Mentors serve as emotional supports and orient new teachers to their campus and district.
- **Professional Learning Exchange Days (PLED)** – PLED days occur twice per year and are intended for exempt, campus-based staff. Staff members who earn 12 credit hours over the course of the year (within the district-assigned PL focus areas) can exchange those hours for two regular duty days.
- **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** – School-based instructional staff and leaders meet in PLCs periodically throughout the year. Principals facilitate PLC discussion and results at the campus level, while central office staff facilitate principal PLC learning.
- **Campus-Based Development Days** – Four to five days per year are designated as campus-based professional development days. The PL and OSL teams provide several required topics for principals to present to their staff, but the majority of the day’s topics/material are left to principal discretion based upon the needs of their campus.
- **AISD EDU** – Held annually during the summer, AISD EDU is the district-wide orientation that all staff (new and returning) receive as part of their training prior to classes starting.

²⁶ AISD Professional Learning Guide, 2.

PL at AISD is facilitated both in person and virtually. Virtual PL is administered via BLEND in the AISD portal, which staff members are able to access at any time and complete trainings as needed.

In 2022-23, AISD's calendar included five staff development days, two PLED days, and two student early release days for planning and staff development. Table 25 shows how this calendar structure compares to AISD's peers (based on published academic calendars, excluding summer trainings).

Table 25. PL Days, AISD and Peers, 2022-23

District	Staff Development Days	PLED Days	Early Release PL Days	Teacher Workdays
Austin ISD	5	2	2	0
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	4	0	0	5
Fort Bend ISD	5	0	4	0
Klein ISD	7	0	3	0
North East ISD	3	0	12	0
Northside ISD	4	0	0	2

Source. AISD and peer academic calendars, 2022-23

Commendation 5: The district is actively prioritizing teacher PLCs as a lever to improve instructional practices.

A PLC is a group of “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.”²⁷ PLCs provide a systematic means of improving instruction and school culture. By design, PLCs overcome the isolated, fragmented cultures in which teachers usually work. Studies have found that schools adopting the PLC model made greater achievement gains in math, science, history, and reading than did their counterparts in other schools, and showed smaller achievement gaps among students from different social classes and racial/ethnic backgrounds. In these schools, teachers collaborate, take collective responsibility for student learning, and strive for continuous improvement in their practice.²⁸

AISD leadership has identified the importance of PLCs and, in recent years, actively prioritized their success. The audit team identified two key examples of this:

- In 2022, the district contracted with Solution Tree, a professional development company specializing in PLCs, to strengthen its systems, trainings, and protocols related to PLCs. Solution Tree has facilitated multiple sessions for campus and district leaders and, in the summer of 2023, nearly half of AISD's campus leaders attended an off-site Solution Tree training in North Carolina.

²⁷ <https://www.allthingsplc.info/files/uploads/brochure.pdf>.

²⁸ Leaders of Learning, DuFour and Marzano.

- In the 2022-23 school year, elementary campus schedules were amended to allow for 45-minute planning periods (during the school day) which are to be used for PLC meetings.

As discussed in this Chapter, the district has room to improve in the *effectiveness* of its PLCs, but establishing the underlying conditions for success (e.g., dedicated time and training) is a critical first step, and one the district is committed to taking.

Finding 15: The district has insufficiently defined roles and responsibilities related to PL, inhibiting cross-departmental collaboration and diminishing coherence.

In *Professional Learning Redefined*, Sawyer and Stuke identified four key elements of effective PL, presented in Table 26 below.

Table 26. Key Elements of PL

Element	Definition
Active Learning	Participants are engaged in their learning through observations, discussions, planning, and practice.
Coherence	Learning initiatives and stakeholders are aligned across departments and campuses. PL is embedded into the day-to-day cultures of schools, districts, and the larger system.
Collaboration	Partnerships, grade-level teams, or schoolwide endeavors facilitate collective learning.
Duration	Acquiring new knowledge and skills takes time – effective PL is not a singular event.

Source. *Professional Learning Redefined*

The authors go on to emphasize the particular importance of coherence and collaboration:

Collaboration and coherence go hand in hand. When there is a trusting environment where all stakeholders have a common vision of the innovation being attempted and where actualizing that common vision is a collective effort, teachers' practice improves. It is the culture of learning that is created through collaboration and coherence that truly promotes professional learning.²⁹

The development and administration of PL involves a number of departments and positions at AISD. The district has insufficiently defined the responsibilities of each of these parties, which has directly impacted both the collaboration and coherence within AISD's PL programming. The primary issues caused by this lack of clarity are the following:

- At AISD, two teams within the HC Department are central to the planning of PL: Employee Effectiveness and Professional Learning. The Employee Effectiveness team oversees all district appraisals and is therefore intimately involved with the learning needs of AISD staff. The Professional Learning team is responsible for the development and facilitation of district professional development. Currently, these two teams do not formally collaborate. Without the input of the Employee Effectiveness team, Professional Learning is creating content that does not

²⁹ Professional Learning Redefined, p. 32.

address specific, tailored learning needs. And without the content created by the Professional Learning team, Employee Effectiveness is not able to actively address growth opportunities.

- The audit team identified two primary inefficiencies in how PL is administered:
 - ACSs are central office-based positions that provide instructional coaching to teachers. The position reports under the Department of Academics but, in day-to-day practice, is managed by the executive directors of leadership and campus support.
 - The vast majority of the Professional Learning team’s work is related to the creation of online trainings. The facilitation of in-person, campus-based trainings falls largely on the campus principal. In interviews with Gibson, principals shared that this is a significant burden. Limiting the scope of the Professional Learning team is an inefficient use of district resources and creates unnecessary work for campus leaders.
- AISD campus leaders currently have two primary touchpoints for coaching and support: the executive director of school leadership and campus support and the coordinator of leadership development and support within the HC Department. The executive director serves as the principal’s direct manager and evaluator, while the coordinator provides informal coaching to assistant principals and new principals. According to the HC Department’s key performance indicator (KPI) tracker, one performance metric tracked for the coordinator position is “number of campus/site visits or touchpoints for administrator coaching, support, and feedback (principals, assistant principals, principal residents, aspiring administrator).”³⁰ Despite the significant overlap in responsibilities, the coordinator and executive director positions do not collaborate on the strategic development of principals. This creates the potential for either redundancies or conflicting information among this trio of positions.
- An effective PL program involves the recognition of employees for the attainment of goals. The HC Department contains an Employee Experience and Sustainability team that oversees the district’s employee recognition programs (e.g. Recognizing AISD’s Valuable Employees). These programs, however, are not strategically linked to the rest of the district’s performance management cycle. Research by Gallup and Workhuman shows that recognition programs have the ability to meaningfully impact employees’ experiences at work, but only if they are deliberately implemented.³¹ Currently, the district is missing an opportunity to leverage the work of the Employee Experience and Sustainability team to round out its performance management cycle.

One of the primary ways districts establish coherence and collaboration in their PL programming is through the creation and implementation of a PL guide. AISD’s HC Department annually updates the district’s PL guide; however, because it does not contain all relevant information, it has failed to establish the levels of coherence and collaboration the district needs. Table 27 presents a comparison of the contents of AISD’s PL guide with an exemplar. All categories that show as “N/A” did not appear in the respective guide, and all categories highlighted orange specifically address coherence and collaboration.

³⁰ AISD HC KPI report, 2021-22.

³¹ “From Praise to Profits: The Business Case for Recognition at Work.” *Gallup, Inc.* 2023. p. 2.

Table 27. PL Guide Comparison

AISD PL Guide	Exemplar PL Guide
Introduction (PL Definition, Mission, Vision, Theory of Change, Commitment)	Introduction (PL Definition, Mission, Vision, Theory of Change, Commitment)
Definition of High-Quality PL	Definition of Effective PL
Description of National Standards for Professional Learning	Standards for PL
Description of “Designing Effective Professional Learning” and “Facilitating Effective Professional Learning” (two PL sessions administered by the HC Department)	N/A
PL Logic Model	Requirements for PL
Description of PL Work Group	N/A
Learning Progression Examples	N/A
Overview of AISD Connect: Teacher Induction Program	N/A
Overview of AISD Novice Teacher Mentor Program	N/A
Overview of AISD Enhanced Mentoring Program	N/A
Campus-Based, Non-Exempt Staff PL	N/A
Description of Professional Learning Exchange Days (PLED)	N/A
N/A	Governance for PL
N/A	Purpose for PL
N/A	Short- and Long-Term PL
N/A	Alignment of Other Systems
N/A	Job Embedded Collaboration
N/A	Dedicated Time for PL
N/A	Leadership for PL
N/A	Evaluation of PL
N/A	Third-Party Providers
N/A	Implementation of the PL Plan
N/A	Appendix
N/A	Alignment of Standards
N/A	Standards for PL with Core Attributes
N/A	Theory of Change
N/A	PL Initiative Planning Tool

AISD PL Guide	Exemplar PL Guide
N/A	Example of a PL Plan Focus on District Initiative
N/A	Campus PL Checklist
N/A	PL Plan for a Teacher
N/A	PL Plan for an Administrator
N/A	PL Plan for Non-Instructional Staff
N/A	Documents for Establishing and Monitoring Effectiveness of PLCs
N/A	Learning Assessment Data Protocol
N/A	Example of Learning Designs
N/A	Example of a Time Use Log
N/A	Example of an Evaluation Framework
N/A	Estimated Percentage of Achievement of Various PL Outcomes Associated with PL Designs

Source. AISD PL guide and Fort Bend ISD Professional Learning Comprehensive Plan

As shown in Table 277, the exemplar guide contains multiple sections related to the management structures supporting PL (e.g. governance, alignment of other systems, leadership for PL, and evaluation of PL). AISD's guide does not currently include these sections. Establishing these core elements at the beginning of the school year is central to effective collaboration between parties and the coherence of the PL program.

Recommendation 15: Update the PL guide to reflect effective program management practices.

The HC Department should use the PL guide as a way to increase PL collaboration and coherence across the district. This will help to eliminate redundancies, leverage expertise, and increase overall programmatic efficiency and effectiveness. At a minimum, the PL guide should be updated to include the following categories and details:

- Leadership – What positions are involved in the planning, creation, and execution of district PL? What are their responsibilities? How does the district ensure effective collaboration between the positions/departments?
- Planning and Evaluation – How does the district ensure the alignment of learning needs and outcomes? What is the expected impact? The HC Department currently sends a template to department heads as part of its annual PL planning process; this template, and the process it facilitates, should be publicized in the PL guide.

Finding 16: The district's PL offerings are not adequately differentiated.

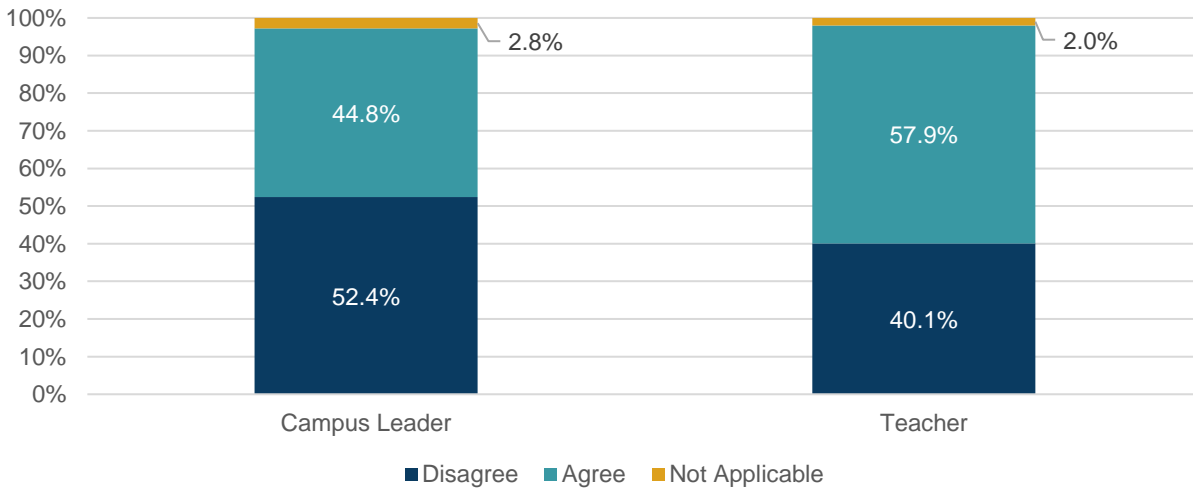
Differentiation is the “matching of a required curriculum with the learning styles, expression styles, interests and abilities of [learners]. It is predicated on the simple belief that engaged and motivated [learners]...enjoy

learning more.”³² Research indicates that learners of all ages benefit from differentiated instruction.³³ This is due mainly to the following:

- Differentiated instruction targets learners’ specific, identified needs;
- Learners are more likely to be engaged because the subject matter reflects their interests or learning style; and
- The takeaways from a differentiated lesson are more likely to have timely, real-world applications, cementing the learner’s understanding.

Currently, the district differentiates its instructional PL via online modules. A staff member can engage in a PL session tailored to their skill and experience level by selecting a pre-recorded module in the district’s online repository of trainings (i.e. BLEND). This, however, requires employees to both find time in their schedules and proactively seek out training opportunities. In interviews with Gibson, HC leadership stated that it is not the HC Department’s intent/vision to use BLEND as the way the district differentiates trainings for staff. Instead, this was a practice that began during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued in the absence of an overarching PL strategy. Further, the results from Gibson’s staff survey show that a fully online approach to differentiation is not meeting the needs of AISD employees. Figure 69 presents principal and teacher agreement levels with the statement, “*District-provided professional development is differentiated to meet my unique learning needs.*” Both the campus administrator and teacher surveys showed high rates of disagreement to this statement, at 52.4% and 40.1%, respectively.

Figure 69. “District-provided professional development is differentiated to meet my unique learning needs.”



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator and Teacher Surveys

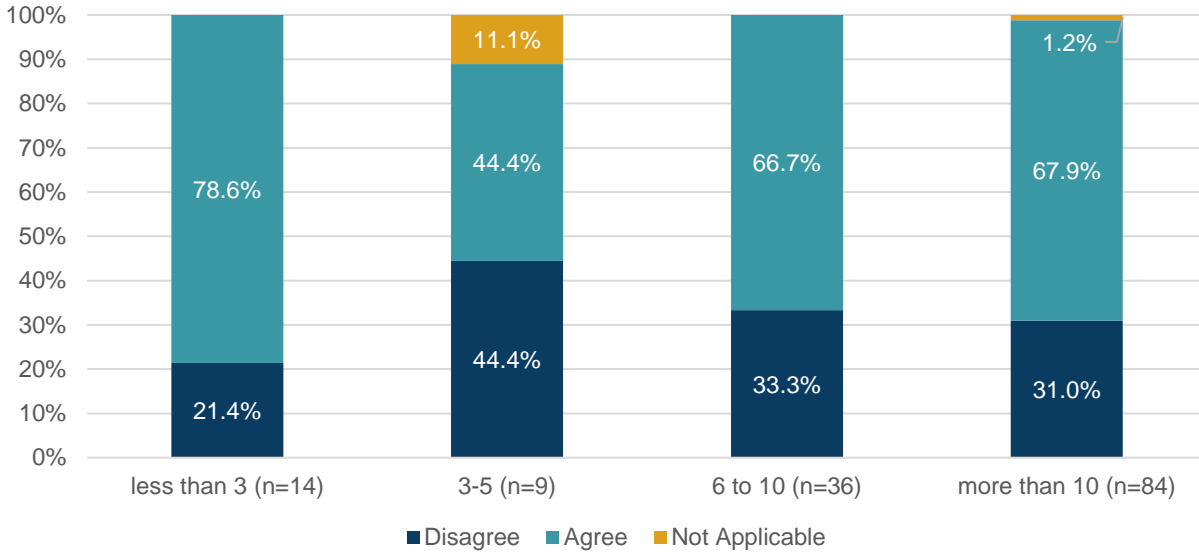
Disaggregating the survey data further reveals that AISD’s experienced principals are the ones most impacted by the lack of differentiation. Figures 70, 71, and 72 below show the responses of campus administrators to three questions related to PL differentiation on Gibson’s campus administrator survey,

³² Five Dimensions of Differentiation. Sally Reis.

³³ Walking the Talk. Arlene Grierson.

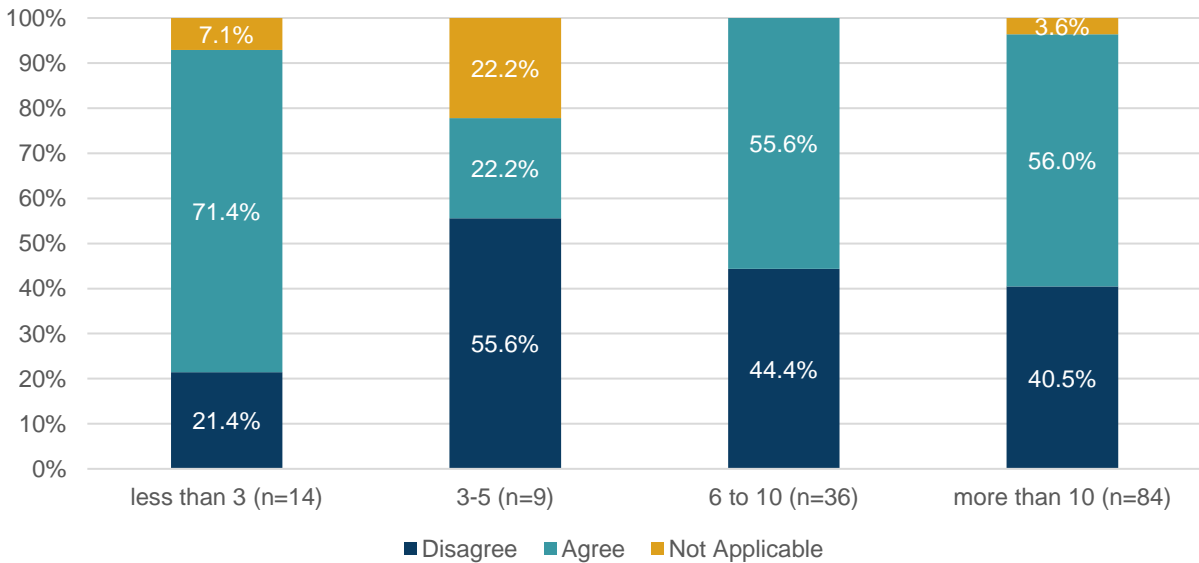
disaggregated by years of experience. Rates of agreement are highest for campus administrators with less than three years of experience, while rates of disagreement are highest for campus administrators with three to five years of experience.

Figure 70. Campus Administrator Survey – “The professional development I receive is of high quality.”



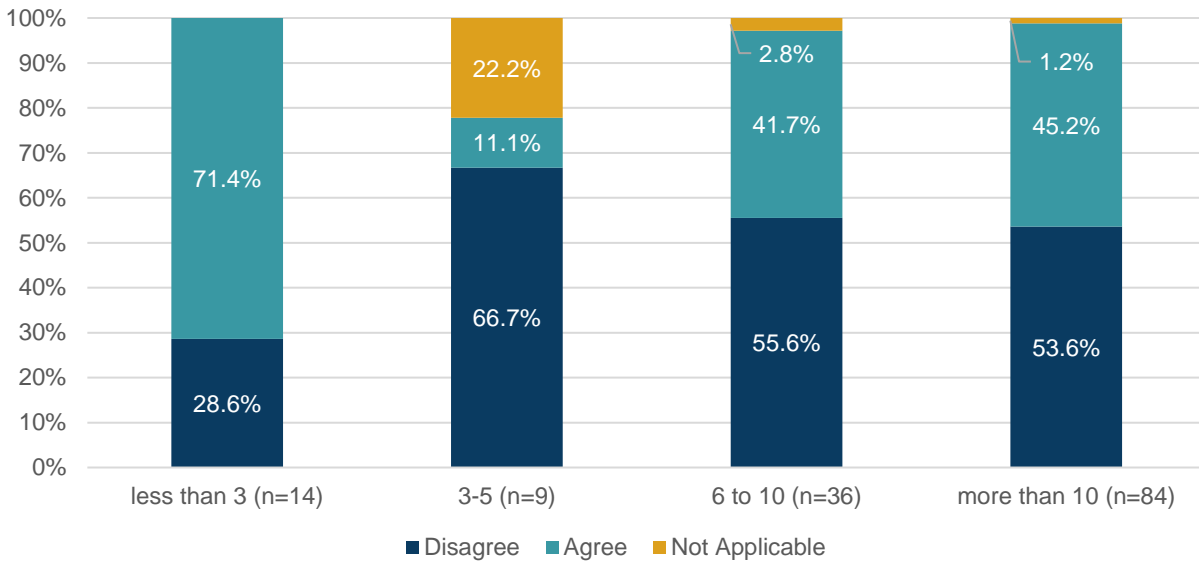
Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Figure 71. Campus Administrator Survey – “I can access content-specific professional development when needed.”



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Figure 72. Campus Administrator Survey – “District-provided professional development is differentiated to meet my unique learning needs.”



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

The wide variation in rates of agreement across campus administrators according to their years of experience suggests that the district’s PL is not appropriately differentiated to meet the varying learning needs of campus administrators.

Recommendation 16: Differentiate in-person training for AISD instructional staff.

AISD should work to differentiate in-person trainings for all staff, including campus leaders. Effective (i.e., differentiated) PL has shown to have a direct impact on employee engagement and retention.³⁴ This is particularly relevant for campus leadership positions, for which retention and effectiveness are critical elements of school success.

At the time of the audit, HC Department leadership was considering plans to offer more differentiated PL. One such plan involved assigning a member of the talent development team (within the HC Department) to each instructional coach. This relationship would allow the HC Department to tailor PL to the campus needs identified by each instructional coach. The talent development team member and the instructional coach would work to develop differentiated content which would be delivered at four PL conferences throughout the school year. The conferences would be separated by feeder pattern, and part of the day would be dedicated to job-alike training (i.e., all fourth grade teachers within that particular feeder pattern).

Finding 17: AISD is not consistently applying the PLC model to support school principal PL.

As described above, PLCs provide a systematic means of improving instruction and school culture. In *Leaders of Learning*, Dufour and Marzano list seven conditions for effective PLCs. These conditions are

³⁴ <https://www.betterbuys.com/lms/professional-development-impact>.

the responsibility of district and school leaders and are essential for creating conditions at the school level for effective PLCs:

- **Organize into meaningful teams** – The most important criterion in organizing educators into teams is their shared responsibility for addressing student learning needs. The most common structures include same course or grade-level teams, vertical teams, and interdisciplinary teams.
- **Provide teams with time to collaborate** – It creates dissonance for teachers to assert that working together is an organizational priority and then provide inadequate time for teams to meet the expectations of district and school leaders. PLC teams need adequate and frequent enough time to engage in deep conversations and complete a cycle of work that encompasses examining standards, designing formative assessments, planning and designing the delivery of instruction, assessing the impact of instruction, re-teaching, enriching, and reassessing. All of this work takes time if it is to be done with a level of quality that students deserve.
- **Provide supportive structures that help groups become teams** – Teams are more effective when they have clarified expectations regarding how they will work together, how they will translate those expectations into collective commitments, and how they will use the commitments to monitor their working relationship on an ongoing basis.
- **Clarify the work teams must accomplish** – A skillful manager can assign people into meaningful teams, create schedules that provide them with time to collaborate, and guide teams in creating acceptable norms and **specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART)** goals. It takes *effective leaders*, however, to help teams clarify their purpose and priorities, focus on the right work, and continuously improve their effectiveness.
- **Monitor the work of teams and provide direction and support as needed** – The corollary to clarifying the work that must be done in the collaborative team process is developing strategies for monitoring that work. One of those strategies calls for teams to develop products that flow from the dialogue of a team engaged in collective inquiry on the right work.
- **Avoid shortcuts in the collaborative team process** – Decide what is tight and what is loose. What should be consistent across all PLCs across the district, and where is there room for variation?
- **Celebrate short-term wins and confront those who do not contribute to the team** – It is difficult to create momentum for the collaborative team process and impossible to sustain the process without recognizing and celebrating both concerted effort and incremental progress. Additionally, effective PLCs depend on leaders who are willing to be direct in addressing those who make no contribution to their collaborative teams.

In recent years, AISD has prioritized the use of PLCs to promote instructional staff development and improve student achievement. This effort, however, has largely focused on teacher PLCs. Currently, the district facilitates principal collaboration via two primary methods:

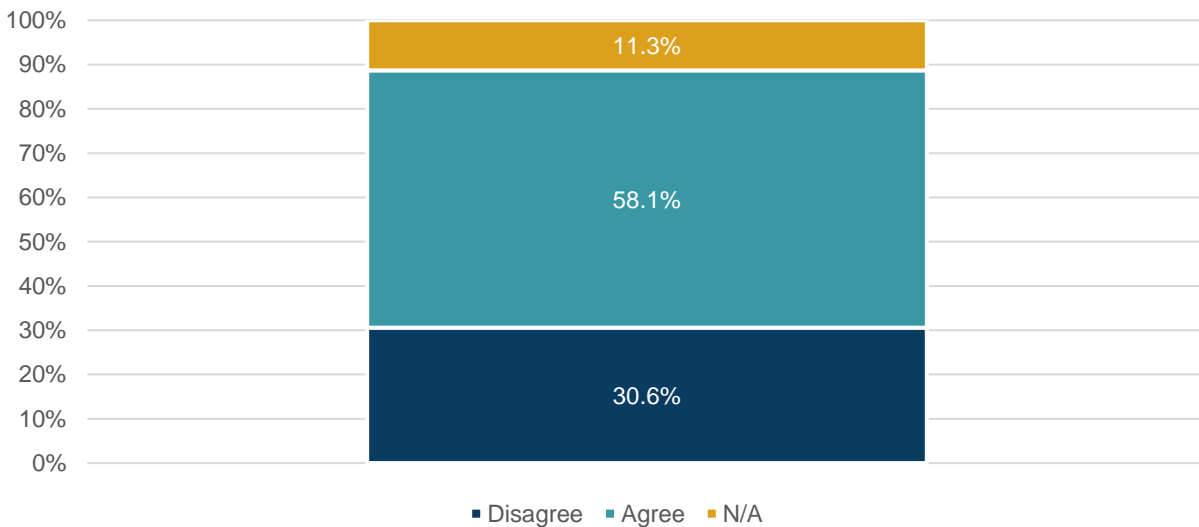
- **Principal Meetings** – All AISD principals meet monthly for a full day. This is an in-person meeting hosted by the OSL with logistical support from the HC Department. This meeting acts primarily as an “information download” for principals (i.e., various departments will request time on the agenda to share relevant updates and deadlines that principals are then expected to take back to their

campuses and execute). Ordinarily, the first half of the day is spent as a full group, and the second half is split into elementary and secondary groups.

- **Vertical Team Meetings** – Vertical teams are defined by feeder patterns, and meetings are principal-led and facilitated. Teams meet once per month and rotate hosts across the three campuses. The agendas of these meetings are unstructured and not formally approved or designed by the OSL.

Based on Gibson’s interviews with principals and campus administrator survey results, neither principal meetings nor vertical team meetings are effectively promoting principal development and learning. On Gibson’s campus administrator survey, principals were asked to what extent they agree with the statement, “My principal PLC supports my own professional growth and development.” Nearly half of principals disagreed or responded “Not Applicable,” indicating that a portion of principals (11.3%) do not consider principal meetings or vertical team meetings as true PLCs and, of those who do, 30.6% find them ineffective (Figure 73).

Figure 73. Campus Administrator Survey – “My principal PLC supports my own professional growth and development.”



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

Principal dissatisfaction with PLCs can largely be explained by the fact that the district has failed to establish true principal PLCs, based upon the seven conditions described earlier in this finding. Several specific issues are detailed in Table 28, organized by select conditions.

Table 28. Seven Conditions for Effective PLCs and Related Issues

Condition	Issue
Organize into meaningful teams	Middle and high school principals found that the combination of their PLC time during principal meetings was not an effective use of time. There are too many topics that are specific to middle schools or high schools to categorize principals as a “secondary” group.

Condition	Issue
Provide teams with time to collaborate	Vertical team meetings are inconsistently occurring, largely because they are planned and executed by principals who have many competing demands. In interviews, one group stated that they met once in the first semester of 2022-23.
Clarify the work teams must accomplish	The majority of the time in principal meetings is spent sharing information with principals. Principals then leave meetings with a list of action items but have not been provided time to apply their learning. As a result, many principals reported leaving principal meetings with insufficient understanding of what is expected of them and what their true priorities should be.
Monitor the work of teams and provide direction and support as needed	The agendas for principal meetings are not directly informed by principal need. In interviews, principals reported agenda topics that were not timely and a desire for differentiated learning (i.e., breakout sessions for veteran and novice principals). Because the topics may or may not be relevant for principals, the connection between learning and deliverable is blurred.
Celebrate short-term wins and confront those who do not contribute to the team	Central office administrators are not formally involved in vertical team meetings, which creates issues when trying to establish systems and accountability. Principals are less likely to hold colleagues accountable to a level of productivity than a direct manager. Further, principals do not have the time to establish the systems necessary to monitor progress against goals for their colleagues (a prerequisite for a celebration).

Source. Leaders of Learning; Gibson interviews with AISD principals and central office staff

In response to principal feedback, AISD executive directors implemented “learning walks.” However, the procedures surrounding learning walks was not standardized across executive directors. This resulted in variances in the frequency, attendance, and discussion topics of each cohort’s learning walks. In Gibson’s interviews, this practice received highly favorable reviews from principals as a method of professional collaboration and growth. One of the main reasons that learning walks have been impactful for AISD principals is that the approach is inherently centered around the three core tenets of a PLC (adapted from DuFour’s *Learning by Doing*):³⁵

- **Focus on Learning** – Principals and executive directors work collaboratively to address the following critical questions:
 - What do we want principals to learn? How will we know if they have learned it? What will we do if they don’t learn it? What will we do if they already know it?
- **Build a Collaborative Culture** – No district can help all students achieve at high levels if principals work in isolation. “Schools improve when [principals] are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.”
- **Focus on Results** – PLCs measure their effectiveness on the “basis of results rather than intentions. All [principals] receive relevant and timely information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.”

³⁵ <https://www.allthingsplc.info/files/uploads/brochure.pdf>.

Recommendation 17: Standardize “Learning Walks as a development practice for AISD principals.

AISD should build upon the success of “Learning Walks and work to standardize the practice across the district. This initiative should be planned and executed by the executive directors for school leadership and campus support. Adding more consistency to principal “Learning Walks will:

- Enable “Learning Walks” to act as a true PLC for principals, allowing them to organically discuss problems of practice and develop as professionals;
- Allow executive directors to stay meaningfully connected to the issues that their principals face as well as to evaluate the implementation fidelity of various district initiatives; and
- Provide a formal structure for principals to establish the professional relationships that are critical to job satisfaction and longevity.

Finding 18: Teacher mentoring programs are redundant and not well monitored.

Research shows that experienced teachers produce higher rates of student achievement. However, more than a third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years.³⁶ AISD’s staffing data shows that the district is no exception – in 2021-22, AISD employed 5,561 teachers; 1,013 (18.2%) of them did not return to the district in 2022-23. Of those 1,013 non-returners, 606 (59.8%) had fewer than five years of tenure with AISD. School districts’ challenge, then, is to develop the supports that encourage the retention of their new teachers. Studies suggest that a strong mentoring program is one of the most effective ways to do this.

AISD maintains four mentor programs intended to support novice teachers (those in their first or second year of the teaching profession):

- **The Connector Program** is a component of AISD’s teacher induction program. All new-to-AISD teachers are assigned a connector (a veteran educator) who is expected to provide guidance and answer job-like questions via call, email, or text.
- **Novice Teacher Support Specialists** are experienced teachers hired by the district as temporary/hourly employees. According to district job descriptions, the position is responsible for the “planning, organizing, and supporting novice teachers in ways that will contribute to educational, social, and physical development of students.” The position reports directly to the director of professional learning and traditionally mentors five novice teachers at a time.
- **The Novice Teacher Mentor Program** is a component of AISD’s teacher induction program and provides a peer, campus-based mentor to all novice teachers. The program’s goals are as follows:
 - Reflect state requirements and align to Austin ISD’s strategic plan;
 - Develop and retain highly effective teachers within Austin ISD;
 - Acclimate beginning teachers to district and campus policies and procedures;
 - Increase teacher effectiveness through PL and mentoring;

³⁶ http://www.deltakappagamma.org/GA-betaepsilon/Newsletters/2016_Jour_83-1_Early-Career-Educators_web.pdf#page=6.

- Encourage professionalism, positive culture, and lifelong learning throughout Austin ISD;
- Build capacity by developing mentor teachers into campus leaders;
- Measure program effectiveness through feedback aligned to program goals; and
- Establish procedures and an environment that foster productive communication.

The program involves three key roles: **the mentee**, a teacher in their first or second year of their teaching career who is paired with a mentor teacher to learn district and campus policies and procedures and enhance their teaching skills for the purpose of strengthening professional capacity; **the mentor**, a teacher or instructional coach with a minimum of three years of successful teaching experience; and **the lead mentor teacher contact**, a campus-based administrator, instructional coach, or mentor who oversees mentor selection.

AISD mentors receive professional development through the HC Department as well as a stipend. To receive the full stipend, mentors must attend one in-person training, complete one observation of their mentee per semester, and complete two reflection surveys.

- **The Enhanced Mentoring Support Program** is an additional support provided to novice teachers working at a Title I campus. In partnership with the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) START Program, AISD provides mentors to all first-, second-, and third-year teachers. The goals of the START program are to: 1) increase new teacher self-efficacy; 2) provide targeted support in the areas of social emotional wellness, literacy, and building classroom community; and 3) foster communication and collaboration between teachers, administration, district, and university faculty. The Enhanced Mentoring Support Program serves novice teachers at the following 29 schools (Table 29):

Table 29. Enhanced Mentoring Support Program Schools, 2023

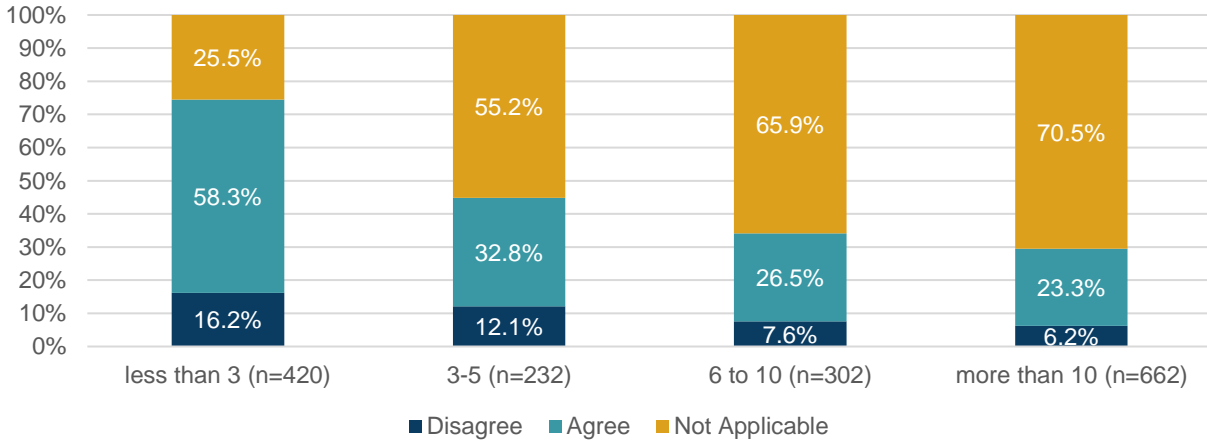
Enhanced Mentoring Support Program Schools			
Allison ES	Barrington ES	Brown ES	Cook ES
Harris ES	Houston ES	Oak Spring ES	Odom ES
Pecan Springs ES	Rodriguez ES	Sanchez ES	Walnut Creek ES
Wooldridge ES	Casey ES	Perez ES	Dawson ES
Langford ES	Eastside ECHS	Becker ES	Travis ECHS
Akins ECHS	Blazier ES	Paredes MS	LBJ ECHS
Joslin ES	Padron ES	Dobie MS	Webb MS
Burnet MS			

Source. Austin ISD

Currently, the district’s mentoring programs are the primary ways a new teacher is inducted/onboarded to AISD. However, the audit team’s analysis points to gaps in its implementation. Figure 74 presents the agreement levels of teachers, disaggregated by years of experience, when responding to the statement, “My teacher mentor provides the support I need to help me successfully transition into my teaching

assignment.” As would be expected, the percentage of those who responded “Not Applicable” increased as years of experience increased; however, 25% of teachers with fewer than three years of experience – the group targeted by the district’s mentor programs – responded “Not Applicable,” and 16% disagreed.

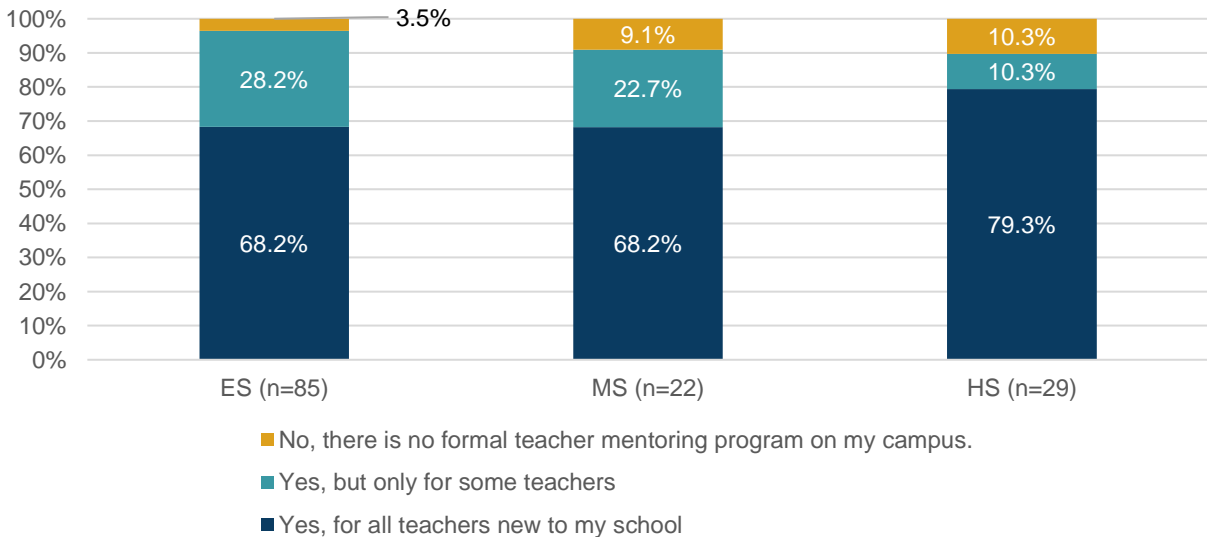
Figure 74. Teacher Survey – “My teacher mentor provides the support I need to help me successfully transition into my teaching assignment.”



Source. Gibson Teacher Survey

Additionally, on Gibson’s campus administrator survey, respondents were asked “For teachers new to your school, do they participate in a formal teacher/mentor program?” Figure 75 presents the results of this question, disaggregated by school level. Although this question does not specify if teachers new to the school are also new to the profession, it does highlight that a number of campuses (3.5% of elementary schools, 9.1% of middle schools, and 10.3% of high schools) do not appear to facilitate a mentor program, for novice teachers or otherwise. This runs counter to district programmatic expectations.

Figure 75. Campus Administrator Survey – “For teachers new to your school, do they participate in a formal teacher/mentor program?”



Source. Gibson Campus Administrator Survey

One factor contributing to the confusion/dissatisfaction shown in the results above is that there is no clear delineation of responsibilities between the four programs/positions supporting a novice teacher. Also, these do not include the other positions (i.e., principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and grade team leaders) who, just by the nature of their work, are supporting novice teachers. The lack of clear coordination between these positions increases the chances of either conflicting guidance or a novice teacher “falling through the cracks.” Further, the district has defined some minimal expectations for mentors (e.g. two observations per year), but this allows for excessive marginal mentoring. Research shows that marginal mentoring – mediocre mentoring often caused by assigning mentors who are too busy, disinterested, dysfunctional, or simply lack competence – is the single greatest threat to an effective mentor program in the workplace.³⁷ Gibson conducted a group interview with AISD teachers, some of whom served as teacher mentors. The mentors validated the expectations described above (i.e., complete a training, two observations, and reflection surveys), but shared that the majority of communication is conducted via email and that the mentee is expected to reach out proactively to the mentor with questions. Based on interviews with HC Department staff, the same is true of the connector – it is possible to fulfill the expectations of the mentor position by waiting for the novice teacher to email a question.

In addition to the programmatic issues described above, the effectiveness of the district’s mentor programs is limited by the HC Department’s insufficient controls over the programs. The HC Department tracks mentor pairings for the Novice Teacher Mentor Program on individual campus spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet contains the name and email of the mentor; the name, email, and years of experience of the assigned mentee; and a checklist of mentor requirements (i.e., mentor training, stipend agreement, semester observations, and surveys). Additionally, the HC Department uses these spreadsheets to track mentee/mentor resignations, reassignments, and name changes. Gibson’s review of these spreadsheets revealed two significant control weaknesses:

- There are data integrity issues with the spreadsheets. For example, there are mentors and mentees without assignments, with misspelled names, with fields such as emails, years of experience, and employee IDs left blank, and with inconsistent notetaking methods (e.g. next to a mentee’s name a note reads, “Do not believe [staff member] is eligible for a mentor” and another note under a staff member’s years of experience reads “Unsure. Taught private for one year”).
- According to the HC Department’s spreadsheets, not all novice teachers have been paired with a mentor. Based on staffing records received from the district in October 2022, there were 776 teachers with either zero or one year of professional experience in or out of AISD. The audit team compared this record to the HC Department’s 2022-23 mentor pairing spreadsheets and found that 178 of them do not appear in the HC Department’s trackers (the trackers include teachers who resigned mid-year). This does not necessarily indicate that none of the 178 are receiving mentor supports, only that the HC Department is unable to track them.

Additionally, the HC Department’s spreadsheets contain evidence of campuses not adhering to district expectations related to the mentoring program. One campus spreadsheet with three eligible mentees contains a note that says, “Campus Status – No Tracking” and no mentors are assigned. Another campus spreadsheet includes a mentor/mentee assignment with a note that the mentor is not an AISD mentor and

³⁷ <https://hbr.org/2020/07/why-your-mentorship-program-isnt-working>.

that the stipend was paid directly by the principal. Another campus shows no mentor/mentee assignments and includes a note that says, “instructional coaches are supporting novices per principal.”

Recommendation 18: Consolidate the district’s efforts to mentor and support its novice teachers.

One of the greatest challenges associated with implementing an effective mentor program is the sheer volume of new teachers at AISD (this challenge is not unique to AISD). In 2021-22, 34.8% of AISD’s teacher workforce had five or fewer years of teaching experience. Still, the research-backed benefits of an effective mentor program (e.g. rapid advancement, higher salaries, organizational commitment, higher satisfaction with job and career) make it an important priority. The district should take three important steps to strengthen the effectiveness of its mentor programs:

- Consolidate all of the programs designed to support novice teachers. Currently, in an attempt to support new teachers, the district’s programs have proliferated in a way that is challenging to manage and, as a result, are not providing the intended supports. Consolidating these programs and their respective resources will allow for a more targeted, intentional, and effective mentor program.
- Increase collaboration between the HC Department’s Professional Learning team and the executive directors for school leadership and campus support. One contributing reason for the inaccuracy of the mentor spreadsheets is that the HC Department is responsible for the planning and facilitation of the mentor programs, but they are removed from the day-to-day of instructional leadership. OSL and the HC Department should be frequently sharing information related to mentors, mentees, and how the program can be improved.
- Identify and eliminate opportunities for “marginal mentoring.” The mentor stipend will likely need to increase commensurately with higher, more rigorous expectations and may result in fewer applicants, but having fewer, high-quality mentors will have a positive impact on the program.

Leadership Development

In addition to the PL offered to all staff, AISD facilitates multiple LD programs intended to identify and develop future district leaders. Currently, the district only offers LD programs to staff members interested in becoming campus-based, instructional leaders (i.e., principals and assistant principals). They are as follows:³⁸

- **Principal Preparation Program (P3)** – P3 is designed to prepare a select cohort of experienced AISD assistant principals and academy directors to successfully enter the urban principalship. The program provides cohort members the opportunity to gain targeted, timely, and personalized PL with a focus on the qualities and skills needed to lead an AISD campus. This program began in the 2014-15 school year.
- **Assistant Principal Preparation Program (AP3)** – AP3 prepares a select cohort of experienced AISD educators to become assistant principals. AP3 provides cohort members the opportunity to

³⁸ All LD descriptions provided by HC Department.

gain targeted PL focused on the qualities and skills needed to be a successful assistant principal on an Austin ISD campus. This program began in the 2016-17 school year.

Additionally, through partnerships with UT Austin and Texas State University, AISD prepares candidates to apply for the assistant principalship:

- **UT Austin Principal Leadership Academy** - Candidates complete 35 credit hours in 12 months and receive a master's degree in educational leadership and policy as well as a principal certification. Candidates receive hands-on training as an administrative intern on two different campuses in AISD (one campus in the Fall semester, one campus in the Spring semester). Upon completion of all requirements, candidates are eligible to apply for an assistant principalship in AISD after a year.
- **Texas State University, Master's in Educational Leadership and Principal Certification** - Candidates complete 36 credit hours in two years and receive a master's degree in educational leadership as well as a principal certification. Upon completion of all requirements, candidates are eligible to apply for an assistant principalship in AISD after a year.

There are several leadership opportunities available to teachers through Professional Pathways for Teachers (PPfT):

- **PPfT Leadership Pathways** – This is a two-year program intended to support teachers' professional growth in one of six pathways (Advanced Academics, Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness, Literacy Leadership, Project-Based Learning, Social and Emotional Learning, and Transformative Technology). Every semester, teachers must engage in 12 hours of relevant PL, apply that learning in their classroom, and reflect on how that application impacted student learning. Leadership Pathways are PPfT compensation point-earning opportunities.
- **PPfT Leadership Pathways Plus 1 (LP+1)** – LP+1 is available to teachers who have completed at least one Leadership Pathway. In LP+1, teachers serve as mentors, facilitators, and scorers for the Leadership Pathways program.
- **Professional Development Units (PDUs)** – Teams of teachers identify a need they plan to focus on throughout the year and develop a plan to study and address that need. PDUs are designed to be a long-term study in which teachers utilize a repeating cycle of engagement in PL research, implementation in the classroom, data collection, and evaluation. PDUs culminate in the submission of an online product that meets specific criteria determined by district leadership.

Commendation 6: AISD provides high-quality PL to teachers who seek National Board Certification (NBC).

NBC is the highest professional certification in the field of teaching. Research shows that teachers who are board certified have a greater impact on student achievement than non-board-certified teachers. Those impacts are even greater for students who have been identified as economically disadvantaged.³⁹

³⁹ <https://www.nbpts.org/certification/benefits/>.

AISD's NBC program supports teachers who are pursuing their NBC. The program is a two-year commitment led by the AISD National Board Leadership team and supports candidates through cohort meetings and mentorships. Trainings are aligned with the four components that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) expects candidates to complete for all certificate areas, shown in Table 30.

Table 30. AISD National Board Program Training Scope

Program Year	NBPTS Component
Year 1	Component 1: Content Knowledge Component 2: Differentiation in Instruction
Year 2	Component 3: Teaching Practice and Learning Environment Component 4: Effective and Reflective Practitioner

Source. AISD NBC program overview

In 2022-23 there were 176 NBC teachers in AISD. Table 31 presents cohort sizes by year for the last five years. The 2019-20 participation data was impacted by deferrals due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 31. AISD NBC Program Cohort Sizes, 2018-19 to 2022-23

Cohort Type	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
New Candidates (Y1 and Y2)	50	46	41	38	30
Renewal/Maintenance Candidates	14	16	36	30	21

Source. AISD-provided NBC participation data

Table 32 presents NBC program expenditure data for the 2022-23 school year. The majority of expenditures are stipends paid out to NBC teachers, some of which is offset by Teacher Incentive Allotment Funds from TEA.

Table 32. AISD NBC Program Expenditures, 2022-23

Expenditure	Details	Total Amount
Candidate component fees	30 candidates @ \$950 per candidate – two components per year	\$57,000
Maintenance of certification component fees	21 candidates @ \$475	\$9,975
Stipends for NBCs	177 NBC teachers @ \$2,000 (144 NBC teachers receiving Teacher Incentive Allotment Funds)	\$352,000
NBC Support Program	Leadership team, cohort facilitators, mentors, candidate support	\$44,500
Total Expenditures		\$463,475

Source. AISD-provided NBC expenditure data

There are several elements of the district's NBC program that reflect best practices in professional development:

- Required attendance – By joining the program, candidates commit to attending monthly cohort meetings and actively participating with their assigned mentor.
- Highly-qualified trainers – Each cohort is led by a National Board-Certified teacher who has also received specialized training from AISD's National Board Leadership Team.
- Coherent sequencing – The ultimate goal of the program is for candidates to successfully submit and achieve NBC. The program's PL scope and sequence supports that outcome through strategic calendaring (Table 32above) and trainings that scaffold towards mastery of National Board standards.

Finding 19: Nearly two-thirds of the district's campus leadership program graduates do not go on to serve in a leadership role in AISD (i.e., principal or assistant principal).

As detailed in the introduction to this Chapter, AISD administers two primary LD programs: P3 and AP3, each of which are described below.

The objectives of **P3** are to:

- Prepare current assistant principals and academy directors for an Austin ISD principalship;
- Facilitate professional growth for participants that positively impacts current and future leadership roles; and
- Build a cadre of well-prepared urban school leaders who successfully transition into positions as principals.

Criteria for P3 membership requires participants to currently hold a position as a campus or central office administrator in Austin ISD, have at least two or more years of service as a campus administrator, and have a CAPR final summative score of "Effective" or better from the school year preceding the application submission. The application process entails completing the P3 application, acquiring one recommendation form submission from the applicant's current principal or central office supervisor, and participating in an interview facilitated by the Leadership Development team and other district officials.

P3 program components include monthly meetings, a book study, and coaching sessions. Monthly meetings include in-person PL with senior district leaders and learning walks at AISD campuses to observe organizational practices and discuss leadership with current principals. For the book study, cohort members engage in a year-long, group study and reflect on high-yield leadership strategies. Additionally, the Leadership Development team offers four coaching sessions per year to all P3 cohort members.

The objectives of **AP3** are to:

- Target, plan, and implement strategies that support and operationalize the AISD leadership framework;
- Develop individual capacity for current and future leadership roles; and

- Prepare teacher leaders for assistant principal positions within Austin ISD.

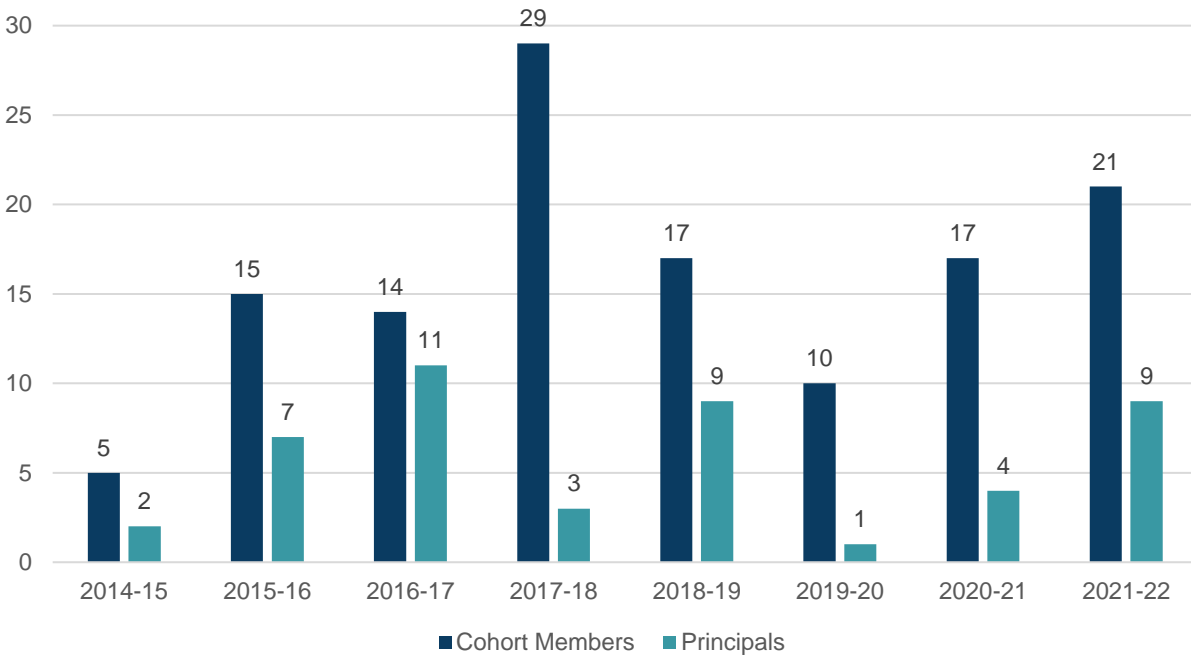
Criteria for AP3 membership requires participants to currently hold an administrative certification or be scheduled to complete master's degree coursework and principal certification, complete at least three years of successful service as a teacher or non-teaching professional, and have a PPfT final rating of "Effective" or better from the school year preceding application submission. The application process includes completing the AP3 application, acquiring one recommendation form submission from the applicant's current principal or central office supervisor, and participating in an interview facilitated by the Leadership Development team and other district officials.

AP3 program components include monthly meetings, a Lead NOW project, and coaching sessions. AP3 monthly meetings are two-hour, in-person learning sessions and are mandatory to maintain participation in the program. Each meeting focuses on core content that prepares aspiring assistant principals. Under the supervision of their principal and with guidance from their LD coach, AP3 members engage in a year-long project (Lead NOW) that requires participants to identify a problem of practice through data-driven planning, campus observations, collaboration, and evaluation of results that specifically impacts student achievement. In order to support the Lead NOW project, cohort members meet for one-on-one coaching sessions with Leadership Development once per semester.

Both programs are intended to internally promote candidates to campus-based leaders (i.e., assistant principals and principals) within AISD. However, the audit team's analysis showed that nearly two-thirds (64%) of the graduates of P3 and AP3 do not, at any point in their tenure with the district, hold campus leadership positions.

Between 2014-15 and 2021-22, 128 AISD aspiring principals graduated from P3. Of those 128, 46 (36%) served as an AISD principal at some point in their tenure with the district. Figure 76 presents two data points by P3 cohort year:

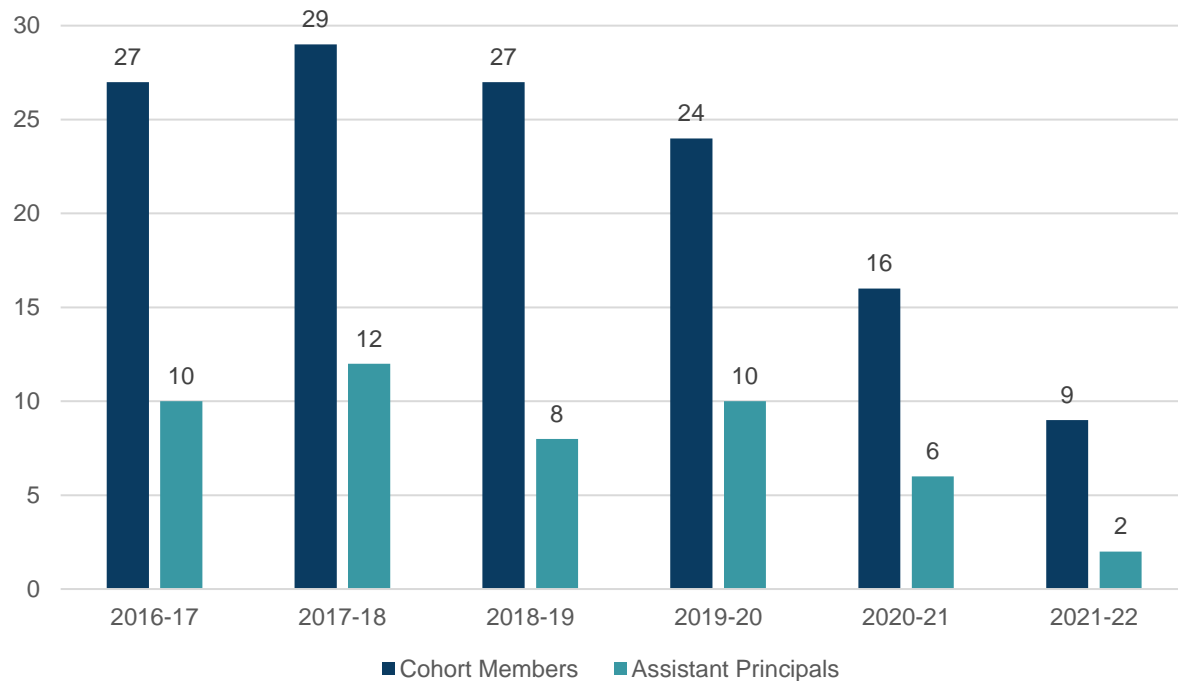
- Total P3 cohort members; and
- Number of cohort members who served as principals at any point in their tenure with the district (including those who no longer work at AISD).

Figure 76. P3 Participation Analysis, 2014-15 to 2021-22

Source. AISD P3 participation data

Between 2016-17 and 2021-22, 132 AISD employees graduated from AP3. Of those 132, 48 (36%) served as AISD assistant principals at any point in their tenure with the district. Figure 77 presents two data points by AP3 cohort year:

- Total AP3 cohort members; and
- Number of cohort members who served as AISD assistant principals at any point in their tenure with the district (including those who no longer work at AISD).

Figure 77. AP3 Participation Analysis, 2016-17 to 2021-22

Source. AISD AP3 participation data

There are two primary reasons why AISD's leadership programs are largely unsuccessful at promoting program graduates:

- The HC Department is not the formal hiring manager for these principal or assistant principal positions; that responsibility falls under the OSL. Therefore, it is critical that the two departments are aligned on the philosophy, approach, and criteria of the P3 and AP3 programs to successfully matriculate program participants into leadership positions. However, Gibson's interviews suggested that this is not the case. As a result, many of the candidates that the HC Department graduates are ultimately not hired by OSL.
- The HC Department has not identified the proper goals to measure the success of the programs. The HC Department does not currently track the progression of program graduates' careers at AISD, nor does it evaluate the "value" the programs provide to the district through any meaningful data analysis. The HC Department does track KPIs for its major functional areas; those listed for "leadership development and support" are the following:
 - Number of campus visits or touchpoints for administrator coaching;
 - Number of individuals who attended training sessions;
 - Number of individuals who attended assessment centers;
 - Number of individuals submitting a Hirevue application;
 - Number of cohort members rating Strongly Agree/Agree for meaningfulness and value of PL sessions; and

- Percentage of assessment center participants meeting the criteria to enter the principal and assistant principal pool.

These KPIs are not clearly aligned with the stated objectives of the program and, as a result, they do not allow the HC Department to holistically evaluate the efficacy of its LD programs or demonstrate their value to hiring managers (i.e., OSL) and the broader AISD workforce.

Recommendation 19: Redesign components of AISD's LD programs.

To increase the effectiveness of its leadership programs, the district should redesign several components. First, AISD should ensure that the HC Department and OSL are fully aligned on the purpose and approach of the programs. One of the first steps in achieving this alignment will be to define how the district will evaluate the P3 and AP3 programs. The HC Department, in collaboration with OSL, should identify performance metrics for P3 and AP3 that will allow it to both internally evaluate the programs' effectiveness and to quantify their value to AISD. In addition to identifying those metrics, the HC Department should develop a schedule that it will use to regularly assess the programs' productivity. To assist in its identification of performance metrics, the HC Department should consider the SHRM Foundation's criteria for evaluating LD initiatives, shown in Table 33.

Table 33. Criteria for Evaluating LD Initiatives

Criteria	Definition	Example Measurements
Reactions	How participants liked or felt about the experience (affect); or participants' perception of the usefulness of the experience to subsequent performance (utility judgments).	Post-experience questionnaire of emotional affect ("smile sheet") Post-experience questionnaire of perceived practical value
Learning	The level of knowledge compared to before the experience; how much knowledge is retained over time; behavioral changes as a result of the development experience.	Knowledge tests Mental models (e.g., understanding of a domain) Skill demonstration
Transfer	The extent to which what was learned in the developmental experience is applied back on the job.	Ratings of behavior (e.g., 360-degree ratings) Self-report
Results	Any criteria in which unit or organizational impact is assessed.	Productivity gains Customer satisfaction Employee morale Profitability

Source. Referenced from: <https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Developing%20Leadership%20Talent.pdf>

Once the performance metrics are agreed upon, the HC Department and OSL should evaluate both P3 and AP3 to ensure that current programming supports those metrics. This will likely lead to several programmatic redesigns which may include selection criteria, application process, or program components.

Appendix A: Interviews and School Visits

Interviews

The review team conducted interviews with the following AISD administrators and staff (listed in alphabetical order):

- Dr. Theresa Arocaha-Gill, Executive Director, Special Education
- Jennifer Abrahamson, Administrative Supervisor of Academics
- Lisa Bush, Director of Secondary Schools
- Tammy Caesar, Director of Career and Technical Education
- Toni Cordova, Chief of Staff
- Susan Diaz, Assistant Superintendent of Academics
- LaKesha Drinks, Executive Director of School Leadership and Campus Support
- Dillon Finan, Director of Campus and District Accountability
- Monica Gonzalez, Director of Elementary Schools
- John Green-Otero, Director of Early Learning
- Carolyn Hanschen, Executive Director of Accountability and Assessment
- Stephanie Hawley, Chief Equity Officer
- Gilbert Hicks, Chief of School Leadership
- Brandi Hosack, Chief Officer Human Capital
- Jessica Jolliffe, Director of Humanities
- Statia Paschel, Director of Social Emotional Learning and Cultural Proficiency and Inclusivity
- Danielle Perico, Director of STEM
- Denisha Presley, Interim Executive Director of Leadership and Professional Development
- Eduardo Ramos, Chief Financial Officer
- Jacob Reach, Chief Officer Government Relations and Board Services
- David Reinhart, Director of Professional Learning
- Matias Segura, Interim Superintendent
- Elizabeth Severance, Director of Advanced Academics
- Arati Singh, School Board President
- Phillip Taylor, Director of Fine Arts
- Suzanne Villalpando, Assistant Superintendent of Multilingual Education and Student Programs

- Gloria Williams, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services
- Angel Wilson, Executive Director of School Leadership and Campus Support

Group Interviews

The review team conducted group interviews with the following stakeholders:

- Executive Directors of School Leadership and Campus Support, Elementary (2 sessions)
- Executive Directors of School Leadership and Campus Support, Secondary
- Academic Coaching Specialist, ELA
- Academic Coaching Specialist, STEM
- Academic Coaching Specialist, Social Studies
- Instructional Specialists
- Principals, Elementary
- Principals, Secondary
- Teachers, Elementary
- Teachers, Secondary

School Visits

The audit team visited 12 campuses between February 17, 2023 and March 12, 2023. Each school visit lasted approximately two hours, during which time the review team interviewed the campus administrator and conducted four to five 15-minute classroom observations. The following schools were selected by the audit team based on their demographic profile and geographic location:

- Barton Hills Elementary School
- Boone Elementary School
- Dawson Elementary School
- Harris Elementary School
- Padron Elementary School
- Ridgetop Elementary School
- Martin Middle School
- Murchison Middle School
- Paredes Middle School
- McCallum High School
- Northeast High School
- Travis High School

Appendix B: Campus Administrator Survey Results

Gibson developed and administered an online survey to all principals and assistant principals. The objective of the survey was to collect perception data related to how effectively the district organizes resources, systems, and processes to support the implementation of effective instructional practices. The survey was administered between March 1 and March 28, 2023. In total, 147 staff completed the survey for an overall response rate of 51.8%.

The survey was administered using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The survey instrument included 70 items. In analyzing survey response data, the audit team recommends that the district explore areas where disagreement rates exceed 20% and consider addressing any areas where disagreement rates exceed 30% more urgently.

Table B.1 shows the percentage of staff who completed the survey, disaggregated by school level.

Table B.1. Survey Completion Rate by School Level

School level	Percent Complete	n
Elementary School	52.7%	88
Middle School	41.5%	22
High School	57.7%	30
Other	66.7%	6
District	33.3%	1
Total	51.8%	147

Note. "Other" includes Alternative Learning Center, Ann Richards SYWL, Austin State Hospital, Graduation Preparatory Academy, Navarro Graduation Path, Travis County JJAEP. "District" refers to staff at the Graduation Preparatory Academy.

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table B.2 shows the experience levels (years in their current principal/assistant principal role) of survey respondents.

Table B.2. Survey Respondent Experience Levels

Years Experience in Current Role	Years
This is my first year in my current role	17.4%
2 to 3 years	21.5%
4 to 5 years	19.4%
6 to 10 years	21.5%

Years Experience in Current Role	Years
11 to 15 years	11.8%
16 to 20 years	4.9%
More than 20 years	3.5%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table B.3 shows the percentage of staff who agreed or disagreed with each survey question.

Table B.3. Campus Administrator Survey Results

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The goals and objectives outlined in the District Improvement Plan (DIP) inform the development of my Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). (n = 146)	6.8%	13.0%	65.8%	11.6%	2.7%
My supervisor supports me in developing my Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). (n = 145)	2.8%	9.7%	48.3%	34.5%	4.8%
Many different stakeholders were involved in the development of my CIP. (n = 145)	6.2%	24.8%	43.4%	22.8%	2.8%
The annual goals in my school's CIP are achievable. (n = 146)	2.1%	6.2%	63.7%	25.3%	2.7%
My CIP is used as a tool for prioritizing the work of my school leadership team. (n = 146)	5.5%	17.1%	52.1%	23.3%	2.1%
My supervisor routinely monitors the implementation and progress towards goals and objectives in my CIP. (n = 146)	4.8%	12.3%	50.7%	27.4%	4.8%
My supervisor clearly communicates to me the expectations of the central office for teaching and learning. (n = 146)	2.7%	5.5%	53.4%	37.7%	0.7%
The teaching and learning expectations communicated to me by central office and my principal supervisor are aligned. (n = 147)	4.1%	12.2%	51.0%	29.9%	2.7%
My supervisor supports me in becoming an effective instructional leader. (n = 146)	3.4%	8.9%	39.7%	47.9%	0.0%
There is an effective process in place for requesting support from the central office. (n = 147)	15.6%	29.9%	40.1%	14.3%	0.0%
The support I receive from the central office is timely. (n = 147)	10.9%	31.3%	43.5%	14.3%	0.0%
The support I receive from the central office is effective. (n = 147)	10.9%	26.5%	49.0%	13.6%	0.0%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Central office administrators routinely conduct classroom walkthroughs at my campus. (n = 146)	12.3%	26.0%	43.2%	17.1%	1.4%
The district effectively communicates the rationale for new academic initiatives. (n = 147)	13.6%	34.0%	38.8%	9.5%	4.1%
The district provides adequate support for the successful implementation of new academic initiatives. (n = 147)	27.2%	42.2%	20.4%	6.8%	3.4%
The district routinely conducts evaluations examining the effectiveness of academic initiatives. (n = 147)	21.8%	36.7%	27.2%	4.8%	9.5%
I understand how the District's Curriculum System, e.g. Yearly Planning Guide, Instructional Planning Guide, etc. to guide their work. (n = 144)	2.1%	16.0%	64.6%	16.7%	0.7%
I have received adequate training on how to access and utilize the components of the District's Curriculum System. (n = 145)	6.9%	33.1%	46.2%	13.8%	0.0%
I expect teachers to use the District's Curriculum System to guide their work. (n = 145)	3.4%	11.0%	60.0%	24.8%	0.7%
Teachers on my campus effectively use the various components of the District's Curriculum System to plan instruction. (n = 144)	4.2%	20.8%	63.9%	11.1%	0.0%
Teachers rely heavily on BLEND to guide their work. (n = 144)	6.9%	35.4%	39.6%	17.4%	0.7%
In my school, teachers are expected to develop unit plans with their PLC. (n = 144)	0.0%	14.6%	44.4%	40.3%	0.7%
In my school, teachers are expected to develop lesson plans for each unit of instruction. (n = 145)	2.1%	11.0%	46.9%	40.0%	0.0%
Most of the teachers on my campus can effectively adapt the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not on grade level. (n = 146)	4.8%	19.9%	57.5%	17.8%	0.0%
Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) processes on my campus are effective in addressing the needs of students experiencing academic challenges. (n = 146)	6.2%	25.3%	55.5%	13.0%	0.0%
Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) processes on my campus are effective in addressing the needs of students experiencing behavioral challenges. (n = 146)	8.9%	26.7%	48.6%	15.8%	0.0%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The District Short Cycle Assessments available in SchoolCity provide an accurate indicator of student learning on a set of identified standards. (n = 145)	9.7%	27.6%	55.2%	5.5%	2.1%
The district provides clear expectations for analysis and action planning based on the results of Short Cycle assessments. (n = 145)	6.9%	22.8%	57.2%	11.7%	1.4%
The NWEA MAP Assessments (K-8) provide an accurate indicator of student growth. (n = 143)	8.4%	23.1%	43.4%	14.0%	11.2%
The district provides clear expectations for analysis and action planning based on the results of NWEA MAP assessments (K-8). (n = 143)	9.1%	37.1%	32.2%	9.8%	11.9%
District office provides support for the analysis of district assessments in a timely manner. (n = 145)	11.7%	33.1%	48.3%	5.5%	1.4%
The district's pacing calendar provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following District Short Cycle Assessments. (n = 145)	15.9%	34.5%	42.8%	4.8%	2.1%
The district's pacing calendar provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following NWEA MAP Assessments (K-8). (n = 144)	11.8%	34.0%	36.1%	6.3%	11.8%
Most of the teachers at my school have the skills necessary to address student learning needs following assessment analysis. (n = 145)	6.2%	19.3%	56.6%	16.6%	1.4%
Teachers at my school consistently follow the district's instructional model for literacy instruction. (n = 82)	3.7%	22.0%	54.9%	17.1%	2.4%
Teachers at my school consistently follow the district's instructional model (Understanding by Design) for math instruction. (n = 82)	3.7%	25.6%	50.0%	15.9%	4.9%
Teachers at my school provide effective literacy instruction. (n = 82)	1.2%	15.9%	57.3%	25.6%	0.0%
Teachers at my school have a deep understanding of the district's model of instruction for reading (Balanced Literacy). (n = 82)	8.5%	25.6%	43.9%	20.7%	1.2%
Austin ISD's Assistant Principal Preparation Program (AP3) prepared me to be an effective instructional leader. (n = 143)	2.1%	4.9%	22.4%	14.0%	56.6%
There are opportunities for me to grow as an instructional leader in the district. (n = 143)	7.0%	13.3%	58.0%	18.2%	3.5%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
District-provided professional development is differentiated to meet my unique learning needs. (n = 143)	14.0%	38.5%	35.7%	9.1%	2.8%
I can access content-specific professional development when needed. (n = 143)	7.7%	32.9%	46.2%	9.1%	4.2%
The professional development I receive is of high quality. (n = 143)	4.9%	26.6%	55.9%	11.2%	1.4%
The district provides adequate support for first-year principals. (n = 143)	11.2%	21.0%	21.0%	8.4%	38.5%
The district provides adequate support for struggling principals. (n = 143)	10.5%	19.6%	12.6%	7.0%	50.3%
My principal PLC supports my own professional growth and development. (n = 143)	6.3%	11.9%	31.5%	16.8%	33.6%
I and/or other school leaders routinely participate in teacher PLC meetings. (n = 142)	0.7%	12.0%	39.4%	46.5%	1.4%
I set clear expectations for the work to be accomplished during teacher PLC meetings. (n = 142)	0.7%	8.5%	53.5%	33.8%	3.5%
I require teacher PLCs to maintain evidence of their work (e.g., formal agendas, meeting minutes, assessment results). (n = 142)	1.4%	13.4%	51.4%	29.6%	4.2%
The district's teacher induction program provides adequate support for new-to-profession teachers. (n = 142)	16.2%	32.4%	31.7%	7.0%	12.7%
The district's teacher induction program provides effective orientation to the District's Curricular System. (n = 141)	13.5%	27.0%	36.2%	7.1%	16.3%
The Human Capital Department provides an adequate pool of qualified teacher candidates when we have vacancies. (n = 143)	23.1%	38.5%	31.5%	3.5%	3.5%
When I identify a teacher I want to hire, the Human Capital Department completes the hire process in a timely manner. (n = 144)	31.3%	40.3%	20.1%	4.2%	4.2%
My campus is typically fully staffed (i.e., there are no teacher vacancies) on the first day of school. (n = 144)	19.4%	31.3%	36.8%	11.1%	1.4%
I receive the support I need from the Human Capital Department to support the performance needs of struggling teachers. (n = 144)	14.6%	26.4%	36.1%	7.6%	15.3%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
I receive the support I need from the Human Capital Department when I have a teacher I want to recommend for non-renewal. (n = 144)	6.9%	9.0%	36.1%	8.3%	39.6%
I would recommend my school as a good place to work. (n = 144)	2.1%	2.1%	27.8%	66.7%	1.4%
I would recommend Austin ISD as a good place to work. (n = 142)	2.8%	11.3%	63.4%	20.4%	2.1%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table B.4. To what extent is your school's capacity to provide effective instruction hindered by the following:

Statement	Not at all	Very little	To some extent	A lot
Too few highly effective teachers. (n = 143)	14.0%	32.2%	40.6%	13.3%
Too few instructional support staff. (n = 143)	11.2%	17.5%	33.6%	37.8%
Too few administrative support staff. (n = 143)	20.3%	25.2%	31.5%	23.1%
High staff turnover. (n = 143)	25.2%	32.2%	30.1%	12.6%
Shortage and/or inadequacy of instructional materials (e.g., textbooks). (n = 142)	29.6%	31.7%	26.8%	12.0%
Shortage and/or inadequacy of technology resources (e.g., computers). (n = 143)	35.7%	27.3%	35.0%	2.1%
Student misbehavior. (n = 143)	10.5%	38.5%	32.9%	18.2%
Student concern over their safety. (n = 142)	30.3%	49.3%	14.8%	5.6%
Low levels of parental involvement/support. (n = 142)	32.4%	33.8%	25.4%	8.5%
Insufficient support from the central office. (n = 141)	13.5%	34.0%	40.4%	12.1%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Appendix C: Teacher Survey Results

Gibson developed and administered an online survey to all AISD teachers. The objective of the survey was to collect perception data related to how effectively the district organizes resources, systems, and processes to support the implementation of effective instructional practices. The survey was administered between March 14 and March 31, 2023. In total, 1,769 teachers completed the survey for an overall response rate of 37.1%.

The survey was administered using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The survey instrument included 64 items. In analyzing survey response data, the review team recommends that the district explore areas where disagreement rates exceed 20% and consider addressing any areas where disagreement rates exceed 30% more urgently.

Table C.1 shows the percentage of staff who completed the survey, disaggregated by school level.

Table C.1. Survey Completion Rate by School Level

School level	Percent Complete	n
Elementary School	39.3%	1,027
Middle School	36.2%	300
High School	32.6%	382
Other	37.1%	39
District	41.2%	21
Total	37.1%	1,769

Note. "Other" includes teachers at: Alternative Learning Center, Ann Richards SYWL, Austin State Hospital, Leadership Academy, Navarro Graduation Path, Rosedale, Travis County JJAEP, Travis County Detention Center. "District" includes teachers at: Clifton Center, Graduation Preparatory Academy, Homebound, Phoenix House, Special Education Department, State Deaf, and Student Support Services.

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table C.2 shows the percentage of staff who agreed or disagreed with each survey question.

Table C.2. Teacher Survey Results

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
My principal is an effective instructional leader. (n = 1,751)	4.6%	11.9%	35.8%	45.6%	2.1%
My principal sets clear expectations for teaching and learning. (n = 1,749)	3.8%	10.2%	37.6%	46.8%	1.6%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
My principal clearly communicates the expectations of the central office for teaching and learning. (n = 1,746)	4.0%	9.4%	38.8%	45.8%	2.1%
I am included in discussions and activities related to my school's vision, mission, and/or core values. (n = 1,749)	5.8%	13.2%	36.7%	42.0%	2.3%
The annual goals set forth in my school's campus improvement plan (CIP) are achievable. (n = 1,741)	2.3%	8.8%	48.5%	29.2%	11.2%
There is strong teamwork among teachers across grades to identify problems and work on solutions. (n = 1,748)	3.9%	16.2%	43.2%	35.1%	1.5%
There are opportunities for me to grow as an instructional leader on my campus. (n = 1,745)	4.1%	13.0%	45.1%	35.1%	2.8%
Teachers at my school maintain high expectations for all students. (n = 1,748)	3.1%	12.9%	43.8%	39.0%	1.2%
Parents of students on my campus are engaged in their child's learning. (n = 1,749)	6.1%	19.6%	49.6%	22.8%	1.9%
I would recommend my school as a good place to work. (n = 1,744)	4.2%	13.2%	39.6%	40.8%	2.2%
I would recommend Austin ISD as a good place to work. (n = 1,739)	10.6%	23.3%	41.5%	15.4%	9.2%
The district expects that I use the District Curriculum System, e.g., Yearly Planning Guide, Instructional Planning Guide, etc. to guide my work. (n = 1,698)	2.1%	6.9%	54.7%	28.9%	7.4%
I rely heavily on the District Curriculum System to guide my work. (n = 1,705)	12.8%	24.6%	40.5%	15.0%	7.0%
Austin ISD provides me with adequate training on the District Curriculum System. (n = 1,694)	14.0%	28.3%	39.6%	11.2%	6.8%
The District Curriculum System has all the components I need to deliver standards-aligned instruction. (n = 1,703)	15.7%	26.1%	37.8%	12.1%	8.3%
The District Curriculum System includes adequate resources that help me differentiate instruction according to student needs. (n = 1,697)	18.2%	28.8%	34.9%	10.5%	7.6%
I rely heavily on the resources in BLEND to guide my work. (n = 1,705)	21.2%	38.1%	23.0%	8.9%	8.8%
The IPG provides an accurate indicator of student learning on a set of identified standards. (n = 1,699)	7.2%	20.1%	47.1%	10.5%	15.1%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The district's pacing calendar (YPG) provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following interim progress monitoring assessment (NWEA MAP, K-8). (n = 1,704)	12.7%	26.7%	36.6%	8.6%	15.4%
The district's pacing calendar (YPG) provides adequate time for analysis and action planning following interim progress monitoring assessment (Short Cycle Assessments, K-12). (n = 1,702)	13.2%	27.2%	36.2%	7.7%	15.7%
I routinely develop unit plans when planning for instruction. (n = 1,675)	1.3%	10.5%	44.5%	36.5%	7.2%
I routinely develop lesson plans when planning for instruction. (n = 1,672)	0.5%	1.9%	44.1%	50.5%	3.0%
Collaboration with my PLC is central to my process for developing unit plans. (n = 1,672)	8.1%	16.6%	35.6%	26.1%	13.7%
Collaboration with my PLC is central to my process for developing lesson plans. (n = 1,672)	8.0%	16.0%	37.2%	26.0%	12.8%
A campus administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal) routinely provides feedback on my unit plans. (n = 1,672)	10.8%	22.8%	35.8%	14.8%	15.8%
A campus administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal) routinely provides feedback on my lesson plans. (n = 1,674)	10.9%	22.3%	39.2%	15.2%	12.4%
I have adequate instructional resources (e.g., textbooks, materials) to support the curriculum. (n = 1,675)	12.0%	25.2%	43.3%	18.1%	1.4%
My students have adequate access to technology resources (e.g., Chromebooks, smartboards) in the classroom. (n = 1,674)	4.3%	9.2%	53.8%	30.6%	2.1%
AISD provides support to teachers in adapting the curriculum to provide grade-level instruction to students who are not on grade level. (n = 1,671)	18.3%	32.8%	30.9%	10.5%	7.5%
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) processes on my campus are effective in addressing the needs of students experiencing academic challenges. (n = 1,673)	10.8%	23.8%	40.8%	11.7%	12.9%
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) processes on my campus are effective in addressing the needs of students experiencing behavioral challenges. (n = 1,672)	17.7%	24.8%	35.2%	10.4%	12.0%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The district has a well-defined instructional model for literacy instruction. (n = 1,675)	10.4%	18.6%	40.6%	11.8%	18.5%
The district has a well-defined instructional model for math instruction. (n = 1,673)	9.6%	17.2%	38.7%	10.6%	23.8%
I use BLEND to archive my learning materials for future lessons. (n = 1,651)	15.5%	19.6%	23.1%	22.9%	18.9%
I require my students to upload their work into BLEND (n = 1,650)	19.0%	22.7%	20.5%	16.7%	21.2%
I use the Blended Learning Models in BLEND to provide digital learning experiences for my students. (n = 1,643)	17.5%	21.1%	25.4%	14.9%	21.1%
I use the Blended Learning Blueprints to create content for blended learning classes. (n = 1,650)	22.0%	27.3%	19.3%	7.9%	23.5%
The How-to Videos are helpful to my understanding of BLEND. (n = 1,645)	12.3%	16.5%	31.7%	9.1%	30.4%
Navigating between the AISD Portal and BLEND is straightforward. (n = 1,646)	8.9%	13.9%	40.1%	19.4%	17.7%
Professional learning is differentiated to meet my learning needs. (n = 1,623)	12.1%	28.0%	45.6%	12.3%	2.0%
The district-provided professional development offered by AISD meets my learning needs. (n = 1,622)	12.0%	30.2%	44.8%	10.9%	2.1%
I have adequate access to instructional coaching to help me improve my instructional practice. (n = 1,622)	12.6%	22.7%	37.0%	12.8%	14.9%
The support provided by the instructional coach is of high quality. (n = 1,619)	7.7%	10.0%	29.8%	15.4%	37.1%
My teacher mentor provides the support I need to help me successfully transition into my teaching assignment. (n = 1,616)	5.0%	4.9%	20.2%	14.1%	55.8%
Campus administrators (principal or assistant principal) routinely visit my classroom to observe teaching and learning. (n = 1,624)	6.2%	11.0%	49.2%	32.6%	1.1%
Campus administrators (principal or assistant principal) routinely provide verbal and/or written feedback after visiting my classroom. (n = 1,622)	4.7%	8.6%	51.0%	34.2%	1.4%
The verbal and/or written feedback from my campus administrators helps me improve my practice. (n = 1,620)	5.3%	13.0%	46.9%	31.3%	3.5%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
I have opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers at my school. (n = 1,616)	3.8%	8.7%	48.1%	37.7%	1.7%
Campus administrators (principal and/or assistant principal) routinely participate in PLC meetings. (n = 1,613)	4.8%	11.8%	40.9%	33.6%	8.9%
Campus administrators set clear expectations for the work to be accomplished during my PLC meetings. (n = 1,623)	4.4%	9.4%	44.0%	29.3%	12.9%
My PLC routinely maintains evidence of our work (e.g., formal agendas, meeting minutes, assessment results). (n = 1,624)	3.9%	10.2%	42.2%	28.9%	14.9%
My PLC routinely uses Plan, Pedagogy, Proof Framework to guide our work. (n = 1,624)	6.6%	12.7%	37.4%	22.7%	20.6%
My PLC includes a weekly data review. (n = 1,620)	5.2%	15.7%	38.3%	21.0%	19.9%
I routinely develop unit plans when planning for instruction. (n = 1,475)	3.2%	12.4%	54.3%	30.1%	-
I routinely develop lesson plans when planning for instruction. (n = 1,478)	0.5%	2.0%	55.4%	42.2%	-
Collaboration with my PLC is central to my process for developing unit plans. (n = 1,454)	10.0%	23.7%	45.7%	20.7%	-
Collaboration with my PLC is central to my process for developing lesson plans. (n = 1,468)	9.3%	22.2%	47.3%	21.2%	-
A campus administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal) routinely provides feedback on my unit plans. (n = 1,462)	12.9%	30.9%	44.3%	11.9%	-
A campus administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal) routinely provides feedback on my lesson plans. (n = 1,466)	12.0%	27.9%	48.0%	12.1%	-

Source: Gibson Consulting Group

Table C.3. Teacher Survey Results – When planning a unit of instruction, how often do you use the following components of the district curriculum system?

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Not Applicable
Yearly Planning Guides (YPGs) (n = 1,651)	4.9%	8.1%	26.1%	49.2%	11.8%
Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs) (n = 1,647)	6.7%	9.6%	29.0%	42.0%	12.6%
Blended Learning Blueprints in BLEND (n = 1,647)	25.5%	22.1%	23.0%	13.5%	16.0%

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Not Applicable
Blending Learning Models in BLEND (n = 1,649)	25.2%	21.8%	23.5%	13.6%	15.9%
AISD Instructional Playbook (n = 1,643)	21.5%	22.5%	29.2%	10.8%	16.0%
Unit assessments (n = 1,649)	13.1%	14.0%	31.2%	24.8%	16.9%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table C.4. Teacher Survey Results – How would you rate the consistency of curriculum implementation in your content area/grade level on your campus? (n = 1,648)

	Percent
High consistency (i.e., more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of teachers)	45.5%
Moderate consistency (i.e., between half and $\frac{3}{4}$ of teachers)	28.3%
Low consistency (i.e., less than half of teachers)	6.4%
Don't know/Not applicable to me	19.8%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table C.5. Teacher Survey Results – What is your overall assessment of the quality of professional learning you have received this school year on the following topics:

Statement	Weak	Adequate	Strong	Very Strong	Not Applicable
Utilizing the District Curriculum System (e.g., YPGs, IPGs, BLEND, etc.) (n = 1,616)	23.8%	30.0%	19.7%	12.3%	14.4%
Interpreting student assessment data (n = 1,609)	15.0%	33.0%	25.5%	14.5%	11.9%
Integrating technology into the curriculum (i.e., blended learning) (n = 1,610)	17.8%	30.4%	25.3%	13.9%	12.5%
Improving content area knowledge (n = 1,611)	20.6%	30.5%	25.8%	14.0%	9.1%
Improving pedagogy (n = 1,603)	18.2%	31.9%	27.6%	13.5%	8.7%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Table C.6. Teacher Survey Results – How many minutes per week, on average, do you meet with your PLC? (n = 1,621)

Minutes per Week	%
Less than 30 minutes	9.2%
Between 30 and 60 minutes	33.3%
More than 60 minutes but less than 90 minutes	19.4%
90 minutes or more	21.9%
Not applicable to me in my role	16.2%

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Appendix D: Classroom Observations

This Appendix provides an overview of the audit team's approach and methodology for conducting school visits and classroom observations, and a summary of key observations made during campus visits.

Approach and Methodology

The audit team visited 50 classrooms at the following 12 schools:

- Barton Hills Elementary School
- Boone Elementary School
- Dawson Elementary School
- Harris Elementary School
- Padron Elementary School
- Ridgetop Elementary School
- Martin Middle School
- Murchison Middle School
- Paredes Middle School⁴⁰
- McCallum High School
- Northeast Early College High School (ECHS)
- Travis High School

Table D.1. Schools and Classrooms Visited

Campus Name	Elementary Classrooms	Middle Classrooms	High School Classrooms
Harris ES Ridgetop ES Boone ES Barton Hills ES Padron ES Dawson ES	29		
Martin MS Paredes MS Murchison MS		8	
Northeast ECHS			13

⁴⁰ Paredes Middle School was testing, so not all classroom observations were conducted.

Campus Name	Elementary Classrooms	Middle Classrooms	High School Classrooms
McCallum HS			
Travis HS			

Source. Gibson Consulting Group

Each school visit included an interview with the principal followed by four to five classroom observations, focused as much as possible on reading/ELA and math. Classroom observations were not conducted at Paredes Middle School due to SCA testing taking place at the time of the school visit.

The classroom observations provided a snapshot of instruction focusing on select components of the district's IPG/lesson plan, which reflects district instructional priorities and best practices. Any conclusions should reflect that this is a snapshot of one day only and may not reflect trends over time.

The remainder of this Appendix describes the results of the classroom observations for the two primary areas assessed: communication of learning intentions and use of technology and blended learning models.

Learning Intentions

Learning intentions help learners understand the purpose behind the lesson. The two primary components include the learning objective and the student success criteria. Sharing learning objectives and success criteria can encourage students to control their learning more. Students know what and why they are learning, and it allows them to make connections from one lesson to another. Including a language objective supports the development of students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and allows EB/EL students to better access the curriculum.

John Hattie, a respected educational leader, describes learning intentions in this way:

The basic premise is that the students have the same idea as their teacher about what is going on in the classroom and what they should be learning as a result of doing. Many students are not going to know this unless it is clearly signposted - learning intentions (or objectives) and learning outcomes (or success criteria) provide this direction.⁴¹

The following describes each in more detail.

Learning Objective

The learning objective describes what the teacher wants their students to know and be able to do at the end of the lesson and helps inform the lesson's design so that the instruction directly addresses the goal.

⁴¹ John Hattie: Learning Intentions and Success Criteria. STEM Learning (n.d.). <https://www.stem.org.uk/resources/elibrary/resource/273227/john-hattie-learning-intentions-and-success-criteria>.

Additionally, a well-written learning objective provides students with a clear purpose and focus for their learning efforts while also guiding the teacher's assessment strategy.

Student Success Criteria

Student success criteria are developed from the learning objective. Success criteria explicitly describe the student performance that will demonstrate whether students have met the learning objective. When students know what is expected of them and what success looks like, they are more likely to engage in the learning process and judge their progress. A common form for a student success criteria is an "I can" statement. For example, *"I can work with others to research and write about a topic."*

Language Objective

The language objective tells how the students will learn and demonstrate mastery of the lesson through one or more language modalities of reading, speaking, writing, or listening.⁴² Language objectives complement the learning objective and success criteria and address the aspects of academic language that will be developed or reinforced while teaching grade-level content concepts. For example, "I will speak and listen to my peers about using equations to determine missing angles in a triangle." Language objectives are especially beneficial for EB/EL students. They can be a decisive first step in ensuring that EB/EL students have access to the curriculum in a way that supports their second language acquisition.⁴³

Learning intentions should be clearly posted for teachers to reference at the beginning and conclusion of the lesson and for students to reference throughout the lesson.

Table D.2 illustrates the inconsistent practice of posting learning intentions with the lowest rate of compliance at secondary schools, with only 42.9% of teachers observed posting a learning objective, 28.6% posting the student success criteria for the lesson, and 23.8% posting the lesson-related language objective.

Table D.2. Percentage of Classrooms With Posted Learning Intentions (n = 50)

Learning Intentions	Elementary	Secondary
Learning Objective	69.0%	42.9%
Student Success Criteria	55.2%	28.6%
Language Objective	58.6%	23.8%

Source. Gibson classroom observation data

While almost every principal, particularly at the elementary level, stated that they expected teachers to post a written learning objective visible to students, implementation varied from school to school and within

⁴² Short, D. & Echevarria, J. (2016). *Developing Academic Language Using the SIOP Model*. Boston : Pearson.

⁴³ Short, D. & Echevarria, J. (2008). *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model*. Boston: Pearson.

schools, with more examples observed at the elementary level than at the secondary level. Most secondary classrooms posted an agenda listing the activities of the class lesson rather than the learning intentions.

The use of student success criteria and language objectives was less evident than the learning objective, with a shallow level of implementation at the secondary level. Given the number of second language learners in the district, this is an area of concern.

Technology and Blended Learning

Beginning in the Spring of 2020, all AISD students received an assigned device from Austin ISD for use at school and home – the “Everyone:1” initiative launched in the Fall of 2017. High school students were given their devices, followed by eighth-grade students in the Fall of 2019. Pre-K through second-grade students were given iPads (with case and charger). Third- through twelfth-grade students are assigned a Chromebook (with charger and optional carrying case).⁴⁴

The use of technology in the classroom by teachers and students was evident during the classroom visits. Every classroom was equipped with a Smart Board, which teachers used extensively. Students used various devices, including iPads, Chromebooks, and graphing calculators. Table D.3 summarizes the audit team’s observation of the use of technology by students during the lesson and by teachers as they delivered the lesson. Table D.3 illustrates the highest level of student use of technology at the secondary level, with 71.4% of observed lessons engaging students in the use of technology. The highest percentage of teacher use of technology was observed at the elementary level, with 51.7% of teachers using technology in the delivery of their lesson.

Table D.3. Observed Use of Technology by Students and Teachers

Technology in Instruction	Elementary	Secondary
Student Use of Technology	55.2%	71.4%
Teacher Use of Technology	51.7%	42.9%

Source. Gibson classroom observation data

In addition to the use of technology in the delivery of instruction, the district's curriculum includes and promotes the use of blended learning models. The lessons in the IPG include suggested blended learning work in the lesson plan. The following four models are promoted and supported in the district's curriculum documents:

- **Station Rotation** – During the classroom, students rotate on a fixed schedule among various modalities, usually including three learning stations: 1) online learning, 2) face-to-face instruction, and 3) group projects.
- **Individual Rotation** – Students rotate through stations on individual schedules set by the teacher or software algorithm. Students rotate only to the stations on their "playlist."
- **Flipped Learning** – Incorporates both face-to-face class time and web-based learning.

⁴⁴ Referenced from: <https://www.austinisd.org/technology/everyone>.

- **Whole Group Rotation** – The entire class rotates at the same time between learning activities that are face-to-face and online (e.g., a student might listen to a mini-lesson lecture and then work on a task in small groups for the face-to-face component).

As described in Table D.4, two examples (8%) were observed at the elementary level: one individual rotation model and one station rotation model. No examples were observed at the secondary level.

Table D.4. Observed Blended Learning Models

Technology in Instruction	Elementary	Secondary
Blended Learning Models	6.9%	0%

Source. Gibson classroom observation data

The observed rate of lessons using blended learning models was low during the classroom visits. Forty-seven percent of teachers responding to the Gibson survey indicated that they do not use the blended learning model suggestions in the curriculum documents to plan digital learning experiences for their students, and 38.6% indicated that they do not use a blended learning model in the delivery of instruction.

Lastly, the classroom observations examined the predominant design of the delivery of instruction. This is important as there is a focus on moving away from most of the lesson delivered to the class as a whole group, where the teacher is the "sage on the stage" and where lecture is the predominant delivery model. A well-designed lesson includes a blend of direct teaching, small group, and independent student work; this expectation is reflected in the lesson documents in the district curriculum. Teachers are often challenged to include small group work in their lessons because it requires more skillful classroom management strategies. However, well-designed small-group instruction allows students to collaborate with their peers and increases engagement in the learning process. Additionally, teacher-guided, small-group instruction enables teachers to differentiate instruction based on student needs.

Table D.5 describes the instructional arrangements observed during the classroom visits.

Table 34. Instructional Arrangements Observed During Classroom Observations (n = 50)

Instructional Delivery	Elementary	Secondary
Teacher Directed, Whole Group	50%	33%
Student Independent	8%	29%
Small Group Independent	29%	24%
Teacher Guided, Small Group	13%	14%

Source. Gibson classroom observation data

Most prevalent was teacher-directed, whole-group instruction, which is unsurprising given that every lesson includes a direct teaching component. Small group student independent work was next and most often involved students working together using Chromebooks or iPads. Teacher-guided, small group instruction was observed less often than independent small group work. Teacher-guided, small group instruction involves intentionally selecting certain students for group work who the teacher can support and typically is informed by assessment information or other data that identifies students who need differentiated support. This requires a higher level of pre-planning, which may contribute to this instructional arrangement's low representation level.

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