

Assessment Centers:

AISD's New Equitable and Rigorous Form of Personnel Selection for Assistant Principals and Principals

What is an assessment center?

An assessment center is a common personnel selection and development tool that uses multiple exercises to measure behavioral dimensions of interest that are pertinent to effective job performance (Arthur & Day, 2011; Hoffman, Melchers, Blair, Kleinmann, & Ladd, 2011). Assessment centers are conducted over several hours, and performance on each exercise is assessed by a number of trained assessors. Exercises within an assessment center are created and chosen to reflect the tasks that an employee in the job of interest would typically complete on the job. For example, if responding to email is an important aspect of effective job performance for an assistant principal (AP), then an assessment center exercise may require AP candidates respond to several emails.

Why use an assessment center?

While assessment centers may take longer to complete and require more preparation than other selection methods, such as an interview, they are considered to be a more robust personnel selection method. Assessment centers tend to have strong criterion-related validity, meaning that performance in an assessment center is a strong predictor of outcomes of interest (e.g., job performance) (Arthur, Day, McNelly, & Edens, 2003). Additionally, assessment centers are commonly found to be more equitable and be less biased than other selection methods (e.g., cognitive ability tests) (Arthur & Day, 2011). Therefore, given that assessment centers tend to be good predictors of job performance and more equitable than many other selection methods, their use to assess APs and principals in Austin Independent School District (AISD) is appropriate. Moreover, many organizations use assessment centers for personnel selection, especially for leadership roles. The University of Texas at Austin, Toyota, AT&T, and McKinsey are just several of thousands of organizations that have harnessed the power of assessment centers to assist in hiring decisions.

Assessment centers also tend to be objective, rather than subjective. If proper rating systems and rubrics are put into place, candidates are simply scored based on their performance in the assessment center activities. Bias and subjectivity are less likely to be evident in such situations when scoring and ratings are made clear. Past AP and principal selection in AISD relied mostly on interviews, which are known to carry forms of bias, subjectivity, or nepotism. By implementing assessment centers, AISD is actively working toward the goal of creating an equitable system for selecting and retaining diverse, equity-focused leaders.

Assessment Centers in AISD

Aside from the benefits of helping strengthen the process for selecting high-quality, diverse personnel, AISD assessment centers have also proven to be a positive experience for assessors. Principals who have attended the assessment centers as assessors have had the chance to see firsthand how rigorous the new hiring process is for candidates. Many principals we spoke with in Spring 2019 mentioned that attending the assessment centers as an assessor helped them to understand the hiring process more and to understand the alignment between the new hiring process and the AISD Leadership Framework and CAPR competencies. Additionally, being an assessor has been described as a great learning experience and could provide deeper insight into the expected competencies of leadership in AISD.

The AISD Department of Leadership Development continues to change the game by implementing innovative and modern ways of selecting the best and brightest leaders for our schools. To learn more about assessment centers in AISD, including both candidates' and principals' perceptions of the new process, please reference the [2018–2019 Leadership Development Evaluation Report](#).

References

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March 2020

Publication 19.19