



## Facing History and Ourselves:

### An analysis of the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum in the Austin Independent School District (AISD)

#### What is Facing History and Ourselves?

Facing History and Ourselves is a non-profit organization with the mission to provide educational curriculum regarding racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism to students from diverse backgrounds. In studying historical acts of prejudice, it is hoped that students make connections to current events and times of conflict in their own lives. The curriculum is primarily designed for students in middle and high schools. To learn more about Facing History and Ourselves, visit <https://www.facinghistory.org/>

#### Who received training in Facing History and Ourselves curriculum?

In Spring 2017, leaders from AISD working to deepen social emotional learning in the district met with the Facing History and Ourselves staff to determine if the curriculum would be a good fit in AISD. As a result, in the 2017–2018 school year, the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum was implemented at Kealing Middle School and Akins High School. Seven additional ethnic studies teachers at Anderson High School, Eastside Memorial High School, LBJ High School, McCallum High School, Reagan High School, and Travis High School were trained in the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum. In total, 59 AISD teachers implemented the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum in the 2017–2018 school year.

#### What analyses were conducted for this report?

The list of teachers (which was provided by AISD’s administrative supervisor for Social Studies) who implemented the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum was used to link to 1,942 students (i.e., treatment students) who were enrolled in their respective ethnic studies or social studies courses (the specific course was dependent on teacher and school). Next, 1,778 similar students attending schools where teachers were not trained in the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum (i.e., control students) were matched to the treatment students. Students were matched to each other based on their free or reduced-price lunch status (a proxy for economic disadvantage), ethnicity, and gender. See Appendix A for the demographic characteristics of both groups of students.

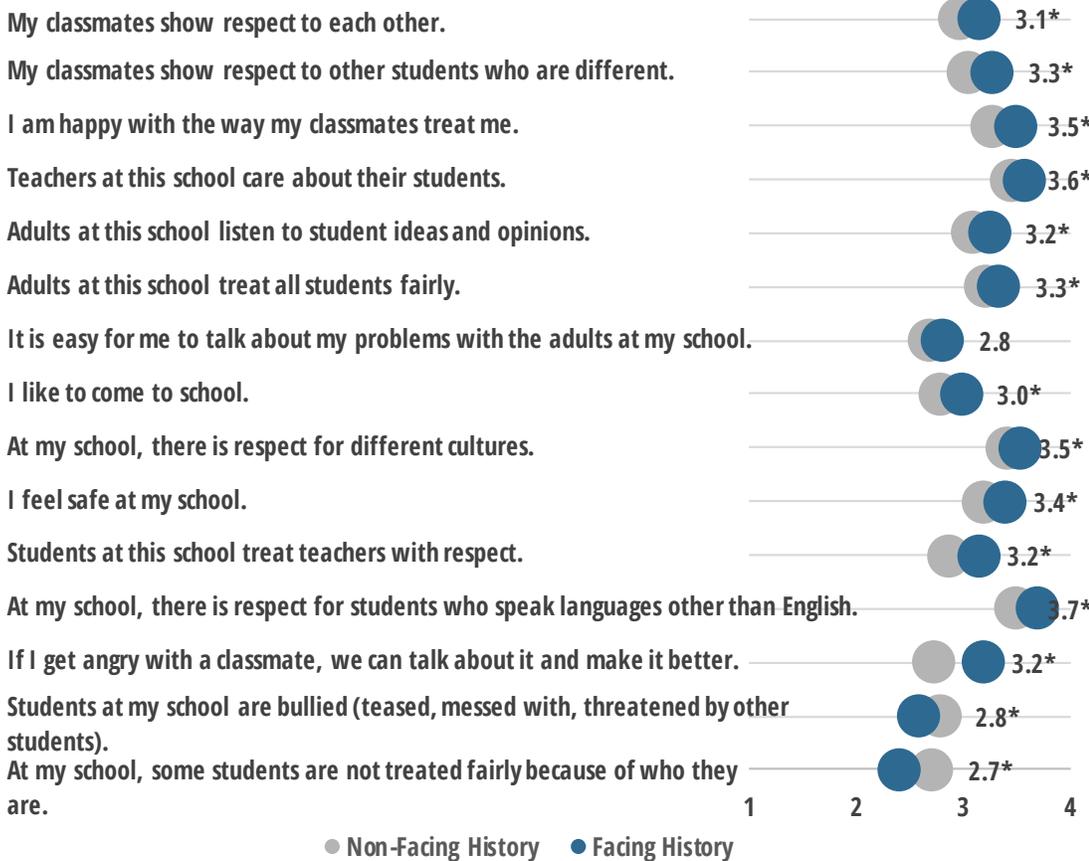
After the matched treatment and control groups of students were created, students were then linked to their responses to the 2016–2017 (the year before the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum was offered in AISD) and 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey. The remainder of this report compares students’ responses to the Student Climate Survey, based on whether or not they learned the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum (see the sidebar on the next page for a list of the specific Student Climate Survey items used in this report).

## Did students who received the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum endorse more positive perceptions of school climate than did their peers who did not receive the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum?

Students' responses to items from the 2016–2017 Student Climate Survey were compared across groups (i.e., treatment and control) to determine if differences in students' perceptions of school climate existed prior to implementing the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum (Appendix B). For the most part, students' perceptions were similar regardless of treatment or control group status. Examinations of the same students' responses to items in 2017–2018 found that middle students who had received Facing History and Ourselves curriculum had more favorable perceptions of climate than did their control group peers (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

**Middle school students who received the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum were more likely than their peers who did not receive the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum to believe that their classmates were respectful, felt safe at school, felt respected by teachers, and talked to peers about a problem.**



Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey.

\* Indicates a significant difference within item and between groups,  $p < .05$ .

### Data Analyzed in this Report.

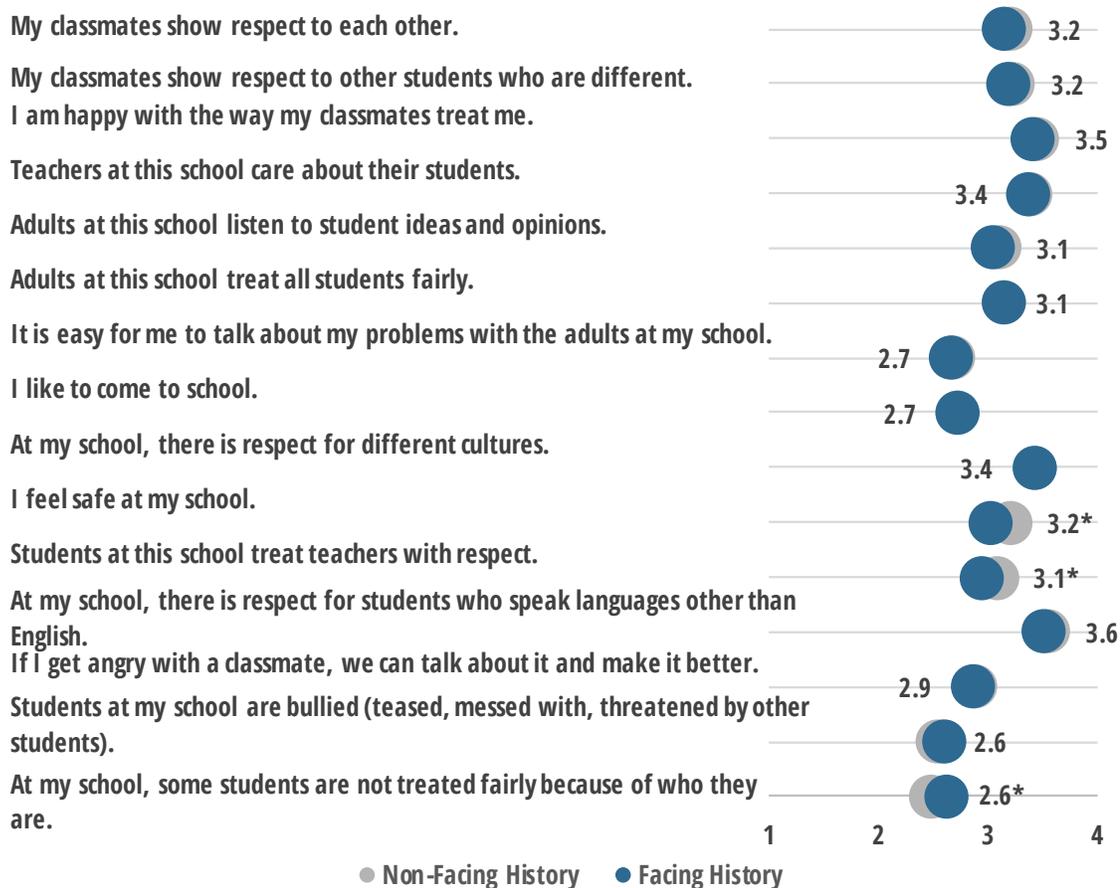
The following Student Climate Survey items were included in analyses (response options ranged from 1 = *never* to 4 = *a lot of the time*; \* indicates item only available in 2017–2018):

- My classmates show respect to each other.
- My classmates show respect to other students who are different.
- I am happy with the way my classmates treat me.
- Teachers at this school care about their students.
- Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.
- Adults at this school treat students fairly.
- It is easy for me to talk about my problems with the adults at my school.
- I like to come to school.
- At my school, there is respect for different cultures.
- I feel safe at my school.
- Students at this school treat teachers with respect.
- At my school, there is respect for students who speak languages other than English.
- If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.\*
- Students at my school are bullied.
- At my school, some students are not treated fairly because of who they are.\*

At the high school level, however, students who had received the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum had some less favorable perceptions of climate than did their peers who did not receive the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum (Figure 2). Indeed, high school students who learned the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum held less positive beliefs regarding school climate after participating in the class than they did prior to participating in the class (see Appendix C). This phenomenon, known as reference bias, occurs when individuals’ self-reported awareness of a specific behavior (such as bullying) increases after learning about that specific behavior, and is common in the bullying research literature, particularly among high school students (see Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015). Therefore, it is possible that the high school students, who are more developmentally advanced than their middle school peers, became more aware of issues relating to racism, sexism, and homophobia occurring at their school after learning the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, thereby altering their self-reported responses to some Student Climate Survey items. Although these perceptions were more negative than they were prior to participating in the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, the results indicate an increased awareness of issues that were taught using the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum—arguably a positive outcome.

Figure 2.

**High school students who received the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum were less likely than their peers who did not receive the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum to feel safe at school, treat teachers with respect, and treat all students fairly.**



Source: 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey.

\* Indicates a significant difference within item and between groups,  $p < .05$ .

## Conclusion

Although not a comprehensive evaluation of the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, the analyses presented in this report suggest that learning the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum changed some students' perceptions of school climate. At the middle school level, students held more favorable views of school climate after experiencing the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, whereas high school students' perceptions became more attenuated to issues related to lessons learned during class. As additional schools and teachers (i.e., Anderson High School and Covington Middle School) implement Facing History and Ourselves curriculum in 2018–2019, it is important to continue monitoring these outcomes.

## Reference

Yeager, D. S., Fong, C. J., Lee, H. Y., & Espelage, D. L., (2015). Declines in efficacy of anti-bullying programs among older adolescents: Theory and a three-level meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 37*, 36–51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2014.11.005>



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## Appendix A. 2017-2018 demographic characteristics of students who received Facing History and Ourselves curriculum and similar students who did not receive Facing History and Ourselves curriculum

		Facing History	Non-Facing History
Gender	Male	49%	49%
	Female	51%	51%
Race	Black or African American	9%	7%
	Hispanic	60%	61%
	White	32%	32%
Economically disadvantaged	Yes	50%	36%
	No	50%	64%

Source. 2017–2018 AISD student records.

## Appendix B. 2016–2017 responses to Student Climate Survey items for students who received Facing History and Ourselves Curriculum and similar students who did not receive Facing History and Ourselves Curriculum, by level

Student Climate Survey Items	Middle School		High School	
	Facing History (n = 284)	Non-Facing History (n = 173)	Facing History (n = 593)	Non-Facing History (n = 301)
My classmates show respect to each other.	3.29	3.20	3.14	3.20
My classmates show respect to other students who are different.	3.35	3.18	3.24	3.26
I am happy with the way my classmates treat me.	3.50	3.47	3.45	3.44
Teachers at this school care about their students.	3.72	3.64	3.44	3.48
Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.	3.28	3.34	3.12	3.22
Adults at this school treat all students fairly.	3.44	3.49	3.24	3.27
It is easy for me to talk about my problems with the adults at my school.	2.86	2.94	2.78	2.77
I like to come to school.	3.18	3.09	2.95	2.91
I feel safe at my school.	3.43	3.56	3.39	3.51*
Students at this school treat teachers with respect.	3.18	2.99	2.97	3.13*
At my school, there is respect for students speaking languages other than English.	3.61	3.66	3.54	3.63
Students at my school are bullied (teased, messed with, threatened by other students).	2.51	2.59	2.60	2.50

Source. 2016–2017 Student Climate Survey.

Note. \* indicates a significant difference within item and between groups,  $p < .05$ .

## Appendix C. 2016–2017 to 2017–2018 responses to Student Climate Survey items for students who received Facing History Students Only

Student Climate Survey Items	Middle School		High School	
	2016-2017 (n = 284)	2017-2018 (n = 173)	2016-2017 (n = 593)	2017-2018 (n = 173)
My classmates show respect to each other.	3.29	3.15	3.14	3.15
My classmates show respect to other students who are different.	3.35	3.27	3.24	3.18
I am happy with the way my classmates treat me.	3.50	3.48	3.45	3.40
Teachers at this school care about their students.	3.72	3.56	3.44	3.37
Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.	3.28	3.24	3.12	3.03
Adults at this school treat all students fairly.	3.44	3.34	3.24	3.14
It is easy for me to talk about my problems with the adults at my school.	2.86	2.80	2.78	2.67
I like to come to school.	3.18	2.97	2.95	2.72
I feel safe at my school.	3.43	3.40	3.39	3.42
Students at this school treat teachers with respect.	3.18	3.15	2.97	2.95
Students at my school are bullied (teased, messed with, threatened by other students).	2.51	2.58	2.60	2.60
At my school, there is respect for students speaking languages other than English.	3.61	3.69	3.54	3.51
At my school, there is respect for different cultures.	--	3.52	--	3.42
If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.	--	3.19	--	2.86
At my school, students take care of each other.	--	3.20	--	3.00
At my school, some students are not treated fairly because of who they are.	--	2.39	--	2.63

*Source.* 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey items.

*Note.* -- indicates item was new in 2017–2018.