



# Districtwide Equity Assessment

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This document has been compiled from the final equity assessment report prepared by WestEd in December 2024. This document is only intended to provide an overview of key findings and recommendations from the assessment. Please view the [full version of the final report here](#).

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# Introduction

In the summer of 2023, Austin Independent School District (ISD) embarked on a critical initiative to examine and improve equity across its schools. To carry out the equity assessment, the district partnered with WestEd, a nonpartisan, nonprofit education research, development, and service agency. WestEd analyzed a multitude of district data sets—ranging from student achievement data to data on resource allocation—and provided Austin ISD with insights, findings, and recommendations through a series of detailed memos. This final report combines all of those memos, which collectively contribute to a broader understanding of the district’s equity landscape. This final report embodies Austin ISD’s commitment to equity and inclusivity for all members of the school district. The equity assessment is a direct reflection of the district’s collective resolve to ensure that each student has what they need to succeed in college, career, and life.

## **Purpose of the Equity Assessment**

The equity assessment was initiated in response to advocacy by community leaders and the district’s Equity Advisory Committee. The equity assessment illuminates areas of strength and areas in which the district can strengthen its commitment to equity, particularly for those who have been historically underserved. The equity assessment focused on three primary focus areas, as identified by Austin ISD: students, staff, and resource allocation. These focus areas served as the lenses through which the assessment was conducted and the findings presented.

## **WestEd’s Approach**

WestEd employed a three-phase approach to ensure that the equity assessment was both thorough and culturally responsive:

1. **Culturally Responsive Data Collection:** Gathering data through various means, including policy reviews, school walkthroughs, and exploratory data analysis, to capture a comprehensive picture of equity in Austin ISD
2. **Culturally Responsive Data Literacy and Root Cause Analysis:** Interpreting the data to understand the underlying causes of inequities and identify areas for targeted improvement
3. **Finalizing and Disseminating Findings and Recommendation:** Compiling the findings into cohesive memos and a final report, and disseminating the results to interest holders to inform action plans and next steps

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in this equity assessment was designed to be rigorous and inclusive, encompassing the following:

- **Meaning Making Conversations:** Dialogues with interest holders to make sense of the data and contextualize findings.
- **Exploratory Data Analysis:** A deep dive into quantitative data to uncover trends and patterns related to equity
- **Document Review:** Analysis of district documents to assess their alignment with equity goals
- **Policy Review:** An examination of existing district policies to identify how they may contribute to or mitigate inequities
- **Focus Groups:** Discussions with a cross-section of interest holders to gather diverse perspectives on equity experiences

- School Walkthroughs: On-site evaluations of school environments to observe practices and gather insights

This final report presents memos with findings from each of these six research activities, all structured around the three focus areas identified by AISD: students, staff, and resource allocation.

### **Next Steps**

This final report does not signify the end but rather the beginning of Austin ISD's journey toward educational equity. Austin ISD has indicated its commitment to taking the findings of this report and translating them into actionable strategies, in alignment with existing district initiatives. The next steps include engaging with district interest holders to prioritize recommendations, develop detailed implementation plans, and establish a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. We invite you to engage with this report fully, reflect on its findings, and join in the critical work of making Austin ISD a district in which every student thrives.

Staff Reported

Families Reported

Community Organizations Reported

## Meaning Making Conversations

### *Student Focus Area - Participants' Key Themes*

- There is a lack of classroom resources and teacher support(s) for non-native English-speaking students.
- Challenges exist in providing consistent and quality education services for students, such as after-school programs and particularly in terms of scheduling and implementing special education services. This could be improved by implementing a simple note-taking system that transitions from teacher to teacher each year.
- Challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of Black and Brown students in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program include restrictive and/or biased testing and identification systems; a lack of staff capacity or incentive to participate in training, scoring, and/or servicing students; and insufficient comprehensive outreach to families of Black and Brown students regarding the program.
- There is a substantial need for student mental health supports, including staff training.
- There is a need for teacher training and support in working with students in areas such as implicit bias, de-escalation, and differentiated instruction, including the provision of inclusion services for students receiving special education services.
- While there is satisfaction with community events for families, there is also a need for improved district marketing to enhance awareness and attendance at community-sponsored events.
- The district equity office has built positive relationships with community organizations and demonstrated some markers of progress (e.g., the representation of community voice, access to AISD leadership, and the analysis of disaggregated student data).
- There is general appreciation for the current board of trustees, especially considering that board membership is representative of the diverse AISD student population and includes strong advocates for educational equity.
- There is a need for inclusive physical access to schools for students with limited mobility: specifically, improvements in sidewalks, transportation, and infrastructure.
- Barriers to partnerships between the district and community organizations include burdensome bureaucratic processes, difficulties navigating complex systems as outsiders, a lack of proactive district engagement, and time lost reconciling gaps in institutional knowledge (i.e., as a result of district turnover). Some community organizations expressed that the district operates in a transactional and uncollaborative manner.

All three groups shared that several factors currently detract from the student experience in the district: (1) a lack of resource parity between communities, (2) insufficient classroom materials and resources, (3) a lack of teacher training and supports, (4) limited access to high-quality enrichment programs for certain communities, and (5) high turnover of staff that contributes to low staff capacity. Other major challenges identified were unclear district policies and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and a lack of procedural follow-

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through on incidents involving discrimination, hate, and/or violence. There was positive reception around efforts to be inclusive of diverse cultures, such as district cultural celebrations. However, a call remains for more inclusion of people hailing from diverse backgrounds and identities—particularly Native American and Indigenous populations.

### **Staff Focus Area - Participants' Key Themes**

- District strengths are present across different campuses with diverse student populations. The teacher workforce and other campus-based staff groups are diversifying, including higher numbers of male teachers in middle school and staff members who identify as LGBTQ+.
- District weaknesses consist of low pay and limited teacher incentives. Other challenges include low retention and a lack of employee supports, such as Human Resources assistance or opportunities to join cohorts like employee resource groups (ERGs) or affinity groups.
- Some programming and activities that support general school improvement efforts are being funded by Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fundraising. This can be an issue for schools with less active or well-resourced PTAs, which can impact the resources made available to teachers and students in schools.
- Some parents have a personal stake in ensuring that the teacher workforce is reflective of the diversity of students in schools.
- It is appropriate to facilitate co-planning and co-creating processes between community organizations and educators and staff in schools to harness collective expertise. This would represent a more inclusive and collaborative model to address important school-specific issues.
- The district can do more to communicate staffing changes and modifications to school community members. The district does provide this information to some extent, but more can be done by the district to ensure relevant staffing and personnel information is shared.

School-based staff reported that the district's prioritization and emphasis on diversifying the teacher workforce is viewed as a positive undertaking. However, additional strategies need to be implemented to support recruitment and increase retention, as these are human capital issues that the district continues to struggle with. Families reported that some schools can do more to support school staff than others, by way of their localized structures (i.e., PTAs), but that this type of support is not available for less well-resourced schools. Community organizations provided recommendations for ways the district can support teachers and students broadly. The groups emphasized that increased formal involvement and more consistent and transparent communication (with AISD) can enable them to improve their supports for schools

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Community Organizations Reported

### **Resource Allocation Focus Area - Participants' Key Themes**

- Staff and family members raised concerns about the disparity in funds allocated to campuses for student enrichment, family programs, curricular resources, instructional materials, and building maintenance.
- Community organizations emphasized that grants should not be the sole source of funding for equitable initiatives. They suggested incorporating such initiatives into the district budget, including after-school programs and cultural education for Native American and Indigenous students. Additionally, they stressed the importance of including medical services in the budget, like immunizations and physical exams, to support student participation in extracurricular programs.
- Community organizations identified the dismantling of the district equity office as a significant barrier to achieving equity for students.
- Community organizations shared the sentiment that the district seemed more responsive and reverent to more affluent, White, and homogenous communities.

### **Other Key Themes**

The following topics are key themes that do not fall in the three focus areas:

- Families of newcomer students encounter a lack of access to information, resources, and educational opportunities. Staff and community organization members suggested potential solutions such as onboarding, assigning caseworkers for families, and offering adult education classes.
- There is a need for improved communication from the district through various channels, including social media, phone calls, and text messaging. Additionally, fostering direct connections through culturally responsive approaches and authentic relationships between campus staff and families is crucial for sharing essential information.
- Community organizations that were not directly engaged through the course of the MMC process also provided feedback and demonstrated a willingness to engage and partner with the district. Working with student advocacy and education improvement organizations on strategic priorities can create synergies and improve implementation efforts.

# Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA)

The EDA addresses 14 research questions. The questions were developed to provide insight into Austin ISD's three focus areas. Following are the consolidated findings from those research questions.

## ***Student-Centered Focus Area***

- In the last 5 years, Austin ISD's student population has fluctuated from 81,346 students to 74,602 in 2022, which is an 8% decrease in the overall student body.
- There were additional changes in student demographic composition as well; there was a 12% decrease in Hispanic/Latine student population and a 20% decrease in African American student population.
- The biggest loss of student enrollment occurred between 2020 and 2021, when Austin ISD saw a decrease of more than 6,400 students, which affected each demographic group but had a larger impact on African American and Hispanic/Latine student population sizes.
- The proportion of students who are FRPL eligible is steadily decreasing. Concurrently, the number of students identified as Emergent Bilingual/English Learner or a student with a disability has held steady or risen over the last 5 years. Special Education proportions saw an increase in 2020 and 2021 before a decrease in 2022.
- Schools are racially and economically segregated.
- African American students are overrepresented compared with the district average in HSVI, and Title 1 and Alternative campuses. In schools with the highest number of African American students, Hispanic/Latine students also have slightly above-average representation, which may signal clustering between the two groups.
- Hispanic/Latine students are overrepresented in HSVI, Title 1, and Alternative campuses.
- Asian students are underrepresented in every campus type.
- White students have little to no representation at economically vulnerable schools (HSVI and Title 1) and Alternative campuses.
- Emergent Bilingual/English Learner and Special Education students are more highly concentrated at HSVI, Title 1, or Alternative campuses than anywhere else in the district. There is a higher number of students within marginalized populations in economically disadvantaged campuses.
- HSVI campuses are composed of only 11% of Austin ISD students and yet contain 26% of Emergent Bilingual/English Learner students and 20% of FRPL eligible students. HSVI campuses are composed of 68% Emergent Bilingual/English Learner students.
- Alternative campuses contain 1% of the student population but 1.8% of all Special Education students, and their proportional representation of Special Education students is almost double that of the district.
- No Gifted and Talented programs have racial parity or equity in student demographics, with most programs having an overrepresentation of Asian and White students and an underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic/Latine students.
- Analyses found that there are 10 schools that have approximately 24% of all Austin ISD students but contain about 47% of all students identified as Gifted and Talented in 2022.
- Most Gifted and Talented programs also fall either in the "Low" or "Very Low" SVI rating.

- Black students are consistently overrepresented in disciplinary referrals, with a trend showing an increase in their disproportionality over the last 4 years.
- Black and Hispanic/Latine students have disproportionately high incidences of disciplinary referrals, whereas White and Asian students have disproportionately low incidences.
- Compared to district averages, Black students have more than twice as much representation in disciplinary referrals than their population.
- Students having Special Education identifications are also consistently overrepresented disproportionately in referrals.
- Year over year, more than 30% of Black students with disciplinary referrals had a Special Education identification, which is more than twice the district average of any other students with Special Education indicators.
- Students in schools that have more vulnerable populations rate their educational experience lower than district averages. These students rate their experiences more negatively in the categories of belonging, climate, rigorous expectations, and school safety.
- For 3rd–5th graders, there was a shift in positive sentiments from students at HSVI, Title 1, and high Black student population campuses, with scores all falling below average in 2023 compared to 2022.
- The most noticeable changes occurred within school safety (falling 8.7 points from the previous year) and teacher–student relationships (dropping 6 points below the district average) at high Black student population campuses.
- For 6th–12th graders, with the exception of teacher–student relationships, Alternative and Special campus students rated the district more favorably than average in every category.
- There were differences in outcomes for respective student groups on the climate survey that can give minor insights.
- Students within marginalized populations (dyslexic, EB/EL, FRPL eligible, and SpEd) consistently reported below-average positive feelings in every category.
- Gifted and Talented students generally reported above-average positive feelings associated with school belonging, climate, rigorous expectations, and school safety. Other groups typically reported less than average positive feelings.
- For 6th–12th graders, 8th graders typically reported less than average positive feelings in any of the respective categories, whereas 6th graders reported above-average positive feelings.
- When scores were aggregated for the year, African American students typically had the most consistently below-average positive feelings in all categories.
- In 2022, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders had high negative feelings in all categories.

### ***Staff-Centered Focus Area***

- Districtwide there are higher proportions of White teachers relative to student population and lower proportions of Hispanic/Latine teachers relative to student population.
- Across the district, the gaps between student and teacher demographics have narrowed over time due to increases in Hispanic/Latine teachers and decreases in Hispanic/Latine student percentages.



- There are differences in demographic representation by campus grouping, with Hispanic/Latine teachers being more likely to teach at an HSVI or a Title 1 campus.
- Black teachers have above-average representation at Title 1, Alternative, or high Black student population campuses.
- White teachers are most concentrated at Special campuses.
- There has been a decrease in new hires across all demographics.
- White new hires have seen the largest numerical decrease since 2018.
- Overall, the district's retention rate has been declining since 2020.
- Recently, Special campuses have had the highest retention rates of any campus type.
- High Black student population and Title 1 campuses saw large decreases in retention between 2021 and 2022, leading to these campuses having the lowest retention within the district.
- Using a 5-year average, HSVI campuses had the lowest retention rate at 81.3%, compared to the 83.5% district average. However, lately, the campuses have seen above district average retention.
- Teachers, in general, are leaving Austin ISD, with the number of teachers falling from 4,868 in 2018 to 3,910 in 2022.
- There are only slight differences between races as it relates to teacher retention.
- Proportionately, White teachers' retention rates have consistently declined since 2018.
- Teachers at Special campuses consistently make more money than any of their counterparts.
- There was an increase in average salaries for all teachers in the 2021 school year.
- Across the district, the average tenure of teachers is about 8 years. However, tenured averages at the campuses analyzed were below district average every year.
- HSVI campuses have less experienced teachers, but the experience level has grown closer to the average every year.
- Title 1 schools have more teachers with bachelor's degrees than the district average and fewer master's degrees.
- Alternative campuses have the highest proportion of teachers with no certification.

### ***Resource Allocation Focus Area***

- The district's funding priorities have shifted considerably throughout the last 5 years, with more funding going into capital outlay than any other in recent years.

- Across the district, instructional and school leadership expenditures are decreasing substantially.
- Special campuses consistently have the most expenditures compared to their counterparts.
- Alternative programs have the least amount of instructional leadership expenditures.
- HSVI, Title 1, and Alternative programs have consistently below-average expenditures in every category.

# Document Review

## Key Findings

- The district has conducted several descriptive and root cause analyses in preparation for action planning. **These efforts illustrate the time AISD has dedicated to data collection and analysis to better understand district challenges and contexts pertaining to education equity.** These types of processes have been completed for the 2021 Texas Equitable Access Roadmap, the 2022 Long-Range Plan, and the 2021 Equity Plan.
- Several key mechanisms have been implemented to drive systemic change within the district. Notable among these are the Local Accountability System (LAS), and the Campus Improvement Plans. **These mechanisms are developed and can be adapted to individual school contexts. Both mechanisms have the potential to be leveraged for systemic improvement.**
- **Important issues of inequity are highlighted across AISD documentation, but our analyses suggest (1) a duplication of efforts and (2) little planning for implementation.** This observation was a prevailing and recurring theme discernible across the documents under review. Information pertaining to the district's strategic direction in priority focus areas is not easily accessible or navigable. In the 2021 Texas Equitable Access Roadmap alone, there are over 25 strategies to implement. However, there is little evidence of strategies being coordinated across functional areas or of a continuous improvement process. Overall, the documentation is voluminous, and much of the language on goals, recommendations, and frameworks is not used consistently across materials.
- **AISD's 2019 African American Achievement Plan and 2021 Equity Plan were minimally referenced in subsequent planning and procedural documents that underwent review.** Many of the identified issues within these plans are the same or like those identified and examined within other AISD documents.<sup>1</sup> This suggests a lack of utilization of these plans as policy or reference documents. The level to which strategic and policy documents are integrated is indicative of a larger theme—a lack of alignment and coherence across strategic planning efforts.
- **The strategic planning documents offered on the AISD website do not provide a clear and coherent understanding of the district's long-term objectives, anchor strategies, or a vision for the future of the district.** Additionally, little has been documented around the implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the strategies underpinning the strategic framework.
- **Current documents outlining the district's equity commitments do not amply address the district's challenges in identifying and supporting students with disabilities or students who**

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the 2021 Equity Plan highlighted disparate results in disciplinary outcomes across student groups and offers district actions/responses. The responses offered in the plan do not align with the strategies found in the 2022 Long-Range Plan for the Behavior Supports at Secondary Campuses Immediate Goal. The 2021 Equity Plan recommended revisions to the student code of conduct and changes to the duration of punishment for violations. Those recommendations are not found in the 2022 Long-Range Plan.

**identify as LGBTQ+.** Given the appointment of a management team to monitor district special education activities and the dearth of information pertaining to academic outcomes and experiences of LGBTQ+ students, it will become increasingly important to collect data on the supplementary supports and resources offered to these student groups.

# Select Policy Review

In reviewing the *Student Success Guide*, the *Student Handbook*, and the *Intradistrict Transfers and Classroom Assignments Transfer Policy*, several key considerations emerged that offer valuable insights for future policy revision and enhancement. It is imperative to conduct a thorough review and revision of the policy, explicitly incorporating equity principles to address bias, promote diversity, and ensure access to educational opportunities for all students, while also implementing mechanisms for collecting and disseminating data disaggregated by social identity to identify and address disparities effectively.

## Key Findings

- **Student Success Guide:** While the guide emphasizes academic excellence and student development, there is a need to explicitly integrate equity principles to address bias, promote diversity, and ensure educational opportunities for all students. Mechanisms for collecting and disseminating disaggregated data by social identity should be implemented to effectively identify and address disparities.
- **Student Handbook:** The handbook includes several supportive measures for students facing various challenges. However, to enhance its impact, it should harmonize terminology related to equity, diversity, and inclusion and ensure consistent procedures for addressing disciplinary issues and student transfers. This will reduce ambiguity and ensure fair treatment across all schools.
- **Intradistrict Transfers and Classroom Assignments Transfer Policy:** The policy supports student transfers to promote diversity, but it needs clearer guidelines and equitable application to prevent potential biases. Standardizing procedures and embedding anti-bias language can further strengthen its equity focus.

## Next Steps

1. **Policy Review and Revision:** Conduct a thorough review and revision of the policies, explicitly incorporating equity principles. This includes establishing a centralized review process to identify and resolve inconsistencies, ensuring that all policies complement rather than contradict each other.
2. **Data Practices:** Implement robust mechanisms for data collection, disaggregation, and dissemination. This will help in identifying disparities and making informed decisions to address inequities.
3. **Consistency and Alignment:** Promote alignment and consistency among policies by harmonizing terminology and standardizing procedures. This will enhance clarity, reduce ambiguity, and ensure fair treatment across schools.
4. **Embedding Equity and Inclusion:** Ensure that principles of equity and inclusion are embedded throughout all policies. Incorporate anti-bias language and ensure accessibility for diverse populations to create an inclusive educational environment.

5. **Interest Holder Engagement:** Establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback and continuous improvement. Foster transparency and accountability by actively involving interest holders in shaping policies that better serve their diverse needs and experiences.

# Focus Groups

## **Key Takeaways**

- While many individuals who participated in focus groups had positive things to say about the district's intentions and desire to be inclusive, there was a consensus across all focus groups that Austin ISD is failing many of its most vulnerable students, defined in the protocol as students with disabilities; students of color; low-income students; students who are members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus (LGBTQ+) community; or students who fall into more than one of these groups.
  - More than other groups, the LGBTQ+ student community was viewed by many adults as being supported by the district. This was not mentioned specifically, however, in student focus groups.
- A lack of resources was mentioned by every group interviewed, with parents most vocal about resource inequities, such as inequities in facilities, not enough dual language programs or parent support specialists, lack of mental health professionals, and inconsistent or limited provision of valuable programs.
- A lack of consistent policies, personnel, and initiatives makes it difficult for teachers, staff, and principals to articulate what equity means in Austin ISD and which initiatives attempt to achieve equity within the district.
- Teachers cited a lack of relevant professional development and a good deal of burnout.
- Newcomer students and students with disabilities were thought to be ill-served due to inconsistencies with staffing and staff professional development across the district.
- African American/Black students were rarely mentioned explicitly. While Black students make up only 6% of Austin ISD student population, their experience seems to be overshadowed by the needs of more populous student groups.

## **Key Findings Related to Students**

- Austin ISD teachers, staff, and principals describe themselves and fellow Austin ISD staff members as caring individuals who are doing what they can to help children.
- Teachers, staff, and principals agreed that Austin ISD schools and the district offer their LGBTQ+ communities of teachers and students a sense of belonging.
- While many individuals who participated in focus groups had positive things to say about the district's intentions and desire to be inclusive, there was a consensus across all focus groups that Austin ISD is failing many of its most vulnerable students.
- Austin ISD constituents felt that the district does not offer adequate training and support to enable it to address the wide array of its students' needs. As examples, participants indicated that students in special education experience extensive challenges in having their needs addressed and that mental health supports and services are lacking, so teachers and staff often rely on punitive disciplinary approaches to address behavioral challenges.
- While Austin ISD offers some supports and services that are well regarded (e.g., parent support specialists, bilingual and dual language programs), the district does not implement them with consistency or broad accessibility across the district.
- Teachers lack adequate training in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). At times, teachers rationalize why students do not meet expectations in ways that place the onus on the students or students' families without accounting for the challenges that students face or the needs they present.

- African American/Black students were rarely mentioned explicitly outside of student focus groups. While Black students make up only 6% of the Austin ISD student population, their experience seems to be very much overshadowed by the needs of more populous student groups.

### ***Key Findings Related to Staff***

- Having a principal that provides strong support for DEI initiatives creates high job satisfaction among like-minded teachers and staff.
- Austin ISD employees valued a variety of professional development offered by the district, such as the Leadership Pathways and ESL Academy.
- Incentives to hire bilingual and special education teachers appear positive to participants, but shortages of teachers in these areas, and others, are still prominent, especially at schools with lower socioeconomic status.
- Hiring delays are resulting in the loss of quality teacher candidates.
- Lack of consistent programming and initiatives at the district level was the theme mentioned by far most often by teachers, principals, staff, and parents in focus groups, followed by insufficient staffing.

### ***Key Findings Related to Resource Allocation***

- While focus group respondents named a variety of school- and community-based services and resources that they find or have found beneficial to some degree in their experience with Austin ISD, participants in every focus group expressed an overall feeling that there are inadequate resources to fully address student needs.
- Many programs are offered in a single or a limited number of schools, with inadequate staffing and staff training and/or for a limited period of time. Other resources (e.g., curricula) are presented without the appropriate training for teachers to use them effectively.
- School buildings are inadequately maintained, resulting in environments that are not conducive to learning.



# School Walkthroughs

As per the district’s request, student performance on the state assessment, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) was used to determine school selection, to further explore how Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) practices can be tied to student academic performance. Six campuses were selected to walk through: two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. Findings presented in this memo intentionally include student and staff racial and gender demographics, to contextualize and compare the types of academic and social supports, programmatic variability, and interpersonal relationships that students experience at each campus. To keep these campuses anonymous and our findings confidential, pseudonyms have been assigned to each campus referenced in the memo. Table 1 lists the pseudonyms and the selection criteria for the schools.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. School Pseudonyms and Selection Criteria**

School pseudonym	School selection criterion
School A	Elementary school with lower proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency
School B	Elementary school with higher proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency in the district
School C	Middle school with lower proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency in the district
School D	Middle school with higher proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency in the district
School E	High school with lower proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency in the district
School F	High school with higher proportions of students meeting grade level proficiency in the district

## ***Findings Across Schools A and B - Elementary Schools***

Overall, both schools had structures in place that contributed to strong, positive campus cultures, positive relationships, student engagement, and displays of joy. However, the two schools differ in student and staff racial diversity, conditions of facilities, and availability of instructional resources and materials. These three areas can profoundly impact the quality of schooling that students perceive their education to have, as well as the richness of academic opportunities they face. Homogeneous bodies of staff, inadequate facility conditions,

<sup>2</sup> Additional campus demographic and socioeconomic data are intentionally not shared, so that schools cannot be identified.

and limited resources can hinder the ability to develop and sustain CRSE practices if students' needs are not met, or understood, at a complex level.

Both School A and School B demonstrated welcoming environments and strong, positive relationships in which both adults and students respect, celebrate, and support one another. There was a strong sense of belonging throughout classrooms on both campuses, demonstrated through the ways that students and staff often acknowledged one another by name and displayed joy in their interactions. Students from both campuses were observed demonstrating willingness to support one another and offered help not only to their peers but also to teachers and staff. This observation is strengthened by the way adults from both schools modeled supportive behavior and willingness to receive support.

To further contextualize and compare the experiences of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is worth noting the difference between the two campuses' racial and ethnic diversity of teachers and staff. Staff at School A included Black, Hispanic/Latine, and Asian educators whose diversity seemed representative of the school's student body. At School B, overall racial diversity within classrooms, among both students and staff, appeared limited. A large majority of students are White, with some Asian, Hispanic/Latine, or multiracial students, and the principal noted a slight increase in diversity within the student population, compared to previous years. However, there was little to no racial diversity among the teaching staff, as all observed teachers of record were White, and only the teaching support staff were people of color. Consequently, there is a lack of adult role models who share the racial or ethnic identities of Black, Indigenous, or other students of color.

The current facilities at School A are older, less spacious, and less accessible for students with physical disabilities, especially in comparison to School B, which is higher performing; serves a predominantly White, more affluent campus; and offers a more modern and accommodating infrastructure.

The conditions of the classroom libraries and the availability of instructional manipulatives were strikingly different between the two campuses, a notable observation considering their importance in elementary education. School B had robust classroom libraries with many books featuring diverse characters and/or stories, clear organization, and inviting arrangements. However, School A, a campus serving a majority of Black and Hispanic/Latine students from low-income backgrounds, had fewer available books and manipulatives in classrooms.

Furthermore, the types of student work on display at each school revealed additional differences between the schools. Student worksheets comprised a large portion of displayed student work at School A, which differs from the many artworks and student-created projects displayed at School B, suggesting a different approach to student output, and possibly an indication of lack of curricular resources and/or differing teaching philosophies. The presence of artwork and student-created projects at School B reflects the prioritization of student creativity and exploration, which is fostered when teachers feel that there is time in the instructional day for students to express themselves artistically and when students can access resources independently to build deep understanding of concepts and to finish complex assignments. The prevalence of displayed student

worksheets at School A suggests a different environment that may prioritize rote learning or limited resources, and in which students are unable to explore their learning independently and/or to express themselves in mediums other than written assignments.

While teaching and staff efforts to build supportive and inclusive environments were similar at both campuses, the availability of both human and material resources was markedly imbalanced between Schools A and B. These gaps in resources could further widen the disparity in students' academic performance, not only between the two campuses but also between students of color and their White peers across the district.

## ***Findings Across Schools C and D - Middle Schools***

Both School C and School D aim to create positive environments, exhibiting generally positive and respectful relationships between teachers and students. They each put forth efforts to promote inclusivity and respect, and they take similar approaches to instructional student engagement, with heavy use of technology at both campuses. However, despite these similarities, they exhibit different approaches and outcomes.

School C faces general school safety challenges that have created a difference in autonomy between the two campuses. School C implemented a schoolwide bathroom procedure due to incidents that occurred in the previous year. Students are required to be accompanied by a teacher when using the restroom during an elective period, and students are not allowed to use restrooms during class unless accompanied by their teacher as a whole class. Meanwhile, School D allows students to leave classrooms individually to use the restrooms, freely congregate in common areas during lunch, and transition between classes with little supervision. School C serves a high percentage of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds while School D serves a body of mostly White students from more affluent backgrounds.

School C displayed inclusivity through a diverse teaching staff that mirrors the predominantly Hispanic/Latine and Black/African American student population, and had visual representations of diversity and active efforts to encourage family and community involvement throughout the campus. In contrast, School D had an overwhelmingly White, homogeneous staff, and had limited cultural representations in the physical environment. School D also showed a gap in bilingual communication and potential gaps in the ways that students from diverse communities are characterized.

The actions of the principal at School C largely contribute to a positive adult culture and strong school relationships, with a high priority on empathy and compassion in partnering with nonprofits to provide physical and mental health resources and programs for students.

Conversely, at School D, principal interaction with students was minimal, which seemed to influence the limited level of staff engagement with students during transitions. While students enjoyed much more autonomy, and

demonstrated respectful language and actions, at School D, student social dynamics still varied, particularly with a few students of color experiencing isolation.

Overall, School C exhibits a more involved approach to student well-being and staff–student relationships. However, instruction, academic expectations, and rigor are stronger at School D.

## ***Findings Across Schools E and F - Middle Schools***

Schools E and F share challenges in ensuring affirming environments and culturally responsive practices for all students, including lacking staff diversity. However, School F appears to have more structures in place to support positive teacher–student relationships and inclusivity. It provides many opportunities for relationship building through campus programming and procedures, and it has a clearly defined schedule that includes an entire class period, built into the instructional day, for teachers to meet with and provide instructional intervention for students struggling in core content areas.

The schools' levels of student autonomy also contribute to their respective senses of welcoming and affirming environments. School F has procedures and a staff culture that encourage and trust students to freely interact throughout the campus, whereas School E largely depends on administrators' presence and direct interactions with students to enforce student attendance, and lacks the same level of student trust.

Finally, while both School E and School F have positive staff cultures and make efforts to celebrate diversity and inclusivity within their physical environments, both also demonstrated challenges with ensuring that their most vulnerable students are well supported. Moreover, these two schools present contrasting environments with regard to student engagement and instructional approaches. In School E, a campus with a majority of students of color, staff–student engagement in common spaces often centers around behavioral management, while students in classes were often disengaged from learning tasks, and curriculum and instruction were less engaging and rigorous. Additionally, resource limitations were evident, with a lack of textbooks and technology. At School F, a campus with a majority White student population, there were many observed instances of on-task, student-to-student engagement during instructional time, which included technology integration, collaborative activities, and active learning strategies. However, several instances where students of color and multilingual students were not receiving the same level of attention or academic support as their White peers were observed at School F.

Overall, while the two schools have similar struggles, the most defining difference between them is that School F has much more capacity, through school systems, staff preparedness, and availability of resources, to be able to improve integration of CRSE practices and better serve their most vulnerable students.

# Recommendations

## Student Recommendations

<p>Student Inequity #1: Inequitable Treatment of Students of Color</p>	<p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 1A: Implement Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Training</b>  <i>Implement a comprehensive CRSE training program for all district staff, with specialized modules tailored to various roles within the district.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 1B: Create Youth Participatory Action Research Projects</b>  <i>Develop and implement Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects that actively involve students in the research process, empowering them to contribute their voices, perspectives, and insights.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 1C: Implement the Culturally Responsive School Walkthrough Tool</b>  <i>Integrate the Culturally Responsive School Walkthrough Tool to systematically assess differential treatment.</i></p>
<p>Student Inequity #2: Disparities in Academic Outcomes and Disciplinary Measures Affecting Marginalized Student Groups</p>	<p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 2A: Implement Race-Conscious Interventions and Programs</b>  <i>Develop and implement race-conscious interventions and programs that are inclusive of the needs of special education students and multilingual learners.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 2B: Continually Monitor Disproportionality</b>  <i>Expand the scope of data collection and analysis beyond special education to include comprehensive monitoring for disproportionality across various metrics within the school and district.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 2C: Revise and Systematize the Identification Process for the Gifted and Talented Program</b>  <i>Revise and systematize the identification process and criteria for the gifted and talented program to ensure that it is inclusive and equitable and minimizes the influence of bias.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 2D: Implement Extensive Behavior Management Training for Staff</b>  <i>Initiate extensive training programs across the district for all staff involved in behavior management, including teachers, administrators, school resource officers, and police.</i></p>
<p>Student Inequity #3: Inequitable Access to High Quality Dual Language Programming</p>	<p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 3A: Establish a Diverse Corps of Dual-Language Educators</b>  <i>Proactively recruit and retain a diverse corps of dual-language educators whose cultural backgrounds reflect those of the student population.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 3B: Establish High-Quality Bilingual Programs Within Bilingual Communities</b>  <i>Establish and maintain robust bilingual education programs within the communities where bilingual students reside.</i></p>

<p>Student Inequity #4: Inequitable Access to and Quality of Mental Health Supports for Marginalized Students</p>	<p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 4A: Increase Behavioral and Mental Health Staff</b>  <i>Invest in recruiting, training, and retaining a behavioral and mental health workforce that has the capacity to support the apparent need across the district.</i></p> <p><b>STUDENT RECOMMENDATION 4B: Offer High-Quality Technical Assistance</b>  <i>Offer technical assistance aimed at enhancing the capacity and advancing the ongoing refinement of integrated, multitiered school-based systems.</i></p>
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**Staff Recommendations**

<p>Staff Inequity #1: Inequitable Access to Quality Teachers and Diverse Staff</p>	<p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 1A: Diversify the Educator Workforce</b>  <i>Develop and articulate a clear, unified vision along with an actionable strategy aimed at expanding the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the district's educators.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 1B: Regularly Monitor District Operations</b>  <i>Periodically review the district's existing policies, procedures, strategic plans, cultural traditions, and public communications.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 1C: Implement Structured Interviews and Blind Resume Reviews for Bias Reduction</b>  <i>Implement structured and standardized interview procedures, including the use of bias-reducing methods such as blind resume reviews.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 1D: Allocate Funding to Support Educators</b>  <i>Allocate funding to offer comprehensive and integrated programming for educators, which can encompass payment of preparation fees, substantive stipends for additional work, and/or housing allowances.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 1E: Establish Credentialing Pathways for Prospective Teacher Candidates</b>  <i>Establish a pathway for district-classified staff members, including paraprofessionals, bus drivers, tutors, and custodial staff, to access designated funds for the purpose of obtaining their teaching credentials.</i></p>
<p>Staff Inequity #2: Lack of Support, Opportunities, and Incentives for Teachers and Staff Members</p>	<p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 2A: Offer Equity-Focused Professional Learning for Educators</b>  <i>Develop and offer comprehensive professional learning opportunities designed to cultivate an equity-focused mindset among both pre-service educators (teacher candidates), current in-service teachers, and Austin ISD school building leaders.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 2B: Implement Culturally Responsive Mentoring and Induction Programs</b>  <i>Implement mentoring and induction programs that are tailored to reflect and respect cultural diversity, fostering an environment conducive to the growth of teacher leaders and school building leaders.</i></p>
<p>Staff Inequity #3: Inequitable Teacher</p>	<p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 3A: Train School Leaders in Trust-Building, Feedback Delivery, and Culturally Responsive School Leadership</b>  <i>Provide training for school leaders to develop trust-building skills, to deliver meaningful,</i></p>

<p>Working Conditions</p>	<p><i>constructive feedback to teachers, and to implement culturally responsive school leadership by enhancing the professional environment.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 3B: Establish Teacher Leadership and Decision-Making Pathways</b>  <i>Forge clear pathways for teacher leadership, involve educators in decision-making processes that affect classroom and school operations, and provide opportunities for professional growth.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 3C: Guarantee Equitable Access to Quality Educational Resources</b>  <i>Guarantee equitable access to quality resources and facilities that support effective teaching and learning, including essential supplies, instructional materials, and up-to-date technology.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 3D: Streamline Instructional Initiatives for CRSE Strategy Adoption</b>  <i>Streamline instructional initiatives to ensure that they are interlinked and that they coherently build upon one another, fostering districtwide adoption of shared CRSE instructional strategies.</i></p> <p><b>STAFF RECOMMENDATION 3E: Modify School Schedules for Teacher Collaboration</b>  <i>Modify school schedules to promote collaborative opportunities among teachers, including dedicated time for peer observation and refinement of instructional techniques.</i></p>
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**Resource Allocation Recommendations**

<p>Resource Allocation Inequity #1: Inequitable Distribution and Spending of Resources and Opportunities (Financial, Human Capital, Facilities)</p>	<p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 1A: Develop a Standardized Process to Rank and Serve Title I Schools</b>  <i>Develop and implement a standardized formula or protocol to guide the determination of Title I “ranking and serving” within the Austin ISD.</i></p> <p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 1B: Implement Hold-Harmless Provisions for Underresourced Schools</b>  <i>Implement measures that safeguard Title I and socially vulnerable (SV) campuses from experiencing fiscal reductions greater than the Austin ISD average.</i></p> <p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 1C: Create Long-Term Agreements for Nonprofit Organizations</b>  <i>Establish enduring partnerships with nonprofit organizations through long-term agreements that guarantee continuity of essential services.</i></p> <p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 1D: Strategically Allocate Student Support Staff</b>  <i>Strategically allocate a greater proportion of student support staff to those schools identified as having the highest levels of need.</i></p> <p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 1E: Develop a Comprehensive Bond Communication Strategy</b>  <i>Develop a comprehensive communication strategy to clearly articulate to schools and families the prioritization process and timeline associated with the bond.</i></p>
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<p>Resource Allocation Inequity #2: Facilities</p>	<p><b>RESOURCE ALLOCATION RECOMMENDATION 2A: Prioritize Cleaning, Modernizing, and the Appropriate Repurposing of Classroom Spaces</b>  <i>Irrespective of future bond modernization plans, prioritize the cleaning, modernization, and appropriate repurposing of classroom spaces to ensure they are immediately conducive to learning, with priority to schools that have been historically neglected.</i></p>
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**General Recommendations**

<p>General Inequity #1: Lack of Coherence in Austin ISD's Approach to Reducing Inequities Along with a Vast Number of Recommendations and Initiatives</p>	<p><b>GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 1A: Develop a Comprehensive Action Plan</b>  <i>Craft a comprehensive action plan that outlines detailed steps, responsibilities, timelines, and evaluation metrics for each recommendation to ensure effective and consistent implementation across the district.</i></p> <p><b>GENERAL RECOMMENDATION 1B: Provide Comprehensive Training in Implementation Science</b>  <i>Provide district leadership with comprehensive training in implementation science to enhance their ability to effectively execute, monitor, and assess equity-focused recommendations as well as wider organizational goals and initiatives.</i></p>
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