

Family Engagement Services by Parent Support Specialists

2019–2020

Overview

Austin Independent School District (AISD) staff provide community and parent engagement support and learning opportunities to families of students attending district schools. AISD's Parent Engagement Support Office (PESO) staff, within the Department of Communication and Community Engagement, coordinate many of these support and learning activities. Using a combination of federal, district, and city funding, AISD employed parent support specialists (PSSs) at most of its Title I elementary, middle, and high schools during the 2019–2020 school year. PSSs help enhance school-family communication, partnerships, and relationships by connecting families, schools, and community resources, with the goal of increasing student achievement.

This report summarizes some of the parent and family engagement services provided by PSSs to parents and families at their schools during the 2019–2020 school year, as recorded in eCST, one of the district's data systems for recording student/family services. These data do not represent all the family and community engagement activities and services provided by district staff during the school year.

Family and Community Engagement Services and Learning Opportunities

AISD's PESO staff provide a variety of services and learning opportunities across the district (<https://www.austinisd.org/family-support>). Examples of these services include parent and family engagement support to schools, communication and outreach to families and community members, parent and family education opportunities (e.g., workshops, classes), and professional development sessions for AISD staff. The 2019–2020 school year also included COVID-19 pandemic support services for families and students. PESO staff also provide guidance and monthly training to PSSs about engaging parents through partnerships to strengthen students' academic success. PSSs use the district's eCST data system to record their parent and family engagement activities. Each time PSSs provide an individualized service to a student's family (e.g., home visit, referral to a social service agency, translation service, one-on-one meeting), they document the service on the student's service tracking record. For 2019–2020, AISD PSSs provided services to 19,832 students' parents, families, or legal guardians, of whom 72% had students at elementary grade levels. The number of services to parents, families, or legal guardians increased significantly after COVID-19-related school closures in the spring of 2020. PSSs provided services to 15,503 individuals after school closures on March 13, 2020, compared with 8,324 prior to school closings (note that some students received services both before and after school closings; therefore, the unique number of services provided for the entire school year is lower than the combined number of services provided before and after campus closures).

In addition, PSSs helped organize and/or conduct classes, trainings, and workshops to



support parent education and life skills. For 2019–2020, AISD families participated and engaged in 3,513 of these events at 72 schools; these events focused on topics such as academic improvement (54%), health and wellness (22%), educating parents about city services (15%), student attendance (5%), and student behavior (1%).

Parent Survey Feedback on Impact of Workshops

To obtain parents' feedback, a survey was sent to parents who attended a workshop series provided by PSSs during the school year. Of those who completed the survey (N = 626), 98% of parents responded that the workshop helped them increase their knowledge. The most commonly mentioned topic presented in workshops, according to the survey results, was Maestro en Casa (14%). Other commonly mentioned workshop topics included health and wellness (e.g., cooking and nutrition; 13%), computer classes (13%), family literacy (8%), bilingual education in AISD (4%), and parenting classes (3%). Due to school closures, many in-person workshops that had been offered in previous years were no longer offered. PSSs continued efforts to engage families over the summer and held three events in June 2020.

Annually, AISD surveys all parents who have students attending AISD schools to gain feedback from them about school climate, their engagement by school staff, information they receive from schools, and district initiatives. (For the most recent report, go to the [AISD DRE](#) homepage and click on “Interactive Reports”; from that page, go to the upper left drop-down menu, entitled “Interactive Reports List,” and select “Family Survey” to see the most recent district and campus survey results.)

Conclusion

AISD provides a variety of family engagement learning opportunities and support services on an annual basis to family members of students. These services are part of the district's vision and mission to provide a comprehensive, high-quality, engaging educational experience for all students (<https://www.austinisd.org/about-us>).

Parent and Family Engagement Policies.

Parent and family engagement is part of AISD policy. AISD policy ([Local Community Relations, section GK](#)) states that the district's mission is to provide, in partnership with parents and the community, a comprehensive educational experience that is high quality and challenging for all students.

At the federal level, any school district that receives federal funding (AISD is such a district) must provide opportunities for parent and family engagement, communication, and support (<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>).

AISD staff use family engagement data for various reporting and compliance purposes.



Anne Fine, MA, MPAff

Department of Research and Evaluation



4000 IH 35 Frontage Road | Austin, TX 78704
512.414.1724 | fax: 512.414.1707
www.austinisd.org/dre | Twitter: @AISD_DRE

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