

Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force

VISION

Austin will become a school district in which every principal, teacher, counselor and administrator believes that all children have the ability to learn and achieve, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status, and that manifests that belief through action on every campus, in every classroom, and through every administrative decision.

CHARGE

- *Needs Assessment*
- *Leadership Roles and Responsibilities*
- *Training* to create/enhance knowledge and understanding about and among the District's diverse cultures, and model and encourage respectful dialogue and conversation.
- *Pedagogy Refinement and Delivery*, including but not limited to the following:
 - Alignment with the nine principles of learning (IFL);
 - Definition and manifestation of high expectations for all students;
 - Language;
 - Curriculum content, context, and process;
 - Community connections; and
 - Fundamental knowledge of cultures as it relates to effective teaching and learning.
- *Accountability*, including a definition of success and accompanying measures to determine if the initiative has helped to produce success, future staff development, self-assessments, appraisal instruments, etc.

Introduction

THE CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO TEACHING AND LEARNING INITIATIVE

Approximately six years ago, the program “Common Bonds” was introduced to provide diversity training to AISD employees. For reasons ranging from the alleged weakness and narrow focus of the program’s content to the alleged failure to sustain its delivery, the program did not prove to be effective on a district-wide basis.

Shortly after the current Superintendent arrived in Austin, he recommended — and the Board strongly supported — the Institute for Learning (IFL) initiative. At its core, the initiative promotes high expectations for all children in the District, regardless of geography, socioeconomic status, gender, culture, or race. The initiative also embodies nine fundamental principles of learning that include:

Organizing for Effort: This principle is premised on the assumption that sustained and directed effort can yield high achievement for all students. Everything should be organized to evoke and support this effort and to send the message that effort is expected and that tough problems yield to sustained work.

Clear Expectations: This principle mandates that expectations for student learning are defined explicitly and communicated clearly in ways that get them "into the heads" of school professionals, parents, the community and, above all, students themselves.

Fair and Credible Evaluations: This principle requires that the assessments used to evaluate students be ones that students find fair, and that parents, the community, and employers find credible.

Recognition of Accomplishment: This principle demands that the accomplishments of students be regularly recognized.

Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum: This principle implies a curriculum organized around major concepts that students are expected to know deeply. In every subject, at every grade level, instruction and learning should include commitment to a knowledge core, high thinking demand, and active use of knowledge.

Accountable Talk: This principle puts forth and demands knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion. It also requires the use of evidence appropriate to the discipline (e.g., proofs in mathematics, data from investigations in science, textual details in literature, documentary sources in history) and the following of established norms of good reasoning.

Socializing Intelligence: This principle finds support in the concept of intelligence as a set of problem-solving and reasoning capabilities, as well as a set of beliefs about one's right and obligation to understand and make sense of the world and one's capacity to figure things out over time. It is based on the belief that educators can “teach” intelligence by calling on students to use the skills of intelligent thinking and by holding them responsible for doing so.

Self-Management or Learning: This principle requires students to notice when they don't understand something and take steps to remedy the situation, as well as formulate questions and inquiries that let them explore deep levels of meaning. The principle also permits students to manage their own learning by evaluating the feedback they get from others; bringing their background knowledge to bear on new learning; anticipating learning difficulties and apportioning their time accordingly; and judging their progress toward a learning goal.

Learning as Apprenticeship: This principle focuses on bringing the power of apprenticeship learning into schooling by organizing learning environments so that complex thinking is modeled and analyzed, and by providing mentoring and coaching as students undertake extended projects and develop presentations of finished work, both in and beyond the classroom.

In addition to the Institute for Learning initiative, several task forces, committees, and organizations in the community have emphasized the need for the Austin Independent School District to address cultural responsiveness. (For a full discussion of these previous recommendations, please see the Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee Report.) As well, several high schools in AISD have recognized the need for training in the area of cultural responsiveness and have contracted with a variety of vendors to provide such training.

Approximately two years ago, the Board, believing that perceptions about cultural differences and that conscious and/or insidious racism are often the root cause of academic challenges in the District's classrooms, approved funding for substantive work in this area. As a first step, the Superintendent authorized the formation of an informal committee that began meeting in September of 2001. They explored the means by which the District could construct an initiative to address cultural connections to effective teaching and learning. The informal committee held a series of meetings to discuss both the sensitive process by which the initiative was to be conducted and its critical substance.

Following the lead of the informal committee, the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force was formed in April of 2002. The Task Force was comprised of internal staff representatives, local experts, parents, and community leaders. It was created to provide guidance and direction on: (a) the refinement and delivery of culturally relevant pedagogy and (b) professional development that will enhance teaching and learning for all children. In undertaking these efforts, the Task Force were

responding to the need to close the achievement gaps between students of different economic backgrounds, and between White students and students of color. In his address to the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force in April of 2002, the Superintendent challenged the Task Force to lay the foundation for an ongoing program that will “ensure that everyone in this school district is valued and treated with dignity and respect” and will allow students to “build on the richness of their cultures and experiences as a way to enhance their academic success.”

To make certain that the Task Force’s work was comprehensive and complete, the Task Force organized itself into six subcommittees that met periodically to accomplish the following specific objectives:

Needs Assessment & Literature Review Subcommittee: The Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee was responsible for conducting a district-wide needs assessment and opinion survey, and for completing an exhaustive review of the available literature on culture and education to be used by the other subcommittees in identifying best practices.

Values Subcommittee: The Values Subcommittee was responsible for examining the District’s policies and practices, including its hiring practices, Special Education program, and rates of referrals to Alternative Education Programs by ethnicity for evidence of cultural responsiveness or lack of cultural responsiveness.

Pedagogy Subcommittee: The Pedagogy Subcommittee was responsible for identifying areas of the curriculum, teaching methodologies, etc. that need to be altered or modified to reflect cultural responsiveness, and for recommending alterations or modifications. Ultimately, the work of the Pedagogy Refinement Subcommittee was divided into the following five distinct components: basic knowledge of diverse cultures, curriculum diversity, language and voices, high expectations, and community.

Training Subcommittee: The Training Subcommittee was responsible for reviewing the Request for Proposals submitted by vendors of cultural training, and identifying the vendor(s) best able to meet the needs of AISD. The Training Subcommittee was also responsible for developing the process by which the training would be conducted throughout the District.

Community Outreach Subcommittee: The Community Outreach Subcommittee was responsible for encouraging public participation in, and keeping the District’s stakeholders informed of the Task Force’s work.

Customer Service Initiative Subcommittee: The Customer Service Initiative Subcommittee was responsible for providing culturally relevant feedback to the District’s nascent Customer Service Initiative.

Over the last year, the members of the Task Force have had the opportunity to meet with several renowned experts in the area of culture and education. For example, in September, the Task Force had the opportunity to visit with **Dr. Walter Secada**, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Dr. Secada discussed his research in the area of equity in mathematics education, and his initial observations following visits to schools in the Austin Independent School District. In October, members of the Task Force met with **Dr. LaVonne Neal**, an assistant professor in the Department of Education at Southwestern University in Georgetown, to discuss her important work in the area of culturally-responsive teaching. In addition, members of the Task Force had the opportunity to hear an October presentation to the Austin ISD Board of Trustees by **Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings**, a professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Senior Fellow in Urban Education at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. In her presentation, Dr. Ladson-Billings shared some of her research concerning effective practices for teaching African-American children. Also, in November, the Task Force visited with **Dr. Francisco Guajardo**, the founder of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, about his inspiring success with Mexican-American students in Edcouch-Elsa. Finally, in March, the Task Force met with **Dr. Ted Gordon**, Director of African-American Studies at the University of Texas. Dr. Gordon provided the Task Force with his ideas for connecting with African-American students in an educational setting. The experiences and research of these, and other experts proved essential to the work of the Task Force.

The Task Force also spent several hours in August with students from the **Chief's Youth Forum**, a collaboration between the Austin Independent School District and the Austin Police Department. The Task Force members had an opportunity to ask the students questions about their personal experiences with and thoughts on cultural responsiveness in the District. In addition, the students shared suggestions for improvement with Task Force members.

As well, the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force had the opportunity to work extensively with the Collaborative Inquiry Project's **Dr. Juanita Garcia and Dr. Pedro Reyes**. The Collaborative Inquiry Project, a collaboration between Austin Independent School District and the University of Texas, has sought to determine the most effective way of transforming elementary and secondary schools in the District so that they more effectively promote the academic and social development of students.

On January 18, 2003, the Task Force held the first **Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Community Forum**. The Community Forum provided the Task Force with the important opportunity to discuss its work with members of the Austin ISD community, as well as to receive essential community feedback. In addition, members of the Task Force and the nearly 300 members of the community in attendance were treated to a keynote address by **Dr. Margarita Calderon**, a faculty member and research scientist at the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University.

The work of the Task Force to date has been focused predominately on research, identification of best practices, and formation of recommendations for future action. However, the Task Force recognized that it was important to begin the process of developing cultural responsiveness in the District as soon as possible. As the first step in a long process, a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a provider of cultural awareness and prejudice reduction training was disseminated in the spring of 2002. In the end, the experienced **National Coalition Building Institute** (NCBI) was selected. The members of the Task Force participated in a training session held by NCBI in June of 2002, and high schools throughout the District began benefiting from the valuable training in March of 2003.

A Note About “Culture” and “Cultural Responsiveness”

For purposes of this report and study, culture is meant to be inclusive of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, and age. In addition, the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force has chosen to use the terms “culturally responsive” and “cultural responsiveness,” instead of “culturally competent” and “cultural competency.” This decision was made because the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force does not expect that everyone within the Austin Independent School District will realistically achieve “competency” in every culture. Rather, the Task Force wants all of the District’s stakeholders to be aware of other cultures, to be willing to acknowledge and talk about cultural differences, and to conduct all interactions in a respectful and responsible manner that protects and preserves the dignity of people as individuals. The Task Force feels that respect is the most important attribute that we can all hope to attain. It should be the cornerstone of all interactions and behaviors.

Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee

CHARGE

Like that of many districts in our nation, the Austin Independent School District's student population has changed significantly in the last two decades. Whereas the District was once predominately white and middle class, the current student population is predominately students of color and those living in poverty. As the demographics have changed, so have the overall achievement levels of students in the District. Students of color are not performing at comparable level to their white counterparts. In other words, there is an achievement gap among the races. One of the charges of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force was to conduct an assessment to determine campus needs as they relate to eliminating this achievement gap. The Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee undertook this charge.

In addition, the successful accomplishment of all other components of the Task Force charge depended in large part on the collection and review of pertinent literature to be used in the identification of best practices. For this reason, the Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee was responsible for identifying, collecting, and disseminating literature relevant to the work of the Task Force for use by Task Force members and subcommittees.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Responding to Previous Recommendations

The rationale for conducting a needs assessment was not originally introduced by the Task Force. Rather, multiple task forces, committees, and organizations in the community, including the Dropout Prevention Task Force, the Mayor's Committee on K – 12 Educational Excellence, the East Side Action Coalition, and the Community Action Network have identified and articulated the need to address cultural issues that may contribute to the achievement gaps present in the District.

On October 25, 1999, Superintendent Pat Forgione created the **Dropout Prevention/Reduction Task Force** to assist the Austin Independent School District in a comprehensive effort to reduce the number of students who drop out of school before graduating from high school. On March 25, 2000, the Dropout Prevention/Reduction Task Force released its specific recommendations for a sustained community-wide effort. Several of the Task Force's recommendations focused on the need for the District to address cultural differences. In particular, the Task Force recommended:

- Reinstating the expectation for ongoing training in cultural, socioeconomic, language and other factors that affect learning

- Designing training programs to help high school teachers serve students who have fallen behind, e.g., culturally sensitive behavior and actions
- Holding ongoing multicultural training for teachers, school staff, and students with the result that all students will be treated with dignity

In January of 2002, Austin Mayor Gus Garcia created the **Mayor's Committee on K-12 Educational Excellence** to provide policy recommendations to the Austin Independent School District on ways to address cultural differences and close the performance gap for students of color. The Committee specifically recommended:

- Recognition and appreciation of a student's cultural background and family situation by teachers and staff
- Demonstration of a genuine comfort in the presence of the culture of others by teachers and staff
- Recognition that what is acceptable in one culture may not be acceptable to another
- Development by teachers of a better understanding of different cultures and ability to communicate better with various ethnic students
- Basing academic expectations on each student's ability rather than on stereotypical beliefs

In October of 2002, following a series of meetings between the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees and the **East Side Action Coalition**, the District's administration and leaders of the District Advisory Council created a comprehensive proposal to improve the academic performance of African-American students in the Austin Independent School District. The proposal recommended the following:

- Provide all African-American students with an educational program comprised of rigorous curricula and quality teaching so that each student will be prepared to master the standards and achieve at high levels.
- Provide African-American students the support they need to graduate from high school well prepared for both college and careers.
- Ensure that African-American students participate and succeed in an advanced curriculum including, but not limited to, Honors and Advanced Placement courses to prepare for college and careers.
- Ensure that gifted and talented African-American students are properly identified and served in the District G/T education program.

- Identify African-American students for Special Education services at a rate proportional to their representation in the total school district population.
- Ensure that African-American students are regularly taught by teachers, and occasionally by substitute teachers, who are highly qualified and whose ethnicity reflects that of the District's student population.
- Pay AISD teachers and administrators equitably regardless of gender or ethnicity.
- Provide the East Austin community the information and opportunity to be informed partners in the education process.

Finally, in August of 2002, the **Community Action Network** released a report entitled *Making the Grade: CAN Assessment on Education K-16*. The CAN report, which examined and analyzed all school districts in Travis County including Austin ISD, specifically called for efforts to close the gaps in achievement and participation across racial, ethnic, cultural and economic groups. The report called for:

- Increasing the participation of minority students in education settings
- Increasing the educational achievement of minority students
- Recognizing and embracing diversity as a valuable asset in our community

Input from the Cultural Connections to Teaching & Learning Community Forum

The Cultural Connections Community Forum was held on Saturday, January 18, 2003. As part of the Community Forum, the Task Force solicited the input of members of the community in attendance. Although the community was not specifically asked to identify whether a need for the work of the Task Force existed, the results of the feedback surveys and the focus group discussions reveal widespread community support for the work of the Task Force and clear encouragement for continued efforts in the area.

Needs Assessment and Survey

The Sample

The Opinion Survey and Needs Assessment were mailed to the Principal and one Assistant Principal at each AISD campus. [See Appendix B and Appendix C.] Of the 208 Surveys and Needs Assessments that were sent out, 106 Opinion Surveys and 78 Needs Assessments were completed and returned (return rates of 51% and 38% respectively). At least one Opinion Survey was received from 75% of elementary schools, 82% of the middle schools, and 76% of the high schools. Needs Assessments were completely anonymous (unless campuses wanted to list their name for additional assistance), thus response rates by campus level cannot be calculated.

Measure Development

The Opinion Survey and Needs Assessment were developed by members of the Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee and experts in cultural equity and diversity from the University of Texas, with additional input from District staff and other members of the Task Force.

The **Opinion Survey** was a 4-item anonymous survey. Respondents were asked to indicate factors that they believed were associated with achievement gaps and identify those factors that they believed currently existed at their particular campuses. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate solutions to achievement gaps. Items were answered by indicating on a bubble sheet a yes or no to each of the factors listed.

The **Needs Assessment** included 5 open-ended items about achievement gaps, data that campus staff may have examined related to achievement gaps, actions taken as a result of examining the data, and additional help campuses may want to assist them in closing achievement gaps. Respondents were given the option to identify themselves to receive further assistance. Of those who returned Needs Assessment (n=78), twelve individuals from ten campuses (13%) identified themselves to receive further assistance.

Results of the Opinion Survey

For the Opinion Survey, the percentage of respondents endorsing each statement was calculated for the entire group and disaggregated by school level (elementary, middle or junior high, and high school). [See Appendix B.] Chi-squares tests were calculated to determine if principals at different school levels were answering questions in a similar manner.

Question 1. What do you think are the causes of achievement gaps?

The most frequently endorsed reasons chosen by the respondents were:

- 82.1% - Lack of differentiation in instruction to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students
- 79.2% - Low teacher expectations for some students
- 66.0% - Inability of teachers to relate or communicate effectively with or motivate students who do not share the same culture, ethnicity, and/or language as the teachers
- 61.3 % - Home environment not providing requisite skills for students to succeed

Question 2. What are the solutions you think would be most effective in decreasing the achievement gaps?

The most frequently endorsed solutions chosen by the respondents were:

- 90.6% - Differentiate curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students
- 88.7% - Organize the instructional setting to provide extra time for interventions to help those students who need extra help
- 87.7% - Have high expectations for all students
- 74.5% - Place the most skilled teachers with the students who have the greatest needs

Question 3. What do you believe may be a significant factor that can cause achievement gaps?

The most frequently endorsed factors chosen by the respondents were:

- 70.8% - Instruction for the lowest achieving students given by teachers who are less skilled
- 65.1% - Teachers' low expectations for or negative attitudes towards some groups of students
- 61.3% - Lack of time for teacher professional development

Question 4. Of the factors listed in question 3, which do you see on your campus?

Only one factor was chosen by more than 50% of the respondents. That factor was:

- 64.2% - Lack of time for teacher professional development

Differences in answers were as follows:

- Middle and high school respondents were more likely to report that misidentification of some student groups to Special Education was a factor that contributed to the achievement gap.

- Elementary and high school respondents were more likely to report that teachers' lack of knowledge about students' home life was a factor that contributed to the achievement gap.
- High school respondents were more likely to report that misidentification of some student groups to Gifted and Talented programs was a factor that contributed to the achievement gap on their campuses.
- High school respondents reported more often that teachers with less experience teaching the lowest achieving students was a problem that contributed to the achievement gap on their campuses.

Results of the Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment was analyzed by examining the written answers given by respondents, and grouping similar answers into overarching categories. The number and percentage of respondents making each statement was then calculated. [See Appendix C.] The most frequently reported answers are listed below.

- Almost 75% of respondents indicated that they had problems with achievement gaps on their campuses.
- Almost all had looked at data related to achievement gaps including:
 - 86% examined TAAS data and,
 - 68% had looked at program placement data (Special Education, ESL, Gifted and Talented).
- Although most reported on the Opinion Survey that teacher experience was a factor contributing to achievement gaps, only two respondents reported examining this type of data.
- Less than 4% of campuses reported conducting observations or student or staff surveys.
- The most frequently reported action taken (70%) as a result of examining the data was to talk with others (including: administrators, specialists, parents, campus staff and faculty).
- About 25% made action plans, designed or implemented professional development for teachers, or examined school processes.
- 30% of the respondents who said they used data related to decreasing achievement gaps reported that the action they took was successful in decreasing achievement gaps, another 30% said they did not know yet if they were successful.

- The most frequent assistance requested was money for teachers to plan, tutor students after school, or to attend professional development (18% requested), time for teachers to attend professional development, plan, or study data (33% requested), and more professional development for teachers (38% requested).

Limitations

- Because the Opinion Survey items were closed ended, respondents may have had other beliefs about the reasons and solutions for achievement gaps, and may have seen other problems on their campuses related to achievement gaps that they were not able to list.
- Respondents may not have felt completely free to list or discuss problems on their campuses or ask for help due to pressure to perform at high levels.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the need to close the achievement gap, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District support the requests of the campus-based needs assessment respondents for additional money for teacher planning, tutoring of students, and attending professional development as the District develops the budgets for subsequent years.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the need to close the achievement gap, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District contact campuses that requested extra help in analyzing their school data and make arrangements to provide this support. Specifically, the committee recommends that Equity Audits be conducted on those campuses that requested support.

Equity audits (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2001) are a simple way to start a discussion of inequities within a school. Equity audits are simply “auditing” the school’s data for inequities by race and socioeconomic status. Not only will equity audits provide the campus with disaggregated data to help inform decision making, the information can be used in staff development sessions to inform the faculty of any existing areas of concern. Once these concerns are identified, the input of all stakeholders can be enlisted in developing strategies to eliminate the inequities on the campus, thereby eliminating the achievement gaps.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the need to close the achievement gap, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District conduct campus-level and district-level needs assessments and surveys in the future

in order to ensure that the efforts of the District remain relevant and responsive to changing needs.

The needs assessment and survey conducted by the Needs Assessment and Literature Review Subcommittee was necessary to identify current needs throughout the District in the area of cultural competency. However, as the Cultural Connections initiative takes root throughout the District, efforts will be made to address many of the needs identified in the needs assessment and survey. As a result, in the future, some needs identified in the 2003 assessment and survey may no longer be needs. At the same time, needs that were not identified in the needs assessment and survey may in fact be needs in months or years time. To ensure that the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative remains relevant and responds to legitimate needs, it is critical that the District make efforts to periodically assess and monitor the needs of the Austin Independent School District community in the area of cultural responsiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When the Task Force was first formed in April of 2002, it became immediately apparent that members of the Task Force needed access to culture and education literature in order to complete its work. In the first place, this type of literature was necessary to provide members of the Task Force with necessary background information on this issue. In addition, it was important that Task Force members approach their work with an understanding of efforts that had been made by other organizations and entities throughout the country and the theories that have been put forth by the many important scholars in the area of multicultural education. The literature would also provide the Task Force members and subcommittees with the tools necessary to identify best practices that could be adapted for use by the District.

Resources were identified through several means. Initially, District personnel conducted general research in the area of multicultural education and cultural responsiveness and collected relevant books and articles. In addition, Task Force members shared resources that they encountered through their own efforts. Finally, the advice of several outside experts was solicited in identifying resources that should be reviewed and made available to members of the Task Force.

All of these resources have been collected and maintained in the Resources Library in the Office of the General Counsel for Legal & External Affairs. A Cultural Connections Resources List has also been developed that identifies all of the resources available in the Resources Library. [See Appendix D.]

It is important to note that all members of the Task Force have not reviewed the resources identified and collected. As a result, the Task Force cannot, and does not, endorse the resources and recommends that they are read with a critical lens.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the current Cultural Connections Resources List be shared with all campuses in the District, along with information about the person to contact to review or receive copies of any of the collected literature.

The resources collected proved to be beneficial to members of the Task Force in accomplishing their work. However, the value of these resources is certainly not limited to the work of the Task Force specifically. Due to the fact that the resources are also valuable for providing important background information and assisting in the identification of best practices, it is important that they be shared with members of the Austin Independent School District community for possible use at the campus-level. For this reason, the Cultural Connections Resources List should immediately be shared with all campuses in the District. Information about the person to contact to review or receive copies of any of the identified resources should accompany the Resources List.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the current Cultural Connections Resources List be made immediately accessible on the District's website, along with information about the person to contact to review or receive copies of any of the collected literature.

While sending the Resources List to District campuses will make the information known, it does not ensure that the information will continue to be accessible to teachers, administrators, and staff at these campuses. In addition, the benefit of the collected resources should not necessarily be limited to District campuses. For this reason, the Cultural Connections Resources List should be made accessible to community members. Placing the Resources List on the District's website seems to be a logical way of ensuring that the information is widely accessible.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that a database of collected literature be developed and made accessible online, including short abstracts.

While sending the Resources List to campuses and making it available online is an important first step, it still requires campus personnel and community members to make contact with the person responsible for maintaining the library of resources at central offices in order to review or obtain copies of the resources. The extra time and effort required to obtain the resources likely means that many people who would otherwise take advantage of the resources may not. For this reason, a database with abstracts and links to the actual resources should be developed and made available online. A person could then access the resources on their own, without reliance on a third party at the District's central offices.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District’s instructional planning resource guides include literature identified as culturally responsive.

It is imperative that the District consistently demonstrate its commitment to improving cultural responsiveness. In addition, the District must make every effort to link cultural responsiveness to academic achievement and effective instruction. A failure to reference any culturally responsive resources in the instructional planning guides may serve as a signal to District teachers that the District classifies cultural responsiveness as separate from and peripheral to instruction.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that a person (or persons) at AISD central offices be responsible for continuing to collect relevant literature and update the Cultural Connections library and database to ensure that the data available to members of the AISD community is not outdated.

The area of multicultural education is constantly developing. New research is being conducted and new articles are being published. For this reason, the resources library that has been created and maintained during the last year may quickly become outdated. Also for this reason, it is important that the District identify someone to be responsible for continuing the search for new literature and periodically updating the library and database.

References:

Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2001, April). Equity audits: A practical tool for increasing equity in schooling. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Values Subcommittee

CHARGE

The Values Subcommittee was given the charge of looking at the current values and beliefs of the District as they relate to the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative. The following report is an overview of the Values Subcommittee's many discussions concerning these important issues. All information collected and reported is in alignment with the TEKS, the Principle of Learning, the Board's Results Policies, and the curriculum and Instructional Planning Guides ("IPGs"). Much of this information was obtained at meetings with eight District Department Directors and at the Community Forum held at Reagan High School.

SUMMARIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH AISD PERSONNEL

The Values Subcommittee met with directors of eight District departments. Discussion with each department focused on issues related to equity for all students, programs that were presently underway to address these equity issues, and challenges faced in achieving more equitable results. The following are highlights and challenges that were identified by each department.

Human Resources – Michael Houser, Director

Highlights:

- Diversity is a priority when hiring staff
- Urban Teacher Perceiver used for last 5 years to screen teachers for cultural sensitivity
- Pathways for future teachers being developed in CATE program to encourage AISD students to enter the teaching profession

Challenges:

- 80% of college of education students are Anglo
- Many districts recruit heavily in the 12-15 schools that graduate a high percentage of minority students
- Austin pay is competitive but cost of living is high
- Retention is a major issue: 50% of teachers leave in first 5 years

Special Education – Joan Solorio, Director

Highlights:

- AISD is “growing our own.” AISD teacher assistants encouraged to get certification through ACC and UT 2+2 program
- Data being collected by campus and “report card” being developed to monitor diversity of referrals and admissions to special education

Challenges:

- Not enough bilingual, and no African American assessment personnel
- Over-identification of African American students (16% in total student population, 21% in Special Education)
- Diagnosis appears to be culturally biased: 60% Hispanic coded language impaired; 60% Anglo coded OHI (often due to ADHD); 60% of African American coded Emotionally Disturbed.
- Keeping referrals to 10% or less per campus

Curriculum – Denise Collier, Director

Highlights:

- Equity: All students expected to master at a high level
- Curriculum matrix provides uniform standards of delivery across district
- Cultural norms well represented in social studies and literacy materials
- Videos of model teaching being developed
- New teachers observing master teachers

Challenges:

- Staff needs time for professional development and dialogue about their students’ needs and their teaching practices
- Holding teachers accountable for high standards

Gifted & Talented – Jim Granada, Director

Highlights:

- Criteria in place
- Mandatory training of staff
- Commence outreach to pastors, parents to inform about process
- Parents can request honors courses without teacher approval

Challenges:

- Achieving equity in identifying students: African-American 9-10%; Hispanic 24%; Asian 7-10% (overrepresentation)
- Magnet schools do not represent demographics of district
- Teacher turnover and keeping staff trained, even though mastery takes 3-5 years
- Identifying students – need to increase referrals in some groups
- Offering advanced courses on every campus is difficult due to low numbers
- Keeping students in honors and Advanced Placement Courses

Student Discipline – Bill Perry – (Temporary) Student Discipline Coordinator

Highlights:

- Data now collected and reported to area superintendents and campuses every 6 weeks for monitoring referrals to ALC, suspensions, etc.
- IMPACT Teams look at pattern of referrals (type of incident, staff referring)
- Awareness has been raised and best practices are being identified

Challenges:

- Disparity in percentage of students being referred – African-American: 33% referral rate vs. 15% of AISD population; Hispanic: 51% vs. 47%; Anglo: 15% vs. 37%
- Discretionary removals are of greatest concern
- Identifying ways to increase staff effectiveness in preventing and de-escalating discipline incidents
- Growing a better discipline climate

Alternative Learning Center – Joe Oliveri: Principal

Highlights:

- Reduced recidivism – students not as likely to come back to ALC
- Discretionary removals decreased 4% from last year
- Parent education and drug prevention programs offered

Challenges:

- Disparity of referrals: 26% of all removals are special education students, almost half of these were Hispanic
- Hispanic students made up nearly half of all students at ALC for past 5 years

- Programs are more effective with some groups than with others

Guidance & Counseling – Mary Sondgeroth, Director

Highlights:

- State and District emphasis on “closing the gap” in college enrollment
- Gear Up and ADVANCE grants supplementing capacity of program to reach more students
- More college information nights for parents K-12 being held
- Guidance Curriculum includes Appreciation of Diversity goals and objectives on each level
- Counselors trained in culturally sensitive counseling, college counseling for students with learning disabilities and immigrant students

Challenges:

- Enrollment and retention of students in honors courses
- Coordination of standardized testing and other non-guidance duties taking an average of 40% of counselors’ time that could be used in removing barriers to learning
- Getting information about services and college and career to parents
- Finding bilingual guidance curriculum materials

Dropout Prevention & Reduction – Linelle Clark, Coordinator

Highlights:

- IMPACT Teams on all campuses provide a systematic approach to addressing student attendance, academics and discipline concerns.
- IMPACT Teams facilitated by an Assistant Principal bring together campus personnel with diverse experiences and expertise who use a solution-focused problem-solving approach to help address the needs of students and faculty
- IMPACT Teams identify and share best practices

Challenges:

- Increasing the level of service and effectiveness of the IMPACT Teams
- Increasing the availability and access of social service resources (e.g., expand the services of the Youth & Family Assessment Program and the Truancy Court Pilot)

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that a systemic approach to improving the cultural responsiveness of all AISD employees be developed and that all AISD policies and practices account for and express the reality that AISD is culturally diverse, values that diversity, and encourages all stakeholders to understand and build upon the strengths of such diversity.

The systems for improving cultural responsiveness may be designed in collaboration with community, parent and student advocates, academic institutions (e.g. the Diversity Institute at the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin), organizations that specialize in cultural responsiveness training (e.g. National Coalition Building Institute), academic professionals with expertise in the fields of cultural responsiveness/multiculturalism, and teachers and staff within AISD that exemplify good cultural responsiveness.

In order for all AISD policies and practices to account for and reflect the reality that AISD is culturally diverse, etc., the following steps may be taken:

- Create a value statement that in AISD all individuals have inherent worth and will be respected for such. This statement should include that all stakeholders are encouraged to understand, assess, and work to increase their own cultural responsiveness. This statement should be publicized in multilingual format in all school publications, job descriptions, in classrooms, etc.
- Allow time and space for professional development and support networking that staff could access throughout the year. This would help those teachers who want more practical information in reaching their students. As well, revamp the mentorship program for teachers at the campus level by helping all staff identify their strengths.
- Use Clear Expectations and Accountable Talk to address the affective side of individuals. Although this is already embedded in the Principles of Learning, it is important to make this explicit and visible in teacher training related to those principles. As well, allow time and space for relationship building on each campus.
- Design accountability measures for affective educational goals including AISD Board results guidance curriculum, and bully-proofing programs.

Rationale

One discussion topic of the Values Subcommittee has been the possible lack of or poor cultural responsiveness of some white teachers and staff in dealing with a culturally diverse student population, made up mostly of Mexican American and African American students. By “a lack of cultural responsiveness” we mean two things: first, a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding about African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, other people of color and people with various backgrounds and life experiences; and second, an assumed universality of Anglo American middle-class culture.

Levels of cultural responsiveness are linked to the cultural and racial identity of teachers and staff. Simply stated, the root of the problem lies in the fact that while most students in AISD are Mexican American and African American, most teachers are white. This creates a dissonance in cultural connectedness that hampers the learning process. This does not mean that white teachers are incapable of being culturally responsive and that African American and Mexican American teachers are axiomatically culturally responsive. Rather it means that African American and Mexican American teachers have a much higher probability of being culturally responsive to African American and Mexican American students, respectively, by virtue of sharing the same culture or race.

For this reason we endorse the recruitment and retention of Mexican American and African American teachers to more fully reflect the student population. We also recognize that some white teachers are culturally responsive. We endorse further training to improve the cultural responsiveness of all teachers.

While the lack of cultural responsiveness may be a general problem within the District and its staff, we feel that it may represent an acute problem with the teaching staff, whose interaction with students is by far the most extensive and intense. In our view, many of the problems discussed by this subcommittee, such as the over-representation of Mexican American and African American students in Special Education; the disproportionate rate of disciplinary referrals of African American and Mexican American students; and the under-representation of Mexican American and African American students in Gifted & Talented Programs, are partially the result of this lack of cultural responsiveness.

The causal explanations for the problems above are complex and we do not mean to oversimplify them. It is our assessment that a lack of cultural responsiveness on the part of AISD teachers and staff is probably responsible, at least in part, for the problems mentioned. For example, discretionary referrals are highly subjective and often times are the result of the inability of a teacher to communicate effectively with a student. This difficulty in communication is not merely due to the limited language proficiency of teachers in Spanish or Ebonics (an African American language variation of English). This difficulty in communication is cultural as well. Notions of respect, authority, family responsibility, body language and eye contact, for example, are aspects of human interaction in a school context that are culturally specific. Teachers need to be culturally

responsive in understanding how these notions operate and what they mean so that they are not misinterpreted as grounds for discretionary referrals.

Another example of how a lack of cultural responsiveness may be conducive to some of the problems mentioned is observed in the data for referrals to Special Education. The cultural/racial breakdown for students referred to Special Education shows a disturbing tendency for most African Americans to be referred for “behavioral problems”; most Mexican Americans for “language problems”; and most whites for ADD. In our view, what this reveals, in part, is that a lack of cultural responsiveness also leads to the tendency for teachers and staff to treat and categorize students based on preconceived, though at times perhaps subconscious, racial and cultural stereotypes. Improving cultural responsiveness would help dispel some of these stereotypes and how they sometimes operate unintentionally.

The problem of a possible lack of cultural responsiveness is broad and it affects many aspects of the education process. For example, the lack of such responsiveness among teachers and staff occurs not just in their interactions with students, but in their interactions with parents as well. Cultural responsiveness also needs to be reflected in the content of curriculum and the range of teaching methods.

Based on presentations, discussions, and research, we feel that cultural responsiveness among teachers and staff is fundamental to the learning process and could contribute to the practice of cultural and racial pluralism. In turn, cultural responsiveness in teaching could also contribute to narrowing the educational achievement gap among Mexican American, African American, and white students. This notion is reflected in our recommendation.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR FOR STAFF POSITIONS

RECOMMENDATION

Based on a disparity in the numbers of children of color in AISD versus the numbers of teachers and other employees of color, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District aggressively recruit and retain Mexican-American, African-American and other teachers and administrators of color.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Creating a system of financial incentives to attract teachers of color to Austin, including possible tuition fellowships for students of color who agree to teach in Austin upon graduation or low-interest housing loans or subsidized housing for teachers in AISD.
- Creating stronger networks and partnerships with Teaching Colleges, Universities and Programs in the area in order to recruit more teachers of color; and working

with institutions of higher learning to help them better prepare future teachers in cultural responsiveness and in how to build respectful relationships.

- Implementing a program, in collaboration with UT Austin, similar to the one at UT A&M that is designed to encourage and support residents in Texas to pursue teaching careers in Texas. The chief goal of the AISD – UT program would be to insure greater representation of African American, Mexican American and other teachers and administrators of color in AISD.
- Advertising in job notices and job fairs that AISD is actively seeking people who are responsive and competent regarding various cultures.
- Raising the wage and benefits package of teachers in Austin so that they are on a par with the wage and benefit structure for teachers in other major cities in the country.
- Creating a Teaching Career Pathway in Austin schools, beginning in Middle Schools, to encourage all students, especially Mexican-American and African-American students, to pursue teaching careers in AISD. University Fellowships could be provided to support students who commit to teaching in Austin upon graduation.
- Seeking additional ways to retain and reward teachers who are successful at teaching all children in academic outcomes, at being advocates for all students, and at helping create meaningful change in school environments.
- Creating at least three task forces of AISD teachers and administrators as advisors to the Human Resources office: one drawn from African Americans, one drawn from Mexican Americans, and one drawn from Asian Americans. These would look at what AISD is doing to hire and retain employees of color and what more could be done.

Rationale

The disproportionately high number of white teachers to Mexican American and African American students creates cultural dissonance and has possibly resulted in poor cultural responsiveness among teachers and staff. We suggest that the recruitment and retention of African American, Mexican American and other teachers of color is needed to deal with this problem.

There are many other reasons why the recruitment and retention of teachers of color would play an important role in narrowing the educational achievement gap between Mexican American and African Americans students and white students and in contributing to cultural pluralism in the City of Austin. If AISD values cultural diversity, then it should institute policies and practices to ensure cultural diversity in its teaching and administrative staff. If cultural diversity is good for the classroom, then

it must be good for the teaching and administrative bodies as well. The defense of cultural and racial diversity as a compelling interest of AISD revolves, in part, around how different cultures and races enrich the learning and teaching experience by drawing on distinct experiences, histories and knowledge. In addition, a diverse student body needs diverse role models for those students. As broader social processes of “Globalization” unfold, characterized by a greater flow of information, labor and capital, knowledge of and openness towards cultural and racial diversity become all the more imperative.

Another reason why AISD should create policies and practices for greater cultural diversity of its teachers and staff is based on a simple premise of democracy. As a public institution, AISD should reflect, somewhat proportionately, the cultural and racial demographics of the population it serves. This population is predominantly Mexican American and African American. Public institutions that adequately reflect the cultural and racial demographics of the population they serve not only tend to function more efficiently and equitably, they also serve to represent the ideal of democratic political representation. Many public institutions, such as Police Departments and Social Service providers have adapted this organizational philosophy.

Finally, the importance of the recruitment and retention of African American and Mexican American teachers and staff goes beyond the immediate needs of AISD and the value of cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness. Policies and practices for the recruitment and retention of teachers and staff of color should also be viewed as a form of remedy for the contemporary effects of historic and existing racial discrimination. For centuries, people of color in the U.S., but especially African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans lived with institutional racism. The AISD recruitment and retention of Mexican American, African American and other teachers and staff of color would be a partial remedy for the centuries of racial marginalization and educational disenfranchisement that people of color have endured.

Pedagogy Subcommittee

Charge

The Pedagogy Subcommittee was charged with examining the issue of pedagogy and making recommendations for ensuring that teaching and learning throughout the District responds to and is reflective of the District's diversity. In addition, the Pedagogy Subcommittee was charged with developing a systematic process for creating leadership and benchmarks, and integrating strategies into daily operations at the District, school, and classroom levels. In particular, the Pedagogy Subcommittee was asked to review five areas of pedagogy – namely, curriculum; language; high expectations for all children; community; and a core knowledge set.

Background

The Pedagogy Subcommittee interviewed key personnel within the District and nationally known experts on culturally responsive pedagogy. Five themes were gleaned from these interviews.

- Different cultural groups often learn best if they are taught in different ways. Of course, there is often as much variation within a cultural group, as among cultural groups. Therefore, one must always be sensitive not to stereotype students while attempting to practice culturally responsive pedagogy.
- All curricula should communicate awareness, respect, appreciation, and understanding of all cultures, and especially the cultures of the children served by the District. The form as well as the content of the curriculum should accommodate cultural differences.
- Although students should be assisted in learning English so they will be able to compete in a culture that virtually requires English proficiency, all languages should be treated with respect and the ability to speak more than one language should be valued in schools as much as it is valued in the diplomatic corps and international business.
- A major problem for students of color is the low expectations many educators hold for them; these expectations lead teachers to behave in certain ways that transform low expectations into self-fulfilling prophecies.
- Schools need to become “bridges between mainstream culture and the lives and cultures of their students.”

Recommendation

Based on the fact that AISD is already overloaded with programs and initiatives, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that culturally-responsive pedagogy practices be integrated into the standard operating procedures (such as those connected with the appraisal process) and professional development activities in place throughout the District.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District identify individuals with experience and expertise to assist the District's IPG (Instructional Planning Guides) Review Committee in reviewing the IPG's for cultural responsiveness.

These individuals should ensure that: (a) the articulated goals in each curriculum area are not only consistent with state standards but also appropriate for a district whose students come from quite different cultural groups; (b) the sample activities are sufficiently varied so teachers will be able to see how to teach students from different cultural groups with preferences for different teaching and learning strategies; and (c) the assessment procedures listed are appropriate for assessing students from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the model lessons developed for each IPG should model culturally responsive pedagogy.

Formative feedback on the issue should be provided by those individuals selected to assist in the IPG review process to the Director of Curriculum, who is heading the IPG review process, during and/or after model lesson preparation, but prior to disseminating the lessons.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that principals, as part of regularly scheduled meetings with district officials, be given suggestions and materials that they could select from to help teachers in their schools teach in a more culturally responsive way and to assess whether the classroom and school environments are appropriate for serving diverse school populations.

Discussions about materials and strategies should be ongoing, and principals who have used materials and/or ideas presented at prior meetings should share data that they have gathered, either formally or informally, about the effectiveness of the materials/ideas.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that principals integrate concerns that include culturally responsive pedagogy into their use of the teacher appraisal system.

For instance, in Domain II, Learner-Centered Instruction, of the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS), there is an item (item 8) about “Appropriate Questioning and Inquiry.” A principal could open a discussion with his or her staff about whether the term *appropriate* should be interpreted differently for different cultural groups or whether different interpretations reflect low expectations on the part of the teacher.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the portfolio process used to assess the work of principals be altered to include an item about what the principal has done to help his/her staff teach in more culturally responsive ways.

Principals should also be asked to discuss the procedures they have used to assess their attempts to help their staff members become more culturally responsive teachers.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District communicate its commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy to textbook publishers and those responsible at the state level for the selection and adoption of the textbooks and, in the future, only purchase those textbooks that reflect this commitment.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that 3 East Austin schools (elementary, middle, and high school) in a vertical team be designated as “professional development schools.”

Professional development schools are schools designed to develop novice professionals, to provide ongoing cutting-edge professional development for experienced professionals, and for experimenting with promising educational practices and structures, including practices and structures that accommodate and promote student diversity and high academic achievement.

Training Subcommittee

CHARGE

The Training Subcommittee was given the charge of assisting the District in the implementation of a training model for AISD staff in the area of diversity with a focus on cultural responsiveness in teaching and learning; to ensure that the training has a special emphasis on (1) prejudice reduction; (2) heightened awareness on the part of administrators and teachers of the interrelationship between culture and teaching and learning; and (3) the training of select District staff members to lead training sessions on campuses and in central office departments to ensure that all employees are eventually trained.

BACKGROUND

Without question, the change in the demographics in the District necessitates shifts in how the children are educated. Teachers and administrators understand that the socialization of students plays an important role in the success of students in school. As a result, in the recent past, teachers and administrators have begun to value the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students.

However, merely valuing and respecting differences is not enough. The low academic achievement and high dropout rate of cultural and linguistic minorities reflects the need for the District to alter what occurs in the classroom to better meet the needs of these students.

Most teachers and staff have not received training during their pre-service or in-service to deal with issues of culture and their relation to teaching and learning. As a result, there is a need to institute training in this area. This training should include, but not be limited to, recognizing the beliefs, values, and behaviors that characterize the various cultures of the students and the impact that these beliefs, values, and behaviors have in the teaching and learning process.

NATIONAL COALITION BUILDING INSTITUTE (NCBI)

While recognizing that specialized, packaged programs or trainings in the area of connecting culture to teaching and learning are not readily available in the market place, the Training Subcommittee sought to procure a customized training similar to that offered within enlightened corporations. After an extensive dialogue among Task Force members, it was agreed that the District would prepare a Request for Proposal for this training, secure bids for the training that included a description of the training to be provided, and select a provider from among the proposals.

During the early spring of 2002, an RFP subcommittee was formed to assist in the selection of a proposal for Cultural Awareness Training. In particular, the RFP subcommittee sought a proposal that would provide a “train-the-trainer” experience in the area of cultural diversity, with an emphasis on prejudice reduction.

A total of six proposals were submitted. The subcommittee selected the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) to interview because it evidenced the most experience in a school setting. After an extensive conversation with NCBI, it was agreed that NCBI would offer a two-day training session at a retreat for Task Force members, members of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent, and senior-level District administrators.

TRAINING OF HIGH SCHOOLS

Process

The Training Subcommittee met with NCBI to determine whom the initial training should target. While the goal is to ultimately train all District staff, the Subcommittee determined that it would begin by targeting high schools. Initially, the Subcommittee proposed holding four one-day trainings. Three high schools would attend each one-day training session. The principal would select 15 to 20 people from each high school to attend the designated training session. Trainees could include the principal, teachers, parents, custodians, cafeteria workers, PTA representatives, clerical staff, or students. After the training session, the principal would select three individuals from those that had attended to go through a three-day train-the-trainer session. The individuals who had attended the train-the-trainer session would then be involved in the training at their high school.

In a meeting to discuss the proposed training schedule, high school principals suggested that they undergo training as a group prior to selecting individuals to represent the campus at future training sessions and spearhead the campus’s training program. The Subcommittee responded to this suggestion. High school principals, along with a couple of other campus representatives, underwent training on March 19, 2003 at Norris Conference Center behind Northcross Mall from 8:00 – 4:45 p.m.

In the interest of time and to accommodate the additional training session for principals, the Subcommittee chose to modify the overall training schedule. Rather than holding the four one-day trainings, the Subcommittee opted to hold two one-day training sessions for individuals designated by high school principals to represent each campus. It was determined that 3-4 individuals from each campus would attend each training session, so that a total of 6-8 representatives would be trained over the course of the two days. The two training sessions were held on May 13, 2003 and May 15, 2003 at the Professional Development Academy. All high schools were represented.

Between the principal training on March 19, 2003 and the training sessions on May 13, 2003 and May 15, 2003, a total of 9-11 people from each high school campus underwent the NCBI training.

Content

Although the NCBI training focuses mainly on awareness and teaching skills in behavioral change, the content of the training consists of the following:

- Ups-Downs – differences; impressions gathered; pride
- What do you never again want people to ever say, think or do?
- How teachers and student impact perception for learning?
- How does it relate to disproportionate referrals and discipline?
- Teach teachers how to rethink within their paradigm.
- Rollout session.

The training will also be complemented by other resources, which would be made available to campuses to meet their specific needs in their long-term follow-up planning. NCBI staff will be available to help campuses develop their follow-up plans and to help secure additional resources.

NEXT STEPS

Certainly, the training of high school principals and a handful of other campus representatives will not be effective, in and of itself, in promoting the type of systemic change the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative is seeking to accomplish. The training must reach as many people on the campuses as possible. For this reason, the Training Subcommittee and the full Task Force is proposing an extensive training program to be accomplished at the campus level to ensure that the effects of the training are felt throughout the campuses.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that one three-day “train the trainer” session with NCBI be held prior to October 31, 2003. Attendees at the “train the trainer” session would include the individuals that previously attended the NCBI training.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the individuals from each campus that attend NCBI training serve as a Core Committee for each of their campuses to develop a campus-specific follow-up plan for teaching others on their campus. The Core Committee should meet once a month with those trained to monitor implementation, address any problems, and lead efforts and sustain momentum for more effective cultural responsiveness on the campus.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that a proposed action plan be developed by the Core Committee for reinforcement and enhancement of lessons learned for a 12-month period after the “train the trainer” session.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that an evaluation plan be developed that measures attainment of goals at the end of the “train the trainer” session and at 180-day intervals thereafter for 12 months.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the Chief Academic Officer (or the other District staff person ultimately responsible for the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative) be responsible for creating a process to share and analyze data across campuses to determine results and implications of the Cultural Connections initiative. This information should be shared with other campuses and appropriate staff.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that additional training resources be made available to campuses to meet their specific needs in their long-term follow-up planning; i.e., the UT Diversity Center staff and materials.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that training be made available in the near future to all middle schools and elementary schools throughout the District, and that the process identified above, with appropriate modifications, be followed in providing that training.

Community Outreach Subcommittee

CHARGE

One component of the Charge of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force was “community connections.” The Community Outreach Subcommittee was formed to fulfill this portion of the Task Force’s charge by coordinating the flow of information from the Task Force to the community. In addition, the Community Outreach Subcommittee was responsible for soliciting, gathering, and sharing the advice and feedback of the community on the Task Force’s work.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that a Cultural Connections task force and/or committee continue to work with the District and community regarding cultural responsiveness on local campuses and central office. This task force and/or committee should submit a quarterly report to the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees to ensure accountability and sustainability.

The quarterly reports provided to the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees should be shared with District personnel, as well as the District’s stakeholders identified in the AISD Key Stakeholder Directory developed and maintained by the District’s Partners in Education program. The quarterly reports should also be made accessible on the District’s website to permit members of the community to monitor the progress of the District’s Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative. In addition, the quarterly reports should be discussed and/or presented at any future Community Forums.

COMMUNITY FORUM

As the primary means of fulfilling its charge, the Community Outreach Subcommittee – with the assistance of District staff – planned and executed the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Community Forum. The Forum was held on January 18, 2003 at Reagan High School from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The Community Outreach Subcommittee identified four goals to be furthered through the Community Forum. These goals were as follows:

- Enhance the awareness of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative
- Facilitate a dialogue within the community regarding the cultural challenges the District faces and the potential solutions to meet those challenges.
- Facilitate a shared learning experience, which enhances our understanding of the important connection between culture and education.
- Open a two-way dialogue with all stakeholders concerned with the academic achievements of all AISD students.

Forum Attendance

The Community Forum was highly successful, involving more than 250 community members and District personnel. At least 17% of those in attendance were self-reported as community members. At the same time, numerous community organizations were represented, including the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Headstart/Child, Inc., El Buen Samaritano, the University of Texas Department of Education, the Austin Council of PTAs, the Austin American Indian Heritage Committee, the Asian American Cultural Center, the Jewish Women International, the Austin Police Department, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Baptist Minister's Union, the Austin Area Interreligious Ministries, and the City of Austin Mayor's Office.

Each high school and middle school within the District was represented at the Community Forum. In addition, sixty-two elementary schools sent representatives.

Structure of the Forum

Following introductions from Johna Edwards, member of the AISD Board of Trustees; Dr. Pat Forgione, Superintendent of AISD; and the Co-Chairs of the Cultural Connection to Teaching and Learning Task Force, participants of the Community Forum were provided the opportunity to hear from Dr. Margarita Espino Calderon. Dr. Calderon is currently a Research Scientist at the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed At-Risk (CRESPAR) of the Johns Hopkins University. She has been a major contributor to "Success for All," a nationally acclaimed school reform model. She has also been conducting research projects on language-minority schooling in El Paso, Texas, on issues dealing with instructional processes and staff development practices in schools with language minority populations, and on bi-national education.

Participants were also invited to attend two of six break-out sessions, hosted by members of the Task Force and District personnel. The break-out sessions allowed participants at the Community Forum to learn about important aspects of the Task Force's work and the

efforts of the District in the area of cultural responsiveness. The break-out sessions were as follows:

- Parent Involvement
- U.T.'s Collaborative Inquiry Study
- What GEAR UP is Teaching Us
- Pedagogy Refinement and the TEKS, Institute for Learning, and Curriculum Alignment
- NCBI Cultural Awareness Training
- Cultural Values Articulation, including Special Education, Student Discipline, and Teacher Recruiting

In order to specifically solicit community feedback and advice, participants were asked to participate in focus group discussions. In addition, participants were asked to complete community feedback surveys.

Community Feedback Surveys

The feedback surveys asked respondents to rate aspects of the Community Forum by indicating the extent to which they agreed (6 = Agree) or disagreed (1 = Disagreed) with particular statements. In addition, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions on the Feedback Form. 120 surveys Feedback Forms were completed.

The responses were as follows:

Statement 1. I learned something new about AISD's work to address culture and diversity issues in schools.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	34%
5	37%
4	19%
3	4%
2	1%
1	3%
Not Rated	2%

Highlight: Over 70% of respondents indicated that they learned about AISD's work on culture and diversity issues by indicating a rating of '5' or '6'.

Statement 2. I felt comfortable asking questions and/or talking at today's event.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	47%
5	28%
4	16%
3	4%
2	3%
1	1%
Not Rated	3%

Highlight: Exactly 75% of respondents reported that they felt comfortable asking questions at the forum by indicating a rating of '5' or '6'.

Statement 3. The Task Force members listened to the community today.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	36%
5	27%
4	17%
3	9%
2	3%
1	0%
Not Rated	9%

Highlight: 63% of respondents reported that they felt that the Task Force listened to the community at the forum by indicating a rating of '5' or '6'.

Statement 4. I feel that another Community Forum should be held in the near future.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	72%
5	16%
4	4%
3	6%
2	0%
1	2%
Not Rated	1%

Highlight: Nearly 90% of respondents felt that another Community Forum should be held in the near future.

Open-Ended Question 1. What issues should the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force examine in the future?

- The **most common** responses related to the need for staff resources and training.
- The **second most common** responses were related to parent and family issues, both in relation to how teachers might encourage parent involvement and learn about their students' families, as well as how to assist in learning about various topics.

Open-Ended Question 2. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force?

- The **most common** responses related to ideas for improving future Community Forums, including suggestions to lengthen the Breakout Sessions and solicit student input.
- The **second most common** responses were related to the need for staff training and resources.

Focus Group Discussions

The Focus Group questions were designed for self-facilitated groups of forum participants (4-6 individuals) to discuss and record their responses. The following prompt was provided for discussion:

The Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force is addressing the following issues:

- The achievement gaps that exist between students of varying economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- The differences in the dropout rate for students of varying economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Differing rates of referral to special programs (Special Education, Gifted and Talented Programs, Alternative Learning Centers) for students of varying racial/ethnic or economic backgrounds.
- The cultural competence and responsiveness of District and campus staff.
- Recruiting staff at all levels that reflect the community's diversity.

This prompt was followed by three questions. The responses to these questions were as follows:

Question 1. What would you like the Task Force to know about these issues?

- The **most common** responses were related to the need for staff resources and training.
- Some of the **other** responses related to parent involvement and special education issues, as well as to the continued need for the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative.

Question 2. Are there any other issues you think that Task Force should address that it has not?

- The **most common** responses were related to the need for better parent-teacher communication.
- The **second most common** responses were related to the need for cultural responsiveness training throughout the District.
- Some of the **other** responses related to the need for student input, the development of culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher empowerment.

Question 3. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

- The **most common** responses were related to parent issues, including increasing parent involvement and improving communication with parents.
- The **second most common** responses were related to increasing involvement of the community in the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative.

Limitation

- Respondents to the Community Feedback survey and the Focus Group discussions were not asked to identify themselves as parents, community members or teachers. The groups' responses very likely differed, even with respect to the same topics such as "parent issues" and "staff resources and training" – which were two frequent categories of responses to the open-ended questions on the survey and the focus group discussions. Without information about the respondents' group membership, however, the differences in responses cannot be verified.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the community's positive response to the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Community Forum held in January of 2003, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District hold an annual community forum, named the "Vince Bland Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Community Forum," to share its progress in the area of cultural responsiveness; to solicit the feedback and advice of the community; and to provide shared professional development opportunities for faculty, administrators, and the community.

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The quarterly reports provided to the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees should be shared with District personnel, as well as the District’s stakeholders identified in the AISD Key Stakeholder Directory developed and maintained by the District’s Partners in Education program. The quarterly reports should also be made accessible on the District’s website to permit members of the community to monitor the progress of the District’s Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative. In addition, the quarterly reports should be discussed and/or presented at any future Community Forums.

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- Enhance the awareness of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative

- Facilitate a dialogue within the community regarding the cultural challenges the District faces and the potential solutions to meet those challenges.
- Facilitate a shared learning experience, which enhances our understanding of the important connection between culture and education.
- Open a two-way dialogue with all stakeholders concerned with the academic achievements of all AISD students.

Forum Attendance

The Community Forum was highly successful, involving more than 250 community members and District personnel. At least 17% of those in attendance were self-reported as community members. At the same time, numerous community organizations were represented, including the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Headstart/Child, Inc., El Buen Samaritano, the University of Texas Department of Education, the Austin Council of PTAs, the Austin American Indian Heritage Committee, the Asian American Cultural Center, the Jewish Women International, the Austin Police Department, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Baptist Minister's Union, the Austin Area Interreligious Ministries, and the City of Austin Mayor's Office.

Each high school and middle school within the District was represented at the Community Forum. In addition, sixty-two elementary schools sent representatives.

Structure of the Forum

Following introductions from Johna Edwards, member of the AISD Board of Trustees; Dr. Pat Forgione, Superintendent of AISD; and the Co-Chairs of the Cultural Connection to Teaching and Learning Task Force, participants of the Community Forum were provided the opportunity to hear from Dr. Margarita Espino Calderon. Dr. Calderon is currently a Research Scientist at the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed At-Risk (CRESPAR) of the Johns Hopkins University. She has been a major contributor to "Success for All," a nationally acclaimed school reform model. She has also been conducting research projects on language-minority schooling in El Paso, Texas, on issues dealing with instructional processes and staff development practices in schools with language minority populations, and on bi-national education.

Participants were also invited to attend two of six break-out sessions, hosted by members of the Task Force and District personnel. The break-out sessions allowed participants at the Community Forum to learn about important aspects of the Task Force's work and the efforts of the District in the area of cultural responsiveness. The break-out sessions were as follows:

- Parent Involvement

- U.T.’s Collaborative Inquiry Study
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- Pedagogy Refinement and the TEKS, Institute for Learning, and Curriculum Alignment
- NCBI Cultural Awareness Training
- Cultural Values Articulation, including Special Education, Student Discipline, and Teacher Recruiting

In order to specifically solicit community feedback and advice, participants were asked to participate in focus group discussions. In addition, participants were asked to complete community feedback surveys.

Community Feedback Surveys

The feedback surveys asked respondents to rate aspects of the Community Forum by indicating the extent to which they agreed (6 = Agree) or disagreed (1 = Disagreed) with particular statements. In addition, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions on the Feedback Form. 120 surveys Feedback Forms were completed.

The responses were as follows:

Statement 1. I learned something new about AISD’s work to address culture and diversity issues in schools.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	34%
5	37%
4	19%
3	4%
2	1%
1	3%
Not Rated	2%

Highlight: Over 70% of respondents indicated that they learned about AISD’s work on culture and diversity issues by indicating a rating of ‘5’ or ‘6’.

Statement 2. I felt comfortable asking questions and/or talking at today’s event.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	47%
5	28%
4	16%
3	4%
2	3%
1	1%
Not Rated	3%

Highlight: Exactly 75% of respondents reported that they felt comfortable asking questions at the forum by indicating a rating of ‘5’ or ‘6’.

Statement 3. The Task Force members listened to the community today.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	36%
5	27%
4	17%
3	9%
2	3%
1	0%
Not Rated	9%

Highlight: 63% of respondents reported that they felt that the Task Force listened to the community at the forum by indicating a rating of ‘5’ or ‘6’.

Statement 4. I feel that another Community Forum should be held in the near future.

Rating	Percentage of Respondents
6	72%
5	16%
4	4%
3	6%
2	0%
1	2%
Not Rated	1%

Highlight: Nearly 90% of respondents felt that another Community Forum should be held in the near future.

Open-Ended Question 1. What issues should the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force examine in the future?

- The **most common** responses related to the need for staff resources and training.
- The **second most common** responses were related to parent and family issues, both in relation to how teachers might encourage parent involvement and learn about their students' families, as well as how to assist in learning about various topics.

Open-Ended Question 2. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force?

- The **most common** responses related to ideas for improving future Community Forums, including suggestions to lengthen the Breakout Sessions and solicit student input.
- The **second most common** responses were related to the need for staff training and resources.

Focus Group Discussions

The Focus Group questions were designed for self-facilitated groups of forum participants (4-6 individuals) to discuss and record their responses. The following prompt was provided for discussion:

The Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force is addressing the following issues:

- The achievement gaps that exist between students of varying economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- The differences in the dropout rate for students of varying economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Differing rates of referral to special programs (Special Education, Gifted and Talented Programs, Alternative Learning Centers) for students of varying racial/ethnic or economic backgrounds.
- The cultural competence and responsiveness of District and campus staff.
- Recruiting staff at all levels that reflect the community's diversity.

This prompt was followed by three questions. The responses to these questions were as follows:

Question 1. What would you like the Task Force to know about these issues?

- The **most common** responses were related to the need for staff resources and training.
- Some of the **other** responses related to parent involvement and special education issues, as well as to the continued need for the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative.

Question 2. Are there any other issues you think that Task Force should address that it has not?

- The **most common** responses were related to the need for better parent-teacher communication.
- The **second most common** responses were related to the need for cultural responsiveness training throughout the District.
- Some of the **other** responses related to the need for student input, the development of culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher empowerment.

Question 3. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

- The **most common** responses were related to parent issues, including increasing parent involvement and improving communication with parents.

- The **second most common** responses were related to increasing involvement of the community in the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning initiative.

Limitation

- Respondents to the Community Feedback survey and the Focus Group discussions were not asked to identify themselves as parents, community members or teachers. The groups' responses very likely differed, even with respect to the same topics such as "parent issues" and "staff resources and training" – which were two frequent categories of responses to the open-ended questions on the survey and the focus group discussions. Without information about the respondents' group membership, however, the differences in responses cannot be verified.

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Evaluation Logic Model

PURPOSE

Logic models are a visual tool for linking a program's desired outcomes (short- and long-term) with the resources, activities, and assumptions of the program.¹ Models are used to help facilitate planning and communication about the objectives and accomplishments of a program. Most importantly, logic models provide a road map for illustrating how desired outcomes can be achieved. While logic models cannot include every possible contingency, they can assist program managers in two ways: First, they help communicate how work and financial inputs contribute to achieving intended program goals. Second, they identify points in a program's implementation where measures may be used to help make decisions about program improvement, which in turn, may affect the program's long term impact.

The purpose of the logic model for the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force is to delineate the activities and work of both the district and the Task Force that are necessary in order to achieve the goals set forth by the Task Force and the superintendent's charge to the Task Force.

ORGANIZATION

With input from the Task Force members, the logic model was organized with an anticipated timeline for all activities and outcomes. It is important to note that those outside of the Task Force (e.g., district staff and the Board of Trustees) have a vital role in ensuring that the long term changes come to fruition.

There are two broad parts of the logic model:

The *planned work* (labeled at the bottom of the model) describes the **resources** available to the Task Force in 2002-2003 and the **activities** that the Task Force engaged in during 2002-2003. Activities are organized according to the work of the six major subcommittees: Needs Assessment and Literature Review, Values, Pedagogy, Training, Community Outreach, and Customer Service Initiative.

The *intended results* describe the **outputs** and **outcomes**, the latter being divided in terms of **primary outcomes** and **secondary outcomes**. Outputs are the direct products of the program—in this case, the Task Force activities. The primary and secondary outcomes, in turn, describe actions outside the control of the Task Force that are necessary for achieving the long term impact goals set by the Task Force and the superintendent's charge. Each of these are organized by outcomes relevant to the

¹ See for example, [Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, and Action: Logic Model Development Guide](http://www.wkkf.org/Programming/ResourceOverview.aspx?CID=281&ID=3669) from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, available at: <http://www.wkkf.org/Programming/ResourceOverview.aspx?CID=281&ID=3669>

Task Force subcommittees. Finally, the **long term outcomes** describe the wide-ranging impact of the combined efforts of the Task Force and district. Long term outcomes, which were discussed at length by Task Force members, are fundamental, system-wide changes that may be ultimately measured using quantitative or qualitative means. As noted in the model, long term outcomes are contingent upon successful, high-quality implementation of previous steps.

GIFTED & TALENTED, ADVANCED PLACEMENT, AND HONORS PROGRAMS AND CLASSES

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the disparity in the number of children of color in AISD versus the number of children of color in GT/AP/Honors classes, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District adopt systems geared to guaranteeing equal access to all AISD students to GT/AP/Honors sections and classes.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Structuring the admissions criteria to provide a more holistic evaluation of a student's academic potential for entry into the GT/AP/Honors sections and classes and erasing existing bias in the criteria towards standardized testing.
- Increasing the number of GT/AP/Honors sections and classes available to students of color.
- Ensuring that all teachers, counselors, and administrators are culturally responsive.
- Publicizing to parents and students, in a multilingual format, the existing and expanded availability of the GT/AP/Honors sections and classes and the procedure for applying to these.
- Helping parents and students understand the connection between rigorous courses and future opportunities for higher education. Assisting parents and students to apply for scholarships.
- Providing school-based advocates or community experts who can be advocates to help students, particularly students of color, through these procedures as well as empowering students to advocate for themselves.
- Evaluating the implementation of GT/AP/Honors classes and the representation of children of color in those classes on each campus.

Rationale

The under-representation of children of color in the Gifted & Talented, Advanced Placement and Honors Programs and classes has been noted by the Directors of these programs. If we are to truly value “high expectations for all students,” then we must ensure that the way in which students are evaluated and recommended for these programs does not include cultural bias. Inadequate cultural responsiveness and an over-reliance on standardized testing may contribute to this under-representation.

Much weight is given to the GT exam while other important criteria for admission into the GT Program are either minimized or ignored. This problem tends to disproportionately and negatively affect students of color. Approximately 75% of the GT admission decision depends on this exam. It was stated, through an anecdotal example, that many students who clearly qualified for the GT Program were not getting in because of their performance on this exam.

There is also a question of the precise number and distribution pattern of GT Programs across AISD. How many GT Programs are there? In what schools are these Programs located? It was generally accepted that we needed to know this data in order to further substantiate our claim about the disproportionate access to GT Programs that white students and students of color have. Teacher training in GT and Advanced Placement methodology, exacerbated by teacher turnover, and equitable access to Advanced Placement and honors courses are issues. Some schools do not offer them because of low enrollment. With adequate support and encouragement, more students are capable of taking these courses.

Parents can be strong advocates for their child’s participation in these programs and classes, but only if they understand the process and feel comfortable confronting the system. Many parents of color have had negative experiences with schools when they attended and thus may be reluctant to confront the system or not know to whom they should discuss these issues. Other parents may not be fluent in English and lack information in their language about these educational opportunities and how to advocate for them effectively. Effective, multilingual communication with parents is essential. Parents should be welcomed into the schools. It may also be necessary to provide advocates for the students and their parents who can help them understand and navigate the system.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION

Based on AISD data that indicates bias in Special Education placement, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District adopt systemic procedures geared towards guaranteeing that each student requiring Special Education get appropriate referral, testing, and placement.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Erasing the existing bias in the criteria that determine a student’s designation into and within Special Education.
- Ensuring that all teachers, counselors, and administrators are culturally responsive.
- Publicizing to parents and students, in a multilingual format, the procedures for admission to Special Education and the rights of students and parents to appeal such designation. This could be a synthesized version of the booklet that AISD already sends out to parents, but it must be in an accessible language.
- Providing school-based advocates or community experts who can be advocates to help students, particularly students of color, and their parents with help with these procedures.
- Evaluating the implementation of referrals to and designations within Special Education classes and the representation of children of color in those classes on each campus.

Rationale

Cultural responsiveness of classroom teachers and of the AISD personnel who, on the basis of teacher recommendations test students who may require Special Education, is essential for correct, unbiased diagnoses and placement.

The following table illustrates the bias that appears to be occurring in the placement of children requiring Special Education.

	Percent in Special Education	Percent of AISD population	Major diagnosis
Hispanic	34%	34%	60% language impaired
Anglo	39%	44%	60% ADHD
African American	21%	16%	60% emotionally disturbed*

*In contrast to U.S. overall, where majority are diagnosed as being mentally retarded.

Parents can be strong advocates for their child’s participation in these programs and classes, but only if they understand the process and feel comfortable confronting the system. Many parents of color have had negative experiences with schools when they attended and thus may be reluctant to confront the system or not know to whom they should discuss these issues. Other parents may not be fluent in English and lack information in their language about Special Education classes and programs and how to effectively advocate for their children. Effective, bilingual communication with parents is essential. Parents should be welcomed into the schools. It may also be necessary to

provide advocates for the students and their parents who can help them understand and navigate the system.

DISCIPLINE AND REFERRALS

RECOMMENDATION

Based on AISD data that indicates bias in discipline referrals, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District monitor and enforce all sections of Board Policy EL-15 which states that the Superintendent may not: fail to ensure that discipline referral procedures are fairly and equitably applied in all schools and across all student subgroups, fail to identify students at risk of suspension, removal or expulsion and provide opportunities to help them avoid suspension or expulsion, fail to ensure that appropriate disciplinary information is communicated to teachers and counselors who have direct contact with disciplined students.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Disaggregating discipline data at the campus and classroom (teacher) levels.
- Having principals review the number and reasons for discipline referrals by teachers (examine and respond to possible teacher disparity in referral rate and reasons) and discuss discipline patterns collectively and individually with teachers.
- Developing culturally responsive classroom management techniques to assist teachers in their ability to more effectively handle their classes.
- Reviewing and monitoring out of school suspensions per student and developing an academic plan so students subjected to a suspension are not negatively impacted academically.
- Publicizing to parents and students, in a multilingual format, the procedures for discipline referrals and suspensions and the rights of students and parents to appeal these; and seeking the advice of and support from parents.
- Referring both student and teacher, whenever practical (prior to suspension), to the Impact Team for solution focused problem-solving assistance.
- Teaching children how to communicate within the school environment as part of the transition plan for students subject to any type of disciplinary action.
- Providing school-based advocates or community experts who can be advocates to help students, particularly students of color, and their parents with these procedures.

- Developing links to community resources.

Rationale

Discipline policies and practices are certainly important. However, we must seek to understand the behavior of the child receiving the consequence. A multitude of factors must be addressed if we are to move beyond a band-aid approach to closing the academic achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. It can be hypothesized that students who are performing well academically and are positively engaged in learning are at a decreased risk of being subjected to a discipline action. The results of the data provided by AISD staff clearly indicated that minority students are subjected to disciplinary actions at higher rates than non-minorities. While disciplinary actions may be designed to address student behavior, the act of removal of students from the established curriculum - for whatever reason - has been documented as having a negative impact on academic achievement. In addition, for students with pre-existing risk factors associated with low academic achievement, such as poverty and special education placement, out of school suspensions exacerbated low academic achievement.

One must also consider the disparity in reasons for a classroom removal and subsequent suspension. As determined by Skiba (2000), teachers are prone to accept stereotypes of different racial and ethnic groups, which may influence the application of student discipline. Researchers have also determined many teachers, especially non-minority teachers, may be unfamiliar with the different communication styles of minority children. This may help explain the disproportional discipline actions taken against minority children. Therefore, early interventions (i.e., IMPACT Team referral) prior to the suspension of a student and transition plans for students subject to a discipline action are important. The rationale for early discipline intervention is as follows: students bring different experiences and views of the world to school that could either help or hinder their ability to successfully negotiate the education system, and “normal” behavior may be defined using a white middle class ontology. Therefore, students not exhibiting “normal” behavior experience increased discipline actions. There is no disagreement that schools must be safe and classrooms free of disruption. However, teachers need to be monitored for disproportional applications of the policy on poor and minority students.

COMPLAINT AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

RECOMMENDATION

Based on a need for assistance with navigating the system, it is the recommendation of the Cultural Connections to Teaching and Learning Task Force that the District institute a democratically structured ombudsman-type of self-help and complaint/grievance procedure to address incidents such as disrespect, harassment, discrimination and bullying for parents, students, teachers and staff at the campus and District levels.

The procedure would have the following characteristics:

- Safeguarding the right to freedom of expression.
- Providing a safe climate for honesty without punishment, protecting persons from any direct or indirect acts of retaliation.
- Providing experienced conflict mediators to help identify fair and just solutions and provide timely, direct feedback.
- Being available to any AISD student, parent, employee, or sub-contractor.
- Being publicized to parents and students, teachers, administrators, and staff in a multilingual format.
- Having a democratic mechanism for determining and dismissing false or unsubstantiated complaints.
- Having an incremental design or appeal system that would start at the campus level and, if not handled in a satisfactory manner, be appealed to the next district level.
- Including representation from AISD, parents, the community, and students when appropriate.

Rationale

Parents, students, teachers and staff need to be able to express their concerns and criticisms freely and candidly in order to create a collegial learning and teaching environment.

Although some people at a particular school might know of a problem within the school, there are often no adequate institutional channels in order to pursue a solution for such a problem. In some cases, a problem may be systemic to AISD.

Sometimes teachers, staff, parents and students alike do not feel they can speak freely and openly about problems affecting their school, their children or AISD. When voicing a complaint, parents sometimes feel that they are putting their children at risk, exposing them to possible acts of retaliation on the part of teachers and staff. Some teachers and staff feel the same way about their administrative superiors. They sometimes fear that a supervisor, a principal or a central administrator at AISD will retaliate against them, possibly costing them their jobs and permanently damaging their careers as teachers, if they were to voice complaints about problems at a particular school or at AISD in general.

Another problem related to the lack of an adequate institutional channel to voice complaints and seek solutions to problems is that of negligence. After a parent or student has lodged a complaint, it could be that no specific act of retaliation is experienced. However, it may be that the complaint is never addressed in a meaningful way and the problem continues to exist or grow. Parents and students may have had support from teachers for their complaints, but higher-level school officials may neglect to address the complaint or pursue it any further.

School leadership conducive to good learning should be based on collegiality, solidarity and mutual support. Currently, principals exist in an atmosphere of intensely competitive pressure that is placed on them to have their schools do well or appear that they are doing well. In some cases this has created an environment where principals see each other as adversaries and compete and withhold information from one another and AISD. Therefore, there is a need for the establishment of a more effective grievance procedure.

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPECT

The Values Subcommittee had many discussions on the importance of respectful relationships. While our charge was to look at policies and practices in several areas, our conversations would always come back to the fundamental necessity for individuals to feel valued for whom they are. As Mr. Guajardo stressed in his presentation, to promote real achievement, teachers must first and foremost celebrate students. Learning happens in the context of relationships. We must be deliberate about creating spaces for relationship building if we want to move ahead in reducing the achievement gap.

At the same time, we recognize all the pressures that schools are undergoing to raise test scores and to teach the essential academic knowledge. Thus, AISD must be bold in balancing these two essentials: academic achievement and respectful relationships. This boldness must be manifested in every level of our system from the top downward. Our system must have high expectations that respectful relationships will take place and must encourage cultural responsiveness among all our stakeholders through belief statements, training and support mechanisms.

Most teachers and staff want students to excel but often do not know how to reach their students. They receive blame for what they do not know how to correct. This cycle results in well meaning teachers and staff being forced to fail or leave the system not because they do not desire to move students ahead, but because they are blocked by lack of knowledge and support mechanisms.

We recognized the fact that respectful relationships must be present in all areas of our schools. Time did not permit us to look at all aspects of our educational system. We did recognize the fact there are many places where diverse needs sometimes tend to stifle how people treat one another. There must be a system in place that makes it safe for people to say they are being treated badly.

Our school district must continue to be pushed to examine our strengths as well as our weaknesses in all areas. All campuses must focus on respect, acceptance of diversity, teamwork, trust, fairness, honesty, equality, responsibility, and effective communication. Everyone from central administrators to school administrators to teachers to students to parents must create individual and group plans to help build greater respect for and understanding of the backgrounds of all those with whom they come in contact. There must be procedures in place to help lessen the amount of put-downs, insults, and devaluing actions. We must examine every practice that says to employees and students we value their individual backgrounds, beliefs, and situations.

Our goal is for AISD's diversity to be not only accepted and appreciated, but to be understood and celebrated. Different perspectives, ideas, and experiences can help everyone to grow in their understanding of themselves and of the world. At the very least, each campus must develop a community where social relationships value collective wants and needs while respecting the integrity of the individual within the group. Each school should be connected by common purposes and commitments and all stakeholders should have a sense that they can depend on one another. This community happens when it is built upon deliberate, respectful relationships.

We measure what we value. Because our committee feels strongly that affective education or social relationships built on mutual respect are so basic in creating academic excellence, we strongly recommend mechanisms for measuring more effectively the feelings and perceptions that our stakeholders have.