Equity in Austin Independent School District

District Summary of Equity Work and Action Steps for Improvement

Executive Summary

At the request of the Austin Independent School District (AISD) board of trustees, AISD undertook an equity self-assessment and the development of a responsive plan of action to address equity gaps identified from the assessment (i.e., the Equity Project).

The purpose of the Equity Project is to review and assist AISD district and campus staff, stakeholders, and the Austin community to understand the current environment; self-identify areas of concern, organizational change, and improvements; facilitate dialogue among the different stakeholders; build accountability; and instill greater understanding and commitment to addressing equity, with the explicit goal of leading to equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

The district's equity self-assessment focused on three major areas: student achievement, student discipline, and access to high-quality programs and curriculum. Numerous sources of evidence were examined to support the equity self-assessment. These included (a) a review of achievement gap indicators, (b) findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, and (c) a Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) curriculum audit.

The data collection and analyses revealed several important issues to consider in the education of all students. For example, the gap analyses and equity study showed gaps, both in achievement and access, for students, especially African American students and economically disadvantaged students. According to the feedback from the self-assessment, district stakeholders generally believe the district is doing an adequate job of addressing equity, but still recognize that more work and further staff training remains. The remaining work includes addressing AISD's equity issues and barriers at the classroom level as well as at the school and district levels.

Findings from the Equity Project have been incorporated into the work plans and strategic plan of the district. Many of these programs will be developed over the next year (i.e., 2016–2017), with the goal of implementing them as soon as possible. AISD's Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) staff will continue to support the district's work related to equity. In future years, DRE staff also will determine how evaluation plans can incorporate the study of Equity Project activities and ideas to measure the efficacy and successfulness of these programs.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

Purpose

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) is committed to fostering an inclusive, healthy, and welcoming environment for all students. We value equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we have high expectations for all students, employees, parents/guardians, and community members.

The AISD board of trustees requested that the district undertake an equity self-assessment and build a framework for such a self-assessment. The board shared feedback on an equity framework and discussed data that the administration should review through an equity lens.

The purpose of the Equity Project is to review and assess Austin, AISD, campuses, and the community to understand the current environment; self-identify areas of concern, organizational change, and improvements; facilitate dialogue between the different stakeholders; build accountability; and instill greater understanding and commitment to addressing equity, with the explicit goal of leading to equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.

Background

The AISD board of trustees met during the February 9, 2015, board work session to discuss a letter presented by the Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP), a local nonprofit that, according to its website, "uses legal advocacy to empower Texas communities and create policy change" (texascivilrightsproject.org). The letter and accompanying 2014 report was a follow-up to a report issued in 2012 by TCRP that claimed the district was deficient in key areas related to equity, and demonstrated a lack of transparency with respect to how resources were spent. According to the major findings of the report, the district did not provide equal access to educational resources, which included academic and extracurricular resources, and private donations.

The letter by TCRP requested that AISD conduct a self-assessment on equity. In addition to referencing the 2014 report, the letter referenced a "Dear Colleague" letter that the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) had sent to all school districts and that raised questions of equity in schools across the United States. The OCR letter included criteria for assessing equity and nondiscrimination in education and suggested that districts use some framework to assess equity at their local level (OCR, 2014). TCRP suggested that AISD conduct the self-assessment following the guidance provided by OCR, and formally begin by February 2015 and conclude by the end of the school year (June 2015). TCRP stated that it would request the OCR investigate AISD if this self-assessment was not completed within the designated time frame.

Framework

The district's equity self-assessment focused on three major areas: student achievement, student discipline, and access to high-quality programs and curriculum. Numerous sources of evidence were examined to support the equity self-assessment. These included (a) a review of achievement gap indicators, (b) findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, and (c) a Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) curriculum audit.

The district's formal gap analysis and equity report served as the foundation for the equity self-assessment work. The gap analysis (Schmitt, Williams, & Christian, 2016) described the performance gaps between and among student groups district wide. The district equity report (Schmitt, 2016) showed school performance across multiple indicators within a school performance index and an instructional services index.[1] Student achievement gaps were examined using numerous indicators, including State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) math, reading, and writing results; 4-year federal graduation rates; disciplinary placement/removal rates; and a composite school performance index. Overall, results from both reports revealed performance gaps within and across schools.

> **Purpose: Understand the current environment; self-identify areas of concern, organizational change, and improvements; facilitate dialogue between the different stakeholders; build accountability; and instill greater understanding and commitment to addressing equity.**

The district's Equity Self-Assessment Survey was based on the Six Goals of Education Equity framework developed by Dr. Bradley Scott, Director of the Equity Assistance Center at the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), and later adapted into a process used by Voices for Racial Justice in Minneapolis, MN. Participating district stakeholders included school principals, members of the district advisory committee (DAC), and members of cabinet alignment. District stakeholders rated the implementation of numerous equity practices within three overall equity goals:

- Equity goal 1: Comparably high graduation rates and other student outcomes
- Equity goal 2: Equitable access and inclusion
- Equity goal 3: Equitable treatment and disciplinary policies and practices

On average, the district stakeholders' equity self-assessment ratings indicated the general perception that the district was somewhat meeting its equity challenges (using a scale of Not at all [1], Not much [2], Somewhat [3], To a great extent [4]).

As part of the strategic plan, the district contracted with TASA to conduct a detailed curriculum audit that was congruent with its portfolio of options for school districts. Following the initial proposal by TASA, the district superintendent asked TASA to align this work with the district's Equity Project. TASA provided a new scope of work that included an audit of equity in access to curriculum. The new proposal stated,

---

[1] See DRE publication #15.37 for details on the school performance index.

Under this area, the auditors will compare student work, survey data, and samples of curriculum from schools with different demographic characteristics to determine if schools with higher percentages of at-risk students are offering the same content and educational experiences to their students as schools with very low percentages of at-risk students. These analyses depend on the data received via online surveys and the extensiveness of student work submitted by teachers and collected by building principals. Analyses will include comparing the content, contexts, and cognitive types of the student work collected.

In the following sections of this report, results from each of the equity self-assessment efforts are summarized in the context of the relevant equity goal. An overview of evidence is presented, and action steps follow. The actions are further supported by a review of current policy and references from the current research/best practice literature.

Student Achievement

Summary of AISD Student Outcome Data

Student achievement findings from the gap analysis. Findings from the gap analysis (Schmitt et al., 2016) showed desirable trends across multiple academic indicators at the district level and for many student groups. However, gaps in students' academic achievement remained between some student groups and across schools in many areas. For example, greater percentages of White students than of their Hispanic and African American peers passed the STAAR tests and graduated from high school. Performance gaps narrowed between English language learners (ELLs) and their peers in STAAR reading and writing, but widened between ELLs and their peers in STAAR math. The race/ethnicity gap in disciplinary placement/ removal rates widened between African American and White students. Gaps in graduation rates narrowed slightly between Hispanic and White students, males and females, and ELLs and their peers, but widened between African American and White students.

Student achievement findings from the equity report. In the equity report (Schmitt, 2016), a variety of academic achievement indicators were used to create a measure of school performance. These indicators included (a) STAAR passing rates for all tests, (b) percentage of students not disciplined, (c) average daily attendance rate, (d) percentage of students scoring at or above AISD's college-ready standard on the Developmental Reading Assessment, (e) percentage of students not annual dropouts, (f) graduation rate, and (g) postsecondary enrollment rate. As with the gap analysis, findings from the equity report showed performance gaps within and across schools. In most instances, schools with higher instructional services index scores (i.e., schools with higher percentages of students who were economically disadvantaged, received bilingual or English as a second language services [ESL], or received special education [SPED] services) had lower school-performance index scores (i.e., scores based on STAAR, attendance, discipline, and college-readiness outcomes) than did schools with lower instructional-services index scores. However, some schools with high instructional services index scores also had high school-performance index scores.

Gaps between student groups measured with the school performance index were consistent across levels for all student groups, with the exception of ELLs. Generally, non-economically disadvantaged students outperformed economically disadvantaged students, and non-SPED students outperformed SPED students. While non-ELLs generally outperformed ELLs at high schools and middle schools on the school performance index, performance varied across elementary schools. At most elementary schools, the school performance index was similar for ELL students and non-ELL students. However, non-ELLs outperformed ELLs at a few elementary schools, while ELLs outperformed non-ELL students at some other elementary schools.

Student achievement findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey: Equity goal 1. On the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, district stakeholders responded to eight questions related to equity practices within equity goal 1 (i.e., comparably high graduation rates and other student outcomes). The survey questions in this section

were concentrated on expected student academic outcomes. The overall rating for this section of the survey was 2.85, where 2 = *Not much* and 3 = *Somewhat*. The overall rating for goal 1 was lowest among all three equity goals self-assessed.

Furthermore, four of the individual equity items rated under goal 1 specifically addressed student achievement and graduation/promotion. These were:

Are school promotion rates consistently high for all diverse learners?

- Average rating = 2.84

Are graduation rates consistently high for all diverse learners?

- Average rating = 2.77

Are there comparably high rates of participation in college and/or postsecondary preparation or is there competent preparation for school-to-work transition for all learners?

- Average rating = 2.72

Are there comparably high achievement outcomes for all learners?

- Average rating = 2.62

Summary of student achievement findings from the gap analysis, equity report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey. The triangulation of data from the gap analysis, equity report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey revealed consistent findings. Achievement gaps were found between student groups and within and across schools. The major findings included:

- Gaps between SPED students and their peers have been increasing on a number of academic outcomes.
- Wide gaps between White students and both Hispanic students and African American students remained over time, even given the slight gains made in STAAR math and writing.
- While gaps in graduation rates narrowed slightly between Hispanic and White students, as well as between ELLs and their peers, gaps in graduation rates widened between African American and White students.
- The relatively low overall district stakeholder self-assessment rating of equity in this area (i.e., equity goal 1: comparably high graduation rates and other student outcomes) reflected an overall acknowledgment of the equity issue in the district.
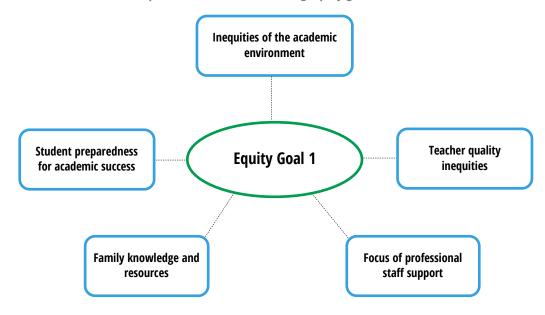
Perceived Barriers to Equity Goal 1: Comparably High Graduation Rates and Other Student Outcomes

In addition to rating AISD's achievement of equity practices related to equity goal 1 (i.e., comparably high graduation rates and other student outcomes) on the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, stakeholders also provided feedback on the issues they perceived as barriers to achieving this equity goal. Review of feedback revealed five potential perceived barriers to the district achieving equity in student outcomes (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Perceived Barriers to Achieving Equity Goal 1: Comparably High Graduation Rates and Other Student Outcomes
Stakeholders identified five potential barriers to achieving equity goal 1.

Source. Austin Independent School District Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Characteristics of the perceived barriers to equity goal 1. For each of the five potential perceived barriers to equity goal 1, a number of characteristics were identified as possible explanations why the barriers might be perceived as obstacles to the district achieving equity in student outcomes.

Inequities of the academic environment. Comments connected to this equity goal 1 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that the academic environment could be a barrier to achieving equity in student outcomes. These environmental characteristics included access to coursework, standardized test bias, well-focused literacy/biliteracy plans, cultural competency, school choice, tutoring and additional options for students off track, academic rigor for all student populations, availability of smaller class sizes for students challenged to learn in a regular size classroom, equitable access to technology and other resources, communication, and availability or awareness of school sponsored opportunities and programs.

Teacher quality inequities. Comments connected to this equity goal 1 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that teacher quality could be a barrier to achieving equity in student outcomes. These teacher characteristics included differentiation of need by student group; teacher expectations of students; cultural compe-

6

tency; equitable teaching experience and teacher quality across schools; and knowledge about achieving student engagement, serving special student populations, serving diverse student populations, graduation requirements, and data driven instruction.

Focus of professional staff support. Comments connected to this equity goal 1 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that the focus of professional staff could be a barrier to achieving equity in student outcomes. These professional staff characteristics included timesharing between student-oriented roles and other job functions, a focus on academic plans/goals, and support time assisting students and parents through the postsecondary application process.

Family knowledge and resources. Comments connected to this equity goal 1 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that family knowledge and resources could be a barrier to achieving equity in student outcomes. These family characteristics included home environment and resources, transportation, socioeconomic status, languages other than English spoken, knowledge and understanding of how to be successful in education system, family involvement and support, and family education level.

Student preparedness for academic success. Comments connected to this equity goal 1 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that student preparation could be a barrier to achieving equity in student outcomes. These student characteristics included academic skills and academic preparedness, attendance, engagement, socioeconomic status, languages other than English spoken, disciplinary issues, drop out, first-generation college in their family, and emotional or psychological stress.

Current Research on Equity in Student Achievement

Theoharis and Haddix (2011) found conversations about racial disparities in education were not particularly helpful to school leaders when critical questioning was absent and challenges were not presented. This seemed particularly true for school leaders who did not share racial and cultural norms with their student populations. To address this issue, school leaders must recognize how race and racism affect equitable academic access and can impede efforts toward closing the achievement gap. Theoharis and Haddix recommended school leaders consider the ways that race and racism were and are present in their own life experiences, and reflect on the differences between themselves and the students they serve. However, it was not sufficient to simply identify inequity based on race (e.g., by simply noting the gaps in STAAR passing rates between White and African American students). Leaders must identify the underlying assumptions behind the disparities to begin dismantling them.

Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) also emphasized that strong educational leadership for social justice and equity is critical to establishing inclusive and equitable education. They suggested school leaders provide evidence of changes in equity-focused processes and learning conditions, in addition to reporting student achievement outcomes in their schools. In this process, leaders would provide evidence of how they addressed barriers to academic achievement for various student groups in their schools.

Actions for Equity in Student Achievement

Table 1 summarizes findings from examining student achievement data, perceived barriers to equity identified from the equity self-assessment, and the administrative action steps being taken to achieve equitable student outcomes.

Table 1.
Summary of Data, Barriers, and Actions Associated with Student Achievement

AISD achievement data	Perceived barriers to equitable student outcomes	Actions for equitable student outcomes
Gaps are increasing between special education students and their peers on several academic outcomes. Gaps persist between White students and their Hispanic and African American peers on several academic outcomes; the gaps are the largest between White and African American students. Gaps narrowed between ELLs and their peers in STAAR reading and writing, but widened between ELLs and their peers in STAAR math. Gaps in graduation rates narrowed slightly between Hispanic and White students, males and females, and ELLs and their peers, but widened between African American and White students. District stakeholders had the lowest overall mean rating for achieving comparably high student outcomes on the self-assessment.	Inequities of the academic environment Teacher quality issues The focus of professional staff Family knowledge and resources Student preparedness for academic success	Identify underlying assumptions and reasons behind disparities in African American student achievement Develop a plan to reduce gaps in African American student achievement Develop comprehensive curriculum planning process Incorporate equity into goal setting in AISD Review and develop AISD's equity policy

Source. Gap Analysis, Equity Report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Administrative action steps. AISD administration is taking the following action steps for achieving equity in student achievement.

1. Identify underlying assumptions and reasons behind disparities in African American student achievement. District leaders should take steps to identify and understand the assumptions underlying the disparities that exist among African American students in the district.

Status. The district is providing increased opportunities for staff to convene to explore and discuss assumptions and reasons for disparate achievement. The district has increased its offerings of cultural competency training to increase the capacity of district staff to be reflective of the role their assumptions may play in district inequities.

2. Reduce gaps in African American student achievement. Based on findings and feedback from the Equity Project, the district will develop a plan to address African American students' achievement. Furthermore, the development and implementation of this plan will be considered a superintendent's initiative as part of the 2016–2017 superintendent's evaluation.

Status. The district has researched best practices for developing plans to address achievement gaps. For the review, the district selected the framework developed by the Council of Great City Schools (Casserly, Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, & Palacios, 2012).

3. Develop a comprehensive curriculum planning process. Based on the findings of the curriculum audit, the district will initiate discussion with the board about the findings and action steps in the final report. The district is working toward developing a comprehensive curriculum planning process.

Status. This step is in progress, and the district plans to discuss with the board the curriculum audit and audit report at a future board meeting.

4. Incorporate equity into goal setting. Based on results from the Equity Self-Assessment, the district will define "equity in AISD" and set equity goals and measures.

Status. The board started a discussion about equity during their February and March 2015 board meetings but did not agree on a definition. Defining equity in AISD is part of ongoing discussion.

The administration has worked to incorporate equity goals and will continue this discussion through the strategic plan and scorecard development and refinement process. The current strategic plan includes achievement gap and equity goals as part of the indicators for the district.

5. Review and develop AISD's equity policy. Based on best practices and the absence of any policy regarding equity, the administration will review—and possibly recommend to the board—policy for addressing equity, including but not limited to developing a policy to address equity, equity goals, and a shared understanding of equity.

Status. The Board of trustees has started a discussion on equity in AISD and continues work to address AISD's equity policy and incorporate changes at the district level.

What is already being done at AISD?

AISD Literacy Plan. The AISD Literacy Plan focuses on strengthening core instruction with a balanced literacy approach and goal of all students reading and writing on grade level (AISD Strategic Plan, strategy 3.1A). The plan encompasses literacy and has the following three approaches: (a) throughout the day, with specific district-wide literacy strategies in all content areas; (b) inside the language arts classroom, with recommended class schedules (for general education, ESL, and dual language, and vertically aligned instructional norms); and (c) beyond the school day, with community partnership projects. Designated literacy leads oversee and support the efforts for every campus in

AISD, and provide professional development opportunities and resources to ensure quality implementation.

Community schools. Community schools embrace the idea that parents, teachers, administrators, local government, nonprofits, and community partners should help plan and improve neighborhood schools, thus creating a community around each school to make sure that school is doing well. In partnership with these organizations, the district continues to look at how to expand this model, including current work with Austin Voices to expand into the Lanier vertical team.

Technology innovation centers. The district is working to establish approximately nine technology innovation centers (e.g., three in North, three in Central, and three in South Austin) at campuses that have already begun to demonstrate an innovative learning practice that solves part of the idealized, reinvented classroom challenge. The practices are not superficial changes; rather, they solve more fundamental issues in practice (e.g., flexibility of time, space, pace of learning). Curriculum and instruction must shift to embrace interdisciplinary connections, problem-based learning, and increased student voice and choice. The practices need to focus on engagement to improve attendance and enrollment. An innovation has to be reproducible at other campuses.

My Brother's Keeper (MBK). Austin is one of 30 cities in the United States implementing the MBK Success Mentors Initiative to address chronic absenteeism through mentors who promote school success and safety. The goal of the MBK Success Mentors Initiative is to reach as many chronically absent 6th and 9th graders as possible by matching chronically absent male students of color with school-linked mentors to improve their attendance and achievement. Nine AISD schools (i.e., Gus Garcia YMLA, Martin Middle School, Mendez Middle School, Webb Middle School, Eastside Memorial High School, Lanier High School, LBJ ECHS, Reagan ECHS, and Travis ECHS) are implementing this initiative during the 2016–2017 school year. Each school will host an MBK kick-off where identified students are provided with free backpacks and are matched with their school success mentors.

Classroom libraries. The year 1 focus for the AISD Literacy Plan is daily structured independent reading. This is a key time for teachers to maximize strategic, individualized instruction while students actively read and discuss books and other texts. To support the year 1 focus, all language arts classrooms are receiving carefully curated classroom library books, which include a wide variety of grade- and language-appropriate (including Spanish), culturally relevant fiction, nonfiction, and content-area texts. All students have access to classroom library books, school library collections, and e-books, as well as specialized reading support platforms for students identified with dyslexia.

Certified Academic Language Therapy (CALT). The district is implementing an initiative to ensure that at least one certified academic language therapist is housed on every campus to provide targeted and effective interventions for students with dyslexia. Fifty-three campuses currently have one staff member who does CALT or has a staff member engaged in the CALT training. The district is implementing an in-house training model

to increase the number of staff members who are CALT certified, with the goal of having at least one on every campus in AISD.

What is already being done at AISD campuses?

The core vision of AISD's strategic plan for 2015 through 2020 is reinvention of the urban school experience. The strategic plan has been named Urban Education 2.0 (UE 2.0). At a recent UE 2.0 meeting, principals identified and shared their own campus practices that they believed were effective in addressing academic achievement challenges for students in their schools. Campus practices included emphases on teacher support, parent engagement, and student learning.

Teacher support. Most of the identified practices in this area focused on teachers' professional development opportunities and support. Principals reported teacher mentoring, teacher professional learning communities (PLCs), and teacher data use as effective ways to address the academic achievement for all learners. District staff have been providing professional development activities for teachers to deliver interventions for high-academic-needs students, to deliver specific academic content, and to implement innovative instructional practices. District staff also are working to recruit/retain high-quality teachers.

Parent engagement. Principals believed parent engagement is essential to increasing the academic achievement of students. Many principals engaged parents in think tanks, parent "coffee talks," and parent education nights. The goal of all these activities was to empower parents to take an active role in their child's education.

Student learning. Finally, principals reported using academic programs (e.g., Advancement Via Individual Determination [AVID], micromessaging[1], universal screening and diagnostics, and flexible tutoring schedules) to identify and support students' learning needs.

[1] Micromessaging to Reach and Teach Every Student™ is an educator professional development program developed by the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE) to address gender and culturally based implicit biases that occur in the classroom and that are manifested through micromessages. For more information see www. napequity.org.

Discipline

Summary of AISD Discipline Data

Discipline rate findings from the gap analysis and equity report. Findings from the gap analysis (Schmitt et al., 2016) showed that disciplinary placement/removal rates remained stable at the district level over the past 3 years, but patterns were not the same for each student group. Gaps in disciplinary removal/placement rates narrowed between students in SPED and their peers, and between males and females. However, disciplinary placement/removal gaps widened between African American and White students.

Discipline findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey: Equity goal 3. On the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, district stakeholders rated 12 equity questions within equity goal 3 (i.e., equitable treatment and disciplinary policies and practices). Cumulatively across the equity issues, stakeholders rated equitable treatment and practices, on average, 3.01 of 4 (where 3 = *Somewhat* and 4 = *To a great extent*). Despite the relatively high overall rating for goal 3, the lowest-rated individual equity question in the self-assessment was in response to the following: Are referrals for disciplinary action proportionate by race and poverty of students? This item had a mean rating of 2.12 of 4 (where 2 = *Not much* and 3 = *Somewhat*).

Additional discipline rate gap analyses. Additional gap analyses were conducted for the purpose of this report. These additional discipline rate gap analyses examined discretionary removals, home suspensions, and in-school suspensions for each school level and student group. Because the gap analysis (Schmitt et al., 2016) used a combined disciplinary placement/removal rate, while the school performance index (Schmitt, 2016) from the equity report used the percentage of students not disciplined, and because low ratings were found for disciplinary actions on the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, further inquiry into patterns of discipline was conducted.
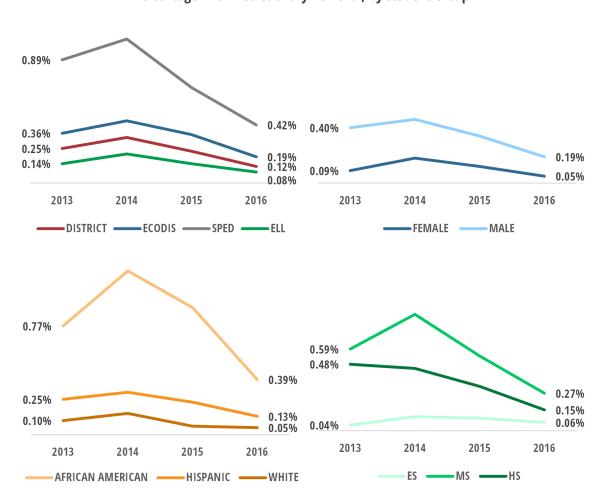
Discretionary removals. Overall rates of discretionary removals in AISD declined over the past few years. With the general drop in discretionary removal rates, gaps between students also seemed to narrow. The narrowing of gaps in discretionary removal rates was most notable between SPED students and their peers, and between African American and White students (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Gap Analysis of Discretionary Removals, by School Level and Student Group
An overall drop was found in discretionary removal rates; the gap narrowed between special education students and their peers and between African American and White students.

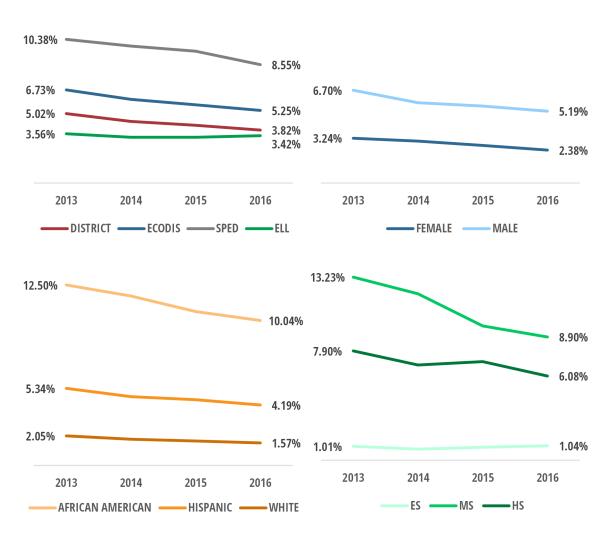**Percentage With Discretionary Removal, by Student Group**

Home suspensions. Overall, rates of home suspensions in AISD dropped slightly over time. Most gaps between students remained stable, with the exception of a narrowing of the home suspension gap between middle school and high school students (Figure 3).

Gap Analysis of Home Suspensions, by School Level and Student Group
Rates of home suspensions in AISD dropped subtly over time; the gap narrowed between middle school and high school students.

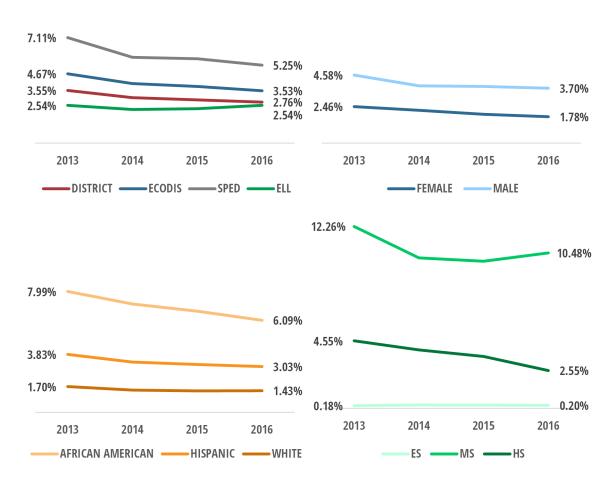**Percentage With Home Suspension, by Student Group**

In-school suspensions. Overall, rates of in-school suspensions in AISD dropped slightly over time. Most gaps between students remained stable, with the exception of a widening of the in-school suspension gap between middle school and high school students (Figure 4).

Gap Analysis of In-School Suspensions, by School Level and Student Group
Rates of in-school suspensions in AISD dropped slightly over time; the gap widened between middle school and high school students.

Percentage With In-School Suspension, by Student Group

Summary of discipline rate findings from the gap analyses, equity report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey. The triangulation of data from the gap analyses, equity report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey revealed findings congruent across sources. In review:

- Gaps in disciplinary placements/removals remained somewhat stable over time, narrowing between most student groups, but widening between African American and White students.

- Rates of discretionary removals, home suspensions, and in-school suspensions dropped slightly over time.

- Discretionary removal gaps narrowed between SPED students and their peers, and between African American students and White students.

- Gaps between middle and high schools appeared to decrease for home suspension but increased for in-school suspensions.

- The overall high rating of equity goal 3 (i.e., equitable treatment and disciplinary policies and practices), coupled with the low rating on the singular item regarding disciplinary equity for race/poverty, seemed an accurate self-assessment of disciplinary gaps in the district.
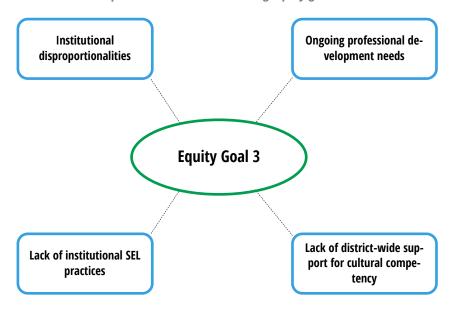
Perceived Barriers to Equity Goal 3: Equitable Treatment and Disciplinary Policies and Practices

In addition to rating AISD's achievement of equity practices related to equity goal 3 (i.e., equitable treatment and disciplinary policies and practices) on the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, stakeholders also provided feedback on the issues they perceived as barriers to achieving this equity goal. Review of feedback revealed four potential perceived barriers to the district achieving equity in student treatment and disciplinary policies (Figure 5).

Figure 5.
Perceived Barriers to Achieving Equity Goal 3: Equitable Treatment and Disciplinary Policies and Practices
Stakeholders identified four potential barriers to achieving equity goal 3.

Source. Austin Independent School District Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Characteristics of the perceived barriers to equity goal 3. For each of the four potential perceived barriers to equity goal 3, a number of characteristics were identified as possible explanations why the barriers might be perceived as obstacles to the district achieving equity in student outcomes.

Institutional disproportionalities. Comments connected to this equity goal 3 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that institutional disproportionalities could be a barrier to achieving equity in student discipline. These institutional characteristics included the proportionality of disciplinary rates across student populations, systemic institutional disproportionalities for student groups, understanding the root causes of disciplinary referrals, and the match in demographic characteristics between the students/community served and the campus/central office staff.

Ongoing professional development needs. Comments connected to this equity goal 3 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that professional development needs could be a barrier to achieving equity in student discipline. These professional development need characteristics included customer service training, campus-based cultural competency programming, central office cultural competency programming, mandates across all staff for cultural competency training, leadership preparation in cross-cultural competence, teacher training on working with all student populations, coordinated district-wide efforts, conflict resolution training, competing priorities with staff development time, and parent training in cross-cultural competence.

Lack of district-wide support for cultural competency. Comments connected to this equity goal 3 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that cultural competency could be a barrier to achieving equity in student discipline. These cultural competency characteristics included district-wide efforts to support training, demographic inequities across campuses, counselor apathy in some schools, challenges changing individual belief systems, intercampus inequities in awareness of cultural competency, mentoring, supports to address behavior proactively, voice and forums for discussions about cultural competencies, and the match between practice and policy.

Lack of institutional social and emotional learning (SEL) practices. Comments connected to this equity goal 3 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that SEL practices could be a barrier to achieving equity in student discipline. These SEL characteristics included awareness of bullying, uniform increase in SEL instruction, starting SEL instruction at earlier grades, restorative justice training, SEL training for parents, and SEL practices as integral parts of day-to-day routines.

Current Research on Equity in Student Discipline

A multitude of studies have documented racial inequity in the area of school discipline. National and state data showed stable patterns of disproportionality in school discipline over the past 30 years, mostly for African American students. Furthermore, males were more likely than females to receive disciplinary sanctions, regardless of race/ethnicity (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Hilberth & Slate, 2011). Skiba et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of examining the issues of race and culture to create and sustain change in racial and ethnic disciplinary disparities.

Many of these studies also described the complex relationship between academic performance and discipline. School disciplinary practices (i.e., suspensions and/or expulsions) contributed to lower academic performance and were strong predictors of dropping out or not graduating on time (Gregory et al., 2010). Additionally, Asian and White students scored higher on academic assessments than did African American, Hispanic, and Native American students. Students who struggled academically over time had lower academic self-confidence and engagement levels than did those who did not struggle, contributing to a greater number of school disruptions. Although low academic achievement was highly correlated with disciplinary infractions, these patterns alone did not explain disproportionality between student groups with regard to discipline infractions.

Many strategies to address these issues may offer promise; however, little research has been conducted on specific interventions for reducing the discipline gap. Freiberg and Lapointe (2006) studied 40 school-based programs targeting the reduction disciplinary problems in schools. They found effective programs

- emphasized students' learning and self-regulation,
- encouraged "school connectedness" and "caring and trusting relationships" between teachers and students, and
- increased students' positive experiences through the reduction of punitive reactions to misbehavior.

Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2014) offered recommendations for removing disciplinary disparities in schools; these recommendations required continued awareness of how the inequalities were created, as well as commitment to resolving the disparities. The recommendations implored practitioners to move beyond a discussion about racial disparities in the area of school discipline and to address problems of race and racism systemically throughout the schools and community. To be effective in addressing racial disparities, Carter et al. stated that participants must examine disaggregated data to determine where racial/ethnic differences occurred and comprehensively discuss the contexts and interactions in which those data occurred. Custom interventions, based on the context, should be crafted to reduce the identified disparities and closely monitored to evaluate the impact of the interventions.

Actions for Equity in Student Discipline

Table 2 summarizes findings from examining student discipline data, perceived barriers to equity identified from the equity self-assessment, and the administrative action steps being taken to achieve equitable student treatment.

Table 2.
Summary of Data, Barriers, and Actions Associated With Student Discipline

AISD discipline data	Perceived barriers to equitable student treatment	Actions for equitable student treatment
Gaps in disciplinary placements/removals narrowed between most student groups, but widening between African American and White students. Rates of discretionary removals, home suspensions, and in-school suspensions dropped subtly over time for all students. Discretionary removal gaps narrowed between SPED students and their peers, and between African American students and White students. Gaps between middle and high schools appeared to decrease with home suspension but increased with in-school suspensions. The overall high rating of equitable treatment and discipline policies by district stakeholders), coupled with the low rating on the singular item regarding disciplinary equity for race/poverty seemed an accurate self-assess disciplinary gaps in the district.	Institutional disproportionalities Ongoing professional development needs Lack of district-wide support for cultural competency Lack of institutional SEL practices	Implement strategies to reduce disciplinary disparities in AISD Change the AISD recess policy Evaluate SEL program implementation **and related program components (e.g., restorative practice and mindfulness)** Improve cultural proficiency and SEL training

Source. Gap analysis, equity report, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Administrative action steps. AISD administration is taking the following action steps for achieving equity in student discipline.

1. Implement strategies and interventions to reduce the disciplinary equity gap in AISD. Based on the findings of the equity study, review of policy, and self-assessment, the district will develop a plan to address discipline and equity in discipline in AISD. AISD will work with Texas Appleseed, a nonprofit public justice organization, to develop recommendations to address disparities in discipline, changes to policy, and training in regard to disciplinary policies and practices for staff. The district will convene a working group to review suspensions in Pre-K through 2nd grade and determine changes to policies and practices.

Status. AISD has connected with Texas Appleseed regarding discipline practices and procedures in AISD. Thus far, these have been informal meetings to review data and discuss practices.

2. Change the AISD recess policy. Based on best practices, the AISD recess policy should be changed to ensure at least 30 minutes of unstructured recess everyday for all students that cannot be taken away due to disciplinary reasons. The recess time should fit into students' existing school day schedules without extending their total time at school.

Status. AISD recess policies have been changed accordingly for the 2016–2017 school year.

3. Evaluate SEL program implementation. Based on the equity self-assessment, questions have arisen regarding the efficiency and fidelity of implementation district wide of our SEL Program. The district will evaluate the SEL Program both for fidelity of implementation and for effectiveness in reducing disciplinary actions. SEL's restorative practices and mindfulness program components also should be evaluated. Plans for this evaluation work should be addressed in the next school year.

Status. DRE is currently evaluating SEL as part of their yearly schedule. The evaluation addresses questions on fidelity of implementation.

4. Improve cultural competency and SEL training. Based on the equity self-assessment, access to training and the effectiveness of training and professional development opportunities need additional support. Based on feedback through sharing this plan with AISD principals and staff, it was concluded that any changes must start in the classroom, and that all staff, including teachers, would benefit from training in cultural competencies and from understanding perceptions and the basis from which to address changing behaviors. The district will work to mandate training in both cultural competencies and SEL practices for all staff, teachers, and administrators.

Status. The professional development plan includes training opportunities for cultural competencies and No Place for Hate. SEL provides training to staff on the model and on SEL strategies in the classroom. The district is looking at additional options for cultural competencies. The scorecard also has an indicator that would require all staff to receive cultural competencies training. Other options and opportunities will be reviewed by the respective teams to see how training options can be expanded to ensure all staff receive relevant training.

What is already being done at AISD?

Recess policy. Recess has been identified as among the best opportunities to promote and incorporate more physical activity into a child's day (Springer, Tanguturi, Ranjit, Skala, & Kelder, 2013). Elementary school children who had more minutes of recess time were found to have better classroom behavior than those who had less time. Children who engage in additional activity breaks during the day have been found to focus better on academic tasks than do children who are less active. In addition to the physical activity benefits of recess time, both structured and unstructured play have been shown

20

to provide a range of physical, social, emotional, problem-solving, and other cognitive benefits for children. Administration has crafted a policy recommendation for board approval, with the intention of implementing a required 30 minutes of unstructured play in addition to the 135 minutes of structure physical activity for all students in full-day prekindergarten through 5th grade.

Social and emotional learning. SEL is a research-driven approach based on the tenets of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Students learn critical life skills (e.g., recognizing and managing emotions, solving problems effectively, and establishing positive relationships). The district is moving into the next stage of SEL implementation, which includes a deep integration of SEL into core teaching and learning in every classroom, maximizing implementation of SEL on every campus, and ensuring seamless delivery systems of intervention and SEL support.

The SEL team has received training in restorative practices, specifically related to community building circles. These circles are designed to ensure that all voices in the classroom are heard. In addition, all campus administrators have been trained in the research behind adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and how trauma affects students' behavior and learning.

What is already being done at AISD campuses?

At a recent UE 2.0 meeting, principals identified and shared their own campus practices that they believed were effective in addressing students' disciplinary challenges. Staffs' practices included providing multiple professional development opportunities for teachers on restorative practice, SEL, student trauma, cultural competence, mindfulness, and bullying prevention. Staff also were reevaluating students' disciplinary practices and focusing on academic support in long-term in-school-suspension (ISS) instances. Principals reported that better collaboration with SPED teachers and Community in Schools (CIS) staff was especially helpful in addressing students' needs and reducing disciplinary issues. Principals also were revising campus policies (e.g., dress codes and fighting) and monitoring consistency in school-wide disciplinary procedures to ensure equitable disciplinary practices.

Program Access

Summary of AISD Program Access Data

Program access findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey: Equity goal 2. On the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, district stakeholders rated nine equity questions within equity goal 2 (i.e., equitable access and inclusion). This section of the survey had the highest overall rating, which was 3.29, where 3 = *Somewhat* and 4 = *To a great extent*. A high degree of consistency was found across the ratings of individual equity items within goal 2, with a minimum rating of 3.13 and maximum of 3.53.
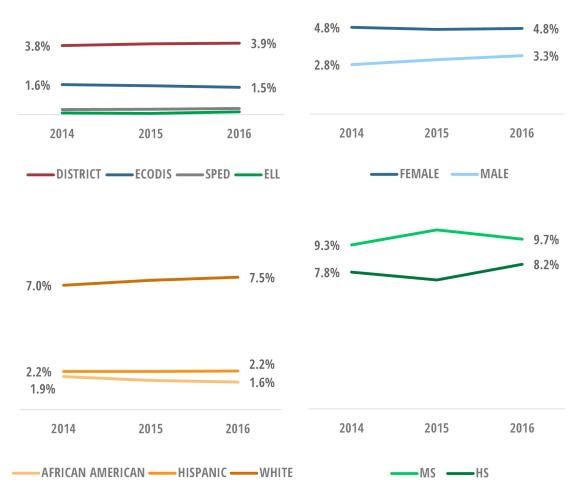
Additional program access gap analyses. Additional gap analyses were conducted for the purpose of this report. These additional program access gap analyses included inclusion in magnet schools, advanced placement (AP), and gifted and talented (GT) participation for each school level and student groups. The gap analysis (Schmitt et al., 2016) and the equity report (Schmitt, 2016) did not specifically explore academic program access. Consequently, to supplement the findings from the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, additional gap analyses were conducted in the area of program access and inclusion.

Magnet school enrollment. Enrollment in magnet schools was explored. This included enrollment at Ann Richards, Kealing, Fulmore, and LASA in 2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016. Gaps in inclusion in magnet schools remained stable over time, with the largest persistent gaps between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students (Figure 6).

Figure 6.
Gap Analysis of Magnet School Participation, by School Level and Student Group
The greatest gaps existed in magnet school participation between White students and their African American and Hispanic peers; ELL and SPED students had the lowest rates of magnet school participation.

Percentage Enrolled in Magnet Program, by Student Group
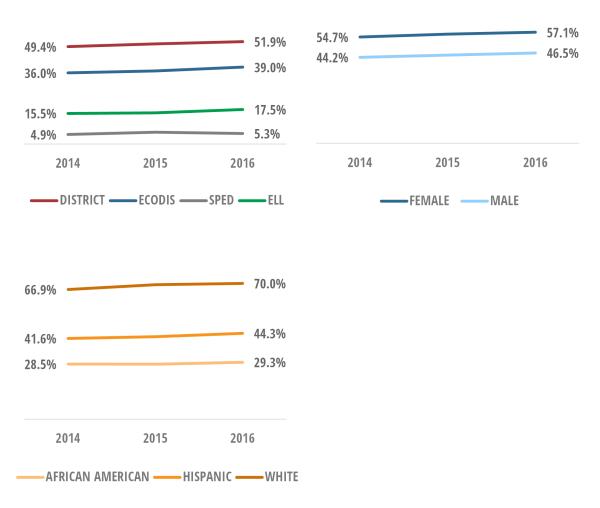

Source. AISD student records

23

AP, IB, and dual credit program participation. Students' participation in AP, international baccalaureate (IB), and dual credit programs was explored for the 2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016 school years. These programs were only offered at the high school level. Gaps between student groups in participation in AP, IB, and dual credit courses were consistent across school years. Large gaps in participation persisted between economically disadvantaged students and their peers, between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students (Figure 7).

Gap Analysis of AP, IB, and/or Dual Credit Program Participation, by School Level and Student Group
The greatest gaps existed in AP, IB and/or dual credit program participation between White students and their African American and Hispanic peers. ELL and SPED student had the lowest AP, IB, and/or dual credit program participation rates.

Percentage Enrolled in AP, IB, and/or Dual Credit Program, by Student Group
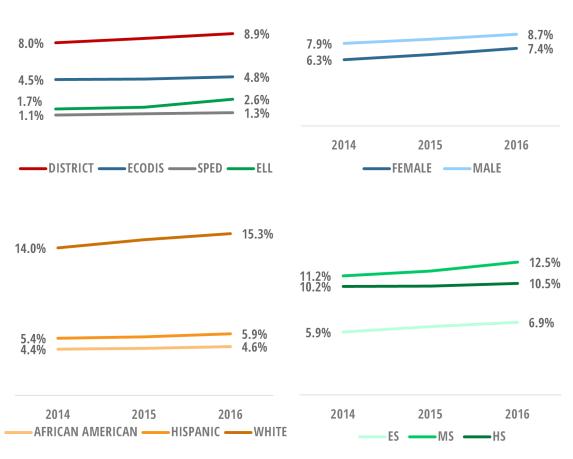

Source. AISD student records

GT program participation. Students' participation in programs in the GT program was explored for the 2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016 school years. Participation rates in GT programs showed slight gains over time. However, gaps between student groups remained stable. Large gaps persisted between elementary schools and both middle and high schools, between economically disadvantaged students and their peers, between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students (Figure 8).

Figure 8.
Gap Analysis of GT Program Participation, by School Level and Student Group
There was an overall drop in discretionary removal rates; the gap narrowed between special education students and their peers and between African American and White students.

Percentage of GT Program Participation, by Student Group

Source. AISD student records

TASA curriculum audit results. The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) curriculum auditors developed five standards against which to test the AISD curriculum. One of the five standards was an audit of equity in access to curriculum that was explicitly included in the curriculum audit to align it with the equity work of the district. The equity in access to curriculum standard assessed whether "the school district demonstrates internal consistency and rational equity in its program development and implementation" (TASA, 2016).

The auditors "found that students do not have equal access to certain programs, nor do they have equal access to the curriculum" (TASA, 2016). Using the percentage of free-and-reduced lunch (FRL) as an indicator, the auditors looked at participation in GT and STAAR results and found unequitable access, compared with access for the campus population of FRL. In closing, TASA stated,

> Overall, the auditors found that although district leaders are strongly committed to equity and success for all students, unequal access to programs still persists, and a number of personnel perceive that equity is not apparent across the system. Inequities in the curriculum taught to students at different schools were also noted, with the greatest difference in the level or rigor of that curriculum.

Summary of program access findings from the gap analyses, Equity Self-Assessment Survey, and TASA curriculum audit. Triangulation of data from the gap analyses, Equity Self-Assessment Survey, and TASA curriculum audit revealed some inconsistencies between stakeholders' perceptions of equitable access and both the district data and the TASA curriculum audit. When compared, the perceptions of access and inclusion held by the stakeholders who responded to the survey reflected a more positive view of program access than was supported by the data. The major findings included:

- The district stakeholders' self-assessment rating of equity in this area (i.e., equity goal 2: equitable access and inclusion) had the highest overall mean rating of all three equity goals self-assessed and reflected a perception not aligned with the gap data and curriculum audit.
- Gaps between student groups with respect to magnet school enrollment persisted overtime, with the largest gaps between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students.
- Gaps between student groups with respect to AP, IB, and dual credit program participation persisted overtime, with the largest gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their peers, between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students.
- Overall rates of GT participation increased in the district. However, large gaps in participation persisted between elementary schools and both middle and high schools, between economically disadvantaged students and their peers, between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students.

- The TASA curriculum audit found access to programs was unequal for economically and non-economically disadvantaged students.
- The TASA curriculum audit also found inequities in the curriculum taught to students at different schools, with the greatest difference associated with the level or rigor of the curriculum.
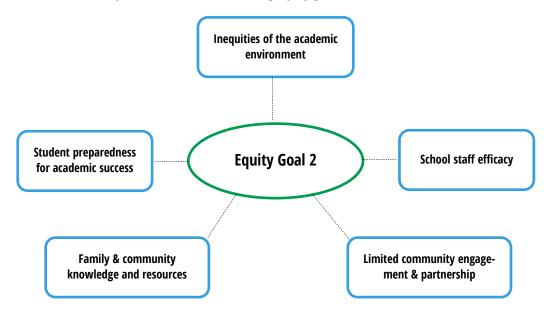
Perceived Barriers to Equity Goal 2: Equitable Access and Inclusion

In addition to rating AISD's achievement of equity practices related to Equity Goal 2: Equitable access and inclusion on the Equity Self-Assessment Survey, stakeholders also provided feedback on the issues they perceived as barriers to achieving this equity goal. Review of feedback revealed five potential perceived barriers to the district achieving equity in student access and inclusion (Figure 9).

Figure 9.
Perceived Barriers to Achieving Equity Goal 2: Equitable Access and Inclusion
Stakeholders identified five potential barriers to achieving equity goal 2.

Source. Austin Independent School District Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Characteristics of the perceived barriers to equity goal 2. For each of the five potential perceived barriers to equity goal 2, a number of characteristics were identified as possible explanations why the barriers might be perceived as obstacles to the district achieving equity in student access and inclusion.

Inequities of the academic environment. Comments connected to this equity goal 2 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that the academic environment could be a barrier to achieving equity in student access and inclusion. These environmental characteristics included academic rigor for all student populations, awareness of college and career readiness at earlier grades, equitable course access, school choice, equitable access to technology, differentiation of need by student group, equitable resources for all student groups, district-wide understanding of

inclusion, diversity of campus advisory groups, and tutoring support that spans student with basic needs to student in advanced coursework.

School staff efficacy. Comments connected to this equity goal 2 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that staff efficacy could be a barrier to achieving equity in student access and inclusion. These staff efficacy characteristics included availability of non-teaching professional support staff at all campuses, knowledge about serving all student populations, teacher quality, student expectations, staff workload, and staff time constraints.

Limited community engagement & partnership. Comments connected to this equity goal 2 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that community engagement and partnership could be a barrier to achieving equity in student access and inclusion. These community characteristics included community partnering and relationship building; effective modes (and languages) of communication; parent-teacher communication; parent-school communication; equitable access to technology; meeting times accommodating of work schedules; and community education about the academic options available to students, the resources available for applying to college, and the challenges different populations of students face.

Family and community knowledge and resources. Comments connected to this equity goal 2 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that family and community knowledge and resources could be a barrier to achieving equity in student access and inclusion. These family and community characteristics included community involvement, parent involvement and support, family education level, family and community socioeconomic status, language barriers (recognized and unrecognized), parent knowledge of the education system/process, and technology access at home.

Student preparedness for academic success. Comments connected to this equity goal 2 barrier revealed numerous characteristics related to the perception that student preparation could be a barrier to achieving equity in student access and inclusion. These student characteristics included: student academic skills and academic preparedness, student work ethic, and student mobility rate.

Current Research on Equity in Student Program Access

Hanley and Noblit (2009) suggested that programming must be responsive to the racial and cultural needs of students if it is to promote academic and life success. They stated,

> There is sufficient evidence to argue that culturally responsive programming and positive racial identity can promote achievement and resilience. Programs can be designed to develop these linkages and to more generally promote the wider project of racial uplift in [African, Latino, Asian, and Native American] communities. The approach will need to be systemic and directly address issues of racism and deficit thinking. Designing programs based on recognizing and building capacity in students, communities, educators, and schools will be necessary.

This view has implications for the district programming.

AP courses provide rigorous academic instruction and help students earn college credit before entering college by reducing time and costs, consequently increasing their chances of college enrollment and graduation. Students who are Hispanic or African American are more often underrepresented than are other student groups in AP courses in schools with comprehensive offerings of AP courses. They often do not have access to AP courses in schools with high minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) student populations (Barnard-Brak, McGaha-Garnett, & Burley, 2011; Hallett & Venegas, 2011). This lack of access to AP courses puts students at a disadvantage with respect to being prepared for and pursuing higher education in a timely manner.

Increasing the number and variety of courses can create greater access; however, increased equity for all student populations comes through a combination of course offerings and course quality (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Discrepancies exist between the quality of AP courses offered in schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students and in schools with lower percentages of economically disadvantaged students. If students are not given the same quality of coursework and instruction, they will be at a disadvantage when taking AP exams and enrolling in college courses. Districts must invest in professional development opportunities for teaching and counseling staff as part of developing a rigorous AP program.

Dual enrollment is frequently considered a cost-effective method of expanding opportunity for both economically disadvantaged and academically gifted students. However, studies show inequitable program participation in dual credit programs (Museus, Lutovsky, & Colbeck, 2007). White and Asian students participated in dual enrollment at disproportionately high levels compared with their African American and Hispanic peers. Students who were not economically disadvantaged participated at much higher rates than did those categorized as economically disadvantaged.

To guarantee that dual enrollment programs have equitable access and opportunity, several factors should be considered. A dual enrollment policy must be in place, with a focus on equitable access to dual enrollment programs. The needs of economically disadvantaged students (Museus et al., 2007) should be considered when forming policy so these students are not unintentionally excluded. Museus et al. suggested conducting

a review of individual students' applications to determine which students may be qualified, and then expanding opportunities for those who have the prerequisite proficiencies but who may not have exceptional academic records or test scores. In consideration of equity, efforts should be made to provide information about the program to economically disadvantaged or first-generation students and their parents, who may not be familiar with the opportunity or enrollment processes. After students are enrolled, academic support should be provided to assist those who may have difficulty adjusting to the college-level work or environment.

Creating greater equity in the identification of students for GT programs is another challenge. On average, students from Native American, African American, Hispanic, and low-income families have lower academic achievement test outcomes than do their White, Asian, and higher-income peers (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). ELLs often have lower scores on assessments used for GT identification than do native speakers. Low scores not only may be indicative of individual students' level of proficiency, but also may be influenced to some extent by language differences between versions of the assessments.

To address equity concerns in GT identification, schools need more than simple adjustments to current school policies, procedures, and assessments (Esquierdo & Arreguín-Anderson, 2012). The restructuring of the GT access and inclusion program requires a strong focus on educating and informing teachers, parents, and the community about the characteristics and identification process of gifted students from all backgrounds.

Actions for Equity in Program Access

Table 3 summarizes findings from examining student program access data, perceived barriers to equity identified from the equity self-assessment, and the administrative action steps being taken to achieve equitable program access and inclusion.

Table 3.
Summary of Data, Barriers, and Actions Associated With Students' Program Access

AISD access and inclusion data	Perceived barriers to equitable access and inclusion	Actions for equitable access and inclusion
District stakeholders had the highest mean rating for achieving equitable access and inclusion on the self-assessment. Gaps in magnet school enrollment persist between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students. Gaps in AP, IB, and dual credit program participation persist between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students . Although overall GT participation is increasing, GT participation gaps persist between elementary schools and both middle and high schools, between economically disadvantaged students and their peers, between ELLs and their peers, between SPED students and their peers, and between White students and both African American and Hispanic students . The TASA curriculum audit found unequal program access between economically and non-economically disadvantaged students, as well as, inequities in curriculum rigor across schools.	Inequities of the academic environment School staff efficacy Limited community engagement and partnership Family and community knowledge and resources Student preparedness for academic success	Implement application process changes for all AISD application-based programs Review magnet school policy and acceptance criteria; implement changes at LASA and Kealing Analyze root-causes of student enrollment and course completion Address enrollment and participation in GT program and other advanced academic programs to ensure participation is representative of the student population

Source. Gap analysis, TASA curriculum audit, and Equity Self-Assessment Survey

Administrative action steps. AISD administration is taking the following action steps for achieving equity in program access.

1. Implement application process changes for all AISD application-based programs.
Based on the self-assessment, the district will review and change the application process

for magnet and other application-based programs. Best practices show that a single application for all programs could increase access and ease for interested students.

Status. An innovation and design team has been created to review the current applications and suggest a single application process. In addition, the innovation and design team is looking at the possibility of the application being made both on paper and digitally online.

2. Review magnet school policy and acceptance criteria. Based on the self-assessment and data on students who apply and are accepted to magnets, the district will review its magnet policy and criteria for selection into magnet programs.

Status. The innovation and design team is examining the criteria used for magnet applications for LASA and Kealing, including the process and how the district prepares students for applying to these schools. Groups at each campus have met to discuss possible changes to increase representation in the magnet programs. Later in the school year, the innovation and design team will share recommendations to ensure the district achieves equity and diversity in the application and selection process.

3. Analyze root-causes of student enrollment and course completion. Achieving equity will involve reviewing the current enrollment and course completion data. Principals will complete a root-cause analysis of the data together. After the root-cause analysis has been completed, each school will create an action plan that addresses the issues identified. In addition, data dashboards will be developed to track campus plans and advanced academic data.

Status. Review of enrollment and course completion data is underway. Principals have reviewed the district- and school-specific data as a group. During the next principals' meetings, they will develop action plans, including measurable outcomes to close the gap. Plans will include academic and guidance supports.
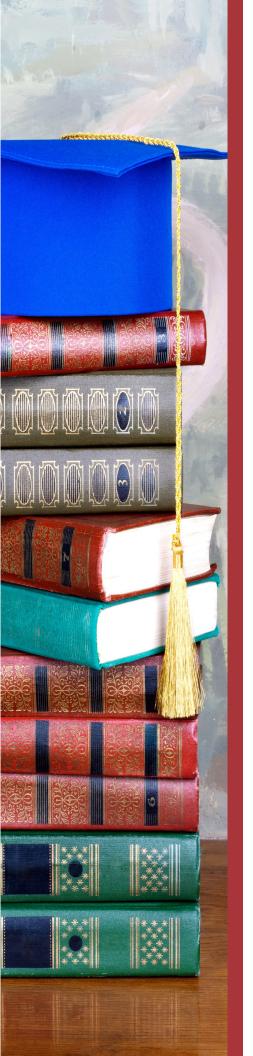
4. Address enrollment and participation in GT program to ensure participation in GT program is representative of the student population. A plan will be created to address enrollment and participation in the GT program. The plan will include targets and goals based on expectations set by the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights for GT programs. In addition, the district will address how it determines who is selected, and how information about selection, identification, and participation is shared.

Status. The district has developed an innovation and design team to assess systems and processes and to collaborate on the design of new solutions that will have an impact on GT services at the district, campus, and classroom level. The charge is to address equity and to expand the identification of and participation in programs and services for students in GT and advanced academics.

What is already being done at AISD campuses?

At a recent UE 2.0 meeting, principals identified and shared their own campus practices that they believed were effective in addressing students' program access. Some were

providing professional development opportunities for teachers to better understand characteristics of GT students and to implement instructional differentiation and interventions for students at risk, and to address the attitudes and biases of staff. Principals also were implementing micromessaging and growth mindset trainings. Some principals reported they were actively identifying underrepresented student groups to participate in GT, career and technical education (CTE), and AVID programs and creating more academic opportunities through clubs and free SAT, ACT, and TSI tutoring outside school hours. Principals identified parent engagement as important to academic program inclusion, and reported holding parent information meetings at new and additional times and providing academic advising sessions for parents.

Summary and Next Steps

The data collection and analyses conducted to explore equity in AISD revealed several important issues to consider in the education of all students. The gap analyses and equity study showed glaring gaps in achievement and access for students, especially African American students and economically disadvantaged students. To prepare all students for college, career, and life, it is imperative to put structures in place to address these barriers and gaps. Based on the feedback from the self-assessment, it is clear that while many believe the district is doing an adequate job at addressing equity, they also feel that more work remains to be done. Part of this work includes the need to address issues and barriers at the classroom level, not just at the school or district level.

This shift to the classroom level would include fundamental changes in how the district supports and trains teachers, staff, and administrators. The district will work to support principals and campuses so they can provide support to teachers and staff at the classroom level. This is not just a shift in philosophy, but also a shift in thinking and recognizing how the actions of staff affect students, including students of color or with low SES.

In addition to the three themes looked at in this report, the district briefly reviewed and heard feedback on other interconnected areas. These included the racial and demographic makeup of staff, access to prekindergarten, and shared accountability. Although not explicitly stated in the district's equity goals and project plan, the review also looked at students receiving SPED services and students identified as ELLs. Future research could continue this review to see how these students' access, discipline, and achievement differ from those of other students. These two groups will be part of the data report and school performance index.

In order to ensure progress towards district equity, an innovation design team should be formed to review the requirements and continuously monitor progress towards the equity goals. Progress should be assessed using a phase-in methodology.

The district's equity project plan, and the suggestions and projects mentioned within, have been incorporated into the work plans and strategic plan of the district. Many of these projects will be developed over the next year, with the goal of implementing them as soon as possible.

AISD's DRE staff will continue to support the district's work related to equity. A fully updated district gap analysis will be available in December 2016. Modifications of and improvements to the school performance and instructional services indices, created as part of the equity study, were explored. These indices will be modified, and an updated district summary will be available in early Spring 2017. In future years, DRE staff also will determine how evaluation plans can incorporate the study of equity project activities and ideas to measure the efficacy and successfulness of these programs. In a similar manner, the Equity Self-Assessment Survey could be administered a second time to the same groups to measure if and how equity perceptions have changed.

References

AISD (2016). *AISD strategic plan 2015-2020*. Retrieved from, https://www.austinisd.org/
    sites/default/files/dept/strategic_plan/docs/2015_StratPlan_FINAL_ENGv2.pdf

Barnard-Brak, L., McGaha-Garnett, V., & Burley, H. (2011). Advanced placement course
    enrollment and school-level characteristics. *NASSP Bulletin, 95(*3), 165–174.

Carter, P., Skiba, R., Arredondo, M., & Pollock, M. (2014). *You can't fix what you don't
    look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities* (Issue
    Brief No 1215140200). Bloomington, IN: The Equity Project at Indiana
    University.

Casserly, M., Lewis, S., Simon, C., Uzzell, R., & Palacios, M. (2012). *A call for change:
    Providing solutions for Black male achievement*. Washington, DC: Council of
    Great City Schools. Retrieved from http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/
    Centricity/Domain/88/A%20Call%20For%20Change_FinaleBook.pdf

Esquierdo, J., & Arreguín-Anderson, M. (2012). The "invisible" gifted and talented
    bilingual students: A current report on enrollment in GT programs. *Journal for
    the Education of the Gifted, 35(*1), 35–47.

Freiberg, H. J., & Lapointe, J. M. (2006). Research-based programs for preventing and
    solving discipline problems. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.),
    Handbook of classroom management (pp. 735–786). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence
    Erlbaum.

Galloway, M., & Ishimaru, A. (2015). Radical recentering: Equity in educational
    leadership standards. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51(*3), 372–408.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R., & Noguera, P. (2010). The achievement gap and the discipline
    gap: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational Researcher, 39(*1), 59–68.

Hallet, R., & Venegas, K. (2011). Is increased access enough? Advanced placement
    courses, quality, and success in low-income urban schools. *Journal for the
    Education of the Gifted, 34(*3), 468–487.

Hanley, M. S., & Noblit, G. W. (2009). *Cultural responsiveness, racial identity and
    academic success: A review of literature*. Pittsburgh, PA: The Heinz
    Endowments. Retrieved from http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/Culture-
    Report_FINAL.pdf

Hilberth, M., & Slate, J. (2011). Middle school black and white student assignment to
    disciplinary consequences: A clear lack of equity. *Education and Urban Society,
    46(*3), 312–328.

Museus, S. D., Lutovsky, B. R., & Colbeck, C. L. (2007). Access and equity in dual enrollment programs: Implications for policy formation. *Higher Education in Review, 4*, 1–19.

Peters, S., & Engerrand, K. (2016). Equity and excellence: Proactive efforts in the identification of underrepresented students for gifted and talented services. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 60(*3), 159–171.

Springer, A., Tanguturi, Y., Ranjit, N., Skala, K., & Kelder, S. (2013). *Physical activity during recess in low-income third-grade Texas students.* American *Journal of Health Behavior, 37(*3), 318–324.

Schmitt, L. (2016). *Equity in Austin Independent School District: Elementary, middle, and high school performance in 2014–2015* (DRE Publication #15.37). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.

Schmitt, L., Williams, H., & Christian, C. (2016). *Analysis of performance gaps: Austin Independent School District, 2012–2013 through 2014–2015* (DRE Publication #15.39). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District.

Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A. C., Rausch, M. K., & Cuadrado, J. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children, 74*, 264–288.

Texas Association of School Administrators. (2016). *A curriculum audit of the Austin Independent School District.* Austin, Texas: Texas Curriculum Management Audit Center.

Theoharis, G., & Haddix, M. (2011). Undermining racism and a whiteness ideology: White principals living a commitment to equitable and excellent schools. *Urban Education, 46(*6), 1332–1351.