

# Budget Stabilization Task Force Findings and Recommendations

## MESSAGE FROM THE TRI-CHAIRS

The honor and obligation of serving our Austin ISD community was always at the forefront of our Task Force members' thoughts. From the very beginning, as we developed the criteria meant to inform and guide our work, each of our members took very seriously our charge to be courageous and bold in addressing Austin ISD's structural budget deficit. We started our work together as a group of diverse, independent and eclectic community members representing each area and constituency of our district. We conclude our work, still diverse and eclectic, and absolutely aligned in our resolve. The structural deficit provides the silver lining to allow the district to fundamentally and courageously re-envision the delivery of a world class education to each and every one of our children in every corner of this district. Austin ISD's failure to fully redesign and implement a fiscally responsible, priority-aligned budget would not only be to fail to operate within our means, but to fail our students, our families and our tax payers. Failure is not an option.

Based on our work, the Task Force learned that:

- AISD is facing decreasing revenue, yet still outspends its state, urban and local peers in cost per student.
- Student enrollment is shrinking, so we must reevaluate how to prioritize spending in a way that would allow the district to reverse this trend.
- Huge portions of the district budget are linked to our aging, crumbling and underutilized facilities, with an unsustainable amount of money going toward the maintenance, repairs and overhead for buildings that have far outlived their useful life. As a consequence, hundreds of millions of bond dollars have been spent over decades to put temporary band-aid fixes on top of band-aid fixes, when those dollars could have been put toward the enhancement of student learning.
- All of the easy and non-controversial budget corrections have already been made, leaving only the special interest, sacred cows to be evaluated. In short, only the most politically charged and difficult options to address the structural budget deficit remain.
- To properly address the structural budget deficit, it would be necessary to look globally at the district's finances—a task that would encompass the broadest and most comprehensive of scopes. It quickly became obvious that to effectively discharge our work, the Task Force would have to truly evaluate where AISD puts its dollars, what that says about its priorities and where we see a need for change.

Diving deeply into the district's finances and historical expenditures made it glaringly obvious that past policy decisions (manifested in the district's budgets) have had a disproportionately negative impact on certain parts of the district, namely east Austin. As a Task Force, we could not ignore that where and how the district solves its structural budget deficit will speak the loudest as to its commitment to finally address decades of disparate impact on the most vulnerable parts of our community.

In very rare and unique instances are large institutional systems confronted with a crisis that simultaneously presents the opportunity for bold, holistic, systemic and transformative change. The silver lining around Austin ISD's dark budget clouds are the opportunity for generational transformation that will change the educational, and therefore life, trajectory of all of our children, not just a select few who live in "preferred" vertical teams or boundaries. Austin ISD must seize this opportunity to address the structural budget deficit in a way that re-envision the delivery of education for every one of our students, in a way that materially improves educational attainment. To stabilize the budget crisis and solve the budget deficit in a fair, transparent, equitable and generational way, will require the closure of schools and re-alignment of school boundaries. Critical to this process will be making every vertical team "preferred," without the need for access to specialized or magnet programs.

High level reflections on our work are as follows:

- The Task Force was able to come to consensus around challenging and sensitive issues by establishing criteria to guide our decision-making. This included a foundational agreement that impact on student achievement and equity were the two most important criteria to measure each option against. In addition, we identified the need to protect the classroom as one of our highest priorities.
- We committed to looking at revenue generating options and efficiency enhancement opportunities, in addition to budget cuts. This freed us to create cost neutral options and investments to redirect dollars as needed to address the district's strategic plan and Scorecard.
- Not every member of the Task Force supports every recommendation. As a whole, the Task Force was able to develop a compelling consensus around the specific list of recommendations included in this report, culled from the hundreds that were evaluated.

The Task Force was passionately faithful to its charge, working tirelessly as community volunteers fundamentally committed to our students' academic success. Our future depends on it. And, we did not do it by ourselves. We had the engagement and support of the district employees who worked equally as tirelessly to staff our meetings, provide us with data, crunch numbers, update reports and answer countless questions. We thank the district staff. We thank the community members who showed up and spoke at our meetings, sent emails and fully engaged to give us meaningful feedback on our work. We thank the Trustees who attended our meetings, asked thoughtful questions and who encouraged us to be brave and courageous in our work.

Finally, we thank our Task Force members for the countless hours they dedicated to our meetings, for tediously pouring over documents and data, and for showing up with a willingness to engage in courageous conversations. We thank them for their commitment to meeting with their individual communities, vertical teams, and our broader Austin ISD community to ensure transparency and engagement critical to the success of our work. For this and so much more we are grateful to them for their dedication to a process that was at times grueling, intense and difficult, yet rewarding. It took all of us committing to each other and our process to successfully conclude our work, culminating in this report.

Finally, it is our hope that the district meaningfully considers, and incorporates, the thoughtfully compiled ideas, wisdom, values and concerns of our members in its budget stabilization and deficit correction plan. Our members took seriously your instructions to act courageously, to think outside of the box, and to deliver a set of recommendations that would fully and finally solve the budget deficit crisis in a way that represents the values of our community. The Task Force has finished its work and has spoken.

Robert D. Thomas

Claire Milam

Kevin Garcia

## THE CHALLENGE

In June 2018, the Board of Trustees approved a budget that uses \$30 million of the district fund balance, or savings. The district anticipates a shortfall of roughly \$55-65 million by the upcoming school year. If we do not address our budget deficit, the district will run out of savings in a few short years. This will put AISD at risk of being taken over by the state, leaving local communities with little say in how the district prioritizes spending. This also has the potential to compromise the district's AAA bond rating, which allows AISD to fund bond programs that support the delivery of a 21st century education to all students.

While Austin is experiencing significant economic growth, AISD does not get to keep the majority of the property tax revenue that comes with that growth. This is because the state law known as recapture requires "property wealthy" school districts like Austin to send money to the state to be redistributed to school districts that are considered "property poor."

For the 2019-20 school year it is estimated that AISD will send over half of its local property tax revenue to the state. That is \$673 million of the total \$1.3 billion in property tax revenue will be sent to the state, leaving AISD with \$646 million.

In addition to recapture, there are several factors that put pressure on the district budget. As it becomes more expensive to live in Austin, AISD strives to offer competitive salaries to enable it to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and staff. Along those same lines, the cost of healthcare goes up each year and AISD works to absorb some of those cost so they do not land on its employees. The outdated state funding formulas that determine how much schools need

to operate do not take these and other growing expenses such as energy and technology costs into account.

At the same time, AISD has lost over 6,000 students in the last six years. Since most school funding is allocated on a per student basis, less students means less dollars. Because many of the district's expenses are fixed and do not go down with declining enrollment, it costs the district more per student just to provide the same level of service.

Notwithstanding, AISD has the responsibility to ensure that every student is provided the support, resources and opportunities that he or she needs to succeed in college, career and life—and it must do this with the money it has. The district cannot continue to evade difficult or unpopular decisions or it runs the risk of being a district driven by financial exigency, not by its values. If it comes to this, the district is ultimately compromising the best interests of its students.

Therefore, the challenge is not only financial. Despite commendable efforts to close achievement gaps, the fact remains that there continues to be a strong correlation between a student's social or cultural background and the likelihood of his or her success in AISD. While indeed we must close the budget gap, we must also adopt strategies that unlock the full potential of our struggling students.

## BUDGET STABILIZATION TASKFORCE

The Budget Stabilization Task Force was convened in late June 2018 to assist the district in exploring a broad range of actions the district could take to balance the budget in the next two to three years.

The Task Force is comprised of Austin ISD staff, parents, community members and a high school student. Membership is a combination of Board nominated and non-nominated individuals with the intent of ensuring representation from diverse backgrounds, perspectives and expertise, reflective of the AISD community at large.

Members committed to delve deeply into the district budget to allow for robust dialogue and analysis of district spending and budget priorities. The scope of their work included evaluating the alignment of budget investments and potential divestments with the district's strategic plan, considering the potential effects of resource reallocations and increased efficiencies and exploring additional revenue opportunities.

Their charge was to:

- Review and carefully consider broad stakeholder input
- Review and carefully consider pertinent data and information
- Discuss a broad range of possible actions to stabilize the district's budget
- Develop recommendations to enable the district to meet its financial obligations and remain in alignment with its stated priorities and strategic direction

More information about the BSTF membership and meetings can be found at [www.austinisd.org/advisory-bodies/bstf](http://www.austinisd.org/advisory-bodies/bstf).

## THE PROCESS

Through a series of eleven 3-hour public meetings, additional sub-committee meetings and meetings with key staff, the task force evaluated and deliberated over roughly 150 options.

The Task Force first established a list of [criteria and guiding principles](#) against which each option would be assessed. While members acknowledged these criteria are somewhat subjective and difficult to measure, they represent an attempt to standardize the evaluation as much as possible to ensure each option received the same, comprehensive level of scrutiny.

From the onset, members committed to seeking input from and bringing back information to their respective communities. Time for public comment was structured into meetings and written feedback was compiled and shared with members electronically. To invite further input from the community, the Task Force participated in the online platform [MindMixer](#), which facilitated dialogue running parallel to their work.

Early on, members shared concerns about the implications of their work on equity in the district and identified the need to gain a shared understanding of the term. They began with the definition adopted by the district from the [National Equity Project](#). Through small group work that was brought back to the Task Force as a whole, members determined that three main concepts encapsulated what equity looks like: all students have access to rich resources and opportunities, well-maintained, inviting physical environments, and culturally responsive/engaging climate and instruction.

The initial approach was for key district departments to present to the Task Force how they spend their budgets, options for reducing expenses and what they saw as outstanding needs. Shortly into this pattern of presentations and discussion, the tri-chairs determined that this approach would not support members fulfilling their charge in the time allotted. They developed an expedited approach and requested that the district provide members with a list of budget savings and revenue options, while departments continued to share their presentations with the Task Force electronically.

The district provided a list of measures AISD had considered in the past, those that its peers have implemented and other ideas that emerged out of efficiency studies and research into best practices. The list was by no means comprehensive and many of the options were blunt tools that were intended to act as a starting point for discussions.

Members poured over the list to identify what was missing in terms of potential savings and revenue options and outstanding needs. To allow for a deeper exploration of how the options might be tailored to the needs of AISD, the Task Force divided into three sub-committees: Revenue and Programs, Efficiencies and Departments and Staffing and Compensation (note that a Contracts and Procurement subcommittee had formed and completed its work prior to

the formation of these three subcommittees and was later absorbed into the Efficiencies and Departments subcommittee).

The subcommittees met separately and set up meetings with district staff to better understand various aspects of the budget and the implications of options. They narrowed and refined the list of options and developed options of their own, which were shared at the regular BSTF meetings. Members went through two rounds of voting, further refining options in order to capture everyone's insights and concerns and arrive at the highest level of consensus possible.

One of the key elements that kept members united despite some disagreement was an early commitment to work toward consensus while at the same creating space for dissenting concerns. The success of those efforts is reflected in the fact that the vast majority of the recommendations have in the range of 80-100% support and a limited number have dissenting concerns.

## THE SECTIONS

The findings and recommendations are organized into three categories:

- Revenue
- Efficiencies and Strategic Investments
- Staffing

Below is a key to understanding the components of each recommendation.

[Title of Recommendation](#) and description

**Financial Impact:** Estimated savings, cost or long-term impact, i.e. increase in enrollment, potential revenue source, etc.

**Context:** Background information that might be needed to better understand the recommendation

**Rationale:** The reasons members support the recommendation including how the option measures up against the criteria. This section can also include member comments from surveys if they are in line with the original thinking or were "friendly amendments."

**Safeguards:** What members have referred to as guardrails or bumpers. Safeguards include ideas from members who support the recommendation but have outlined some parameters or have indicated they would like to see the district exercise particular care in how the option is potentially implemented.

**Auxiliary Options:** Alternative options recommended by one or more members. Ideas listed here are from members who supported the recommendation but who had supplemental suggestions that are not necessarily in line with the formal recommendation. This does not necessarily mean that the rest of members do not support the idea, simply that they did not have the opportunity to vote on it.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Ideas listed here are from members who voted against the recommendation and shared their cause for concern.

**Resources:** Includes data pulled by district staff as well as research and articles referenced in the report.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### REVENUE

Adjust AISD facilities rental fees to market rates and provide a sliding fee scale for select non-profits that have an educational focus

**Level of Support:** 100%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** The option presented by the district, an across-the-board 15% increase in fees, would yield an estimated \$315K.

**Rationale:** The preference would be to see the district develop a fee schedule that accounts for the level of demand for specific facilities based on location, amenities and intended use.

Current policy offers a discount for any non-profit organization with a valid federal 501(c)(3) status. The recommendation is to only offer discounts to those non-profit organizations that have an educational focus or are partners supporting AISD.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district spends hundreds of thousands of dollars renting space from UT for graduation, an overall better use of district facilities needs to be considered to bring down costs.

**Resources:**

<https://www.austinisd.org/facility-use/fees>

AISD 2018-19 Facility Use Vendors:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nWUq8pSPeQq\\_zg1X-JUId3TdUMswAUu\\_MVkdZbfYLo/edit#gid=84024817](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nWUq8pSPeQq_zg1X-JUId3TdUMswAUu_MVkdZbfYLo/edit#gid=84024817)

Contract with a real estate management group to coordinate building rentals as downtime of schools and athletic facilities permits

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** Presumably the contract would pay for itself and potentially generate additional revenue

**Rationale:** An outside contractor would have more specialized knowledge of market rates and could potentially generate increased revenue. As more of the district's new and modernized campuses come online, the district could see increased demand for the use of its spaces.

AISD has no meaningful electronic method to keep track of room reservations at present. The BSTF was forced to move at the last moment when some of its locations were double booked. Real estate management groups, which can keep track of thousands of apartments, can keep track of hundreds of cafeterias, libraries and athletic facilities as well as thousands of classrooms. In addition, one stop shopping for AISD rentals could make renting space easier for third parties.

**Safeguards:** There are concerns about the rental of AISD facilities to organizations or churches that promote hate and actively work against the district's core value of inclusiveness.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district could look to a fair bidding group that has experience with large school districts.

### Eliminate property tax exemptions for historic properties

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** \$1M

**Context:** AISD currently offers a tax exemption to a number of historic homes and buildings in Austin. The intent of the tax exemption is to make it easier for property owners to maintain the historic character of their properties. The City of Austin, however, does not require these property owners to restore or rehabilitate their properties in order to be eligible for the tax break and unlike most cities in Texas, the tax exemption is not limited to a number of years. The assumption is that maintaining the historic character of neighborhoods maintains or adds to the value of neighboring properties, which would positively impact revenue.

**Rationale:** Maintaining property tax exemptions has no bearing on student achievement. Given AISD's financial circumstances, it seems the district cannot afford to forego these dollars. Were the district to eliminate this exemption, the properties would still benefit from the tax exemption the City has in place under current policy.

Some public opposition can be anticipated so the district would need to communicate its intentions and provide opportunities for public input before implementing the change. While this option could potentially introduce risk to current and/or future bond projects that are or might be accelerated and supported by Preservation Austin and the City of Austin Landmark Commission, it is hoped that with adequate engagement, these entities will understand will continue to support the creation of 21st century learning spaces for our students.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district could consider leaving in place a short-term exemption, limited to a certain number of years.

**Resources:**

<https://www.statesman.com/news/20120901/austin-tax-breaks-for-historical-landmarks-more-generous-than-other-cities-review-finds>

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=240736>

[https://www.preservationaustin.org/uploads/Austin\\_Landmarks\\_Impact\\_Study.pdf](https://www.preservationaustin.org/uploads/Austin_Landmarks_Impact_Study.pdf)

### Apply Build America Bonds Subsidy to the General Fund

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** \$1M

**Context:** Build America Bonds are special municipal bonds that carry federal subsidies that allow the district to save on its borrowing costs. Historically AISD has applied these subsidies to its interest and sinking fund. The language of the Build America Bonds indicates, however, that the subsidy can be used not only to pay the interest payments on the district's bonds, but also for any other lawful purpose of the district. This language allows the district to move the subsidy from the Interest and Sinking fund to the Maintenance and Operations fund so it can be



used for the districts operating expenses. The subsidy is subject to sequestration which causes the payment to reduce over time. By 2035 it will be worth just over \$80K annually.

**Rationale:** The only criteria meaningfully impacted by this option is financial. Infusing more dollars into the Maintenance and Operations fund has the potential to positively impact the other criteria.

**Resources:**

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a-10lgAk2dyT8GiEFMo8bMRB94qwpalxzxlpYC-B\\_bs/edit#gid=662622901](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a-10lgAk2dyT8GiEFMo8bMRB94qwpalxzxlpYC-B_bs/edit#gid=662622901)

Pursue the possibility of generating additional revenue by increasing the availability of child care at district campuses and work sites

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** \$6,000 per site

**Context:** The district offers childcare at twelve locations (Kiker, Mills, Williams, Hill, Wooldridge, Winn, Casis, Mathews, Pease, Patton, Highland Park and Lee). These facilities have been nominally profitable—roughly \$31k total in FY 2016-17 and \$72k in FY2017-18—and many manage a waiting list.

**Rationale:** Anecdotal evidence suggests that even more employees would take advantage of AISD provided child care if it was offered at more convenient locations. In a recent survey, 29% of central office staff respondents indicated that they would use district provided childcare if it were offered on site at the new Central Headquarters. The new site cannot accommodate child care because it cannot meet the legal requirements of outdoor space. The district is now exploring other sites near the new headquarters. The district should survey campus-based staff to determine the level of unmet demand and explore other strategic sites around the district. AISD provided childcare is considerably more affordable than private facilities (one staff member shared that she would save over \$400/month if she were able to take advantage of district child care). Meanwhile, it is likely that many of the under-enrolled campuses could accommodate any unmet need.

Given the intractable problem of Austin traffic, more conveniently located, affordable childcare facilities could improve employee quality of life and have a positive impact on recruitment and retention. The Task Force acknowledges that child care facilities carry a considerable administrative burden—costs were \$1.7M and \$1.9M in FY 2016-17 and FY 2017-18 respectively—however, the added benefits to staff seem to make the added effort worthwhile since the programs are nominally profitable.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district could also explore options for providing care for elderly or disabled dependents that employees may be caregivers of.

**Resources:** AISD 2016-17 and 2017-18 Childcare Revenue and Expenses:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1L\\_A-CB30Ko7dFtTaXD10TM\\_pDXhuNoKtHEeNWY5wNFo/edit#gid=939975289](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1L_A-CB30Ko7dFtTaXD10TM_pDXhuNoKtHEeNWY5wNFo/edit#gid=939975289)

Expand and manage event revenue on a district wide basis.

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** Currently individual campuses keep half of the revenue from rentals of their facilities/grounds instead of all of the money benefitting the district at-large.

**Rationale:** Not all campuses have the ability to generate revenue through events. It is an equity issue when some campuses have additional sources of revenue not on the basis of need but by gift of circumstance. If event revenue were managed district-wide, the district would be in a better position to negotiate contracts for events such as SXSW to capture more revenue for the general fund.

**Safeguards:** The plan should ensure specific campuses do not bear undue staff burden when sharing proceeds. In some instances, particular schools provide significant manpower—student and/or administrative—to accommodate the use of the campus. In those instances, the district would need to ensure they are compensated for that effort so the incentive is not being taken away. Essentially, in some cases keeping 50% of revenue would be appropriate, in other cases the campus might keep a very small token contribution if the revenue reflects income that incurred no administrative overhead.

**Dissenting Concerns:** This option has a potentially high administrative burden. If acted upon, it should be carefully studied and planned out including a cost-benefit analysis.

Implement district provided, tuition-based, extended day program until 6:00 or 6:30 for all elementary school campuses where not currently available

Stratify tuition fees based on income thresholds

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** The program would be designed to be cost neutral but would help the district compete with charter schools, potentially boosting enrollment and bringing in more revenue.

**Rationale:** Quality after-school programs have a positive impact on student achievement. There are currently gaps in after school offerings as grants run out and funding sources are inconsistent across campuses. There are also disparities in the quality of programming available with some offerings being highly enriching and others less so. Ensuring every elementary campus had highly enriching after school programming would increase equity across the district since some families can afford to pay for extra-curricular enrichment while others cannot.

**Resources:** Pflugerville ISD extended day program: <http://www.pfisd.net/Page/7025>

Move investments into higher-yield vehicles so long as it does not threaten the district's AAA bond rating

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** \$200K

**Context:** The district's AAA bond rating indicates that it is exceptionally creditworthy and can easily meet its financial commitments. The rating allows AISD to borrow at a lower cost and makes it possible for the district to pass a \$1.05 billion bond as it did in 2017, to fund improvements to its facilities and technology, without increasing the tax rate.

**Rationale:** Higher yield vehicles presumably introduce greater risk. Since the Facilities Master Plan identifies over \$4 billion in needed facilities improvements, the district's AAA rating will be critical to its ability to fund future bonds. The financial impact of this option merits the added risk so long as the district is confident the higher yield vehicles will not compromise its AAA bond rating.

Sell services to charter schools, other districts and other organizations providing that the participating departments have the existing capacity to do so

**Level of Support:** 80%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** The Task Force learned that the High Schools Office is in negotiations with Round Rock ISD to provide some administrative capabilities. The district has skilled personnel who could manage RRISD programs within their existing AISD responsibilities with little to no additional effort.

**Rationale:** As a large organization, there are likely activities where AISD has automated capabilities that could be contracted out to other entities. One area of opportunity could be payroll services where once information is entered, it simply runs as an automated process. AISD understands educational payroll better than any of the for-profit payroll services which could make the district competitive in that market.

The district could explore other services that could present similar opportunities to create new revenue streams with perhaps a small investment upfront and essentially automated capacity shortly down the road.

**Safeguards:** Yearly audits on the customer service of these departments should be evaluated to ensure services to the district are not diminished.

**Dissenting Concerns:** The district should not support or provide services to charter schools.

Eliminate the Copper Penny yield if and only if the legislature does not make changes to recapture formula in the upcoming legislative session

**Level of Support:** 76%

**Financial Impact:** (\$2.8M)

**Context:** The copper pennies refer to the 1.9 cents AISD collects on every \$100 of taxable property value in Austin. For 2019, the copper pennies are expected to generate approximately \$23M in revenue. Of that yield, AISD will keep only about \$2.8 million due to the recapture formula.

**Rationale:** If the district chose to lower the property tax rate (eliminating the copper penny), it would reduce the property tax burden for Austin residents but Austin ISD would not receive the approximately \$2.8M in revenue. It is understood that this involves some risk because the current tax rate for AISD required voter approval. If AISD were to drop the copper pennies, giving taxpayers a break, and the legislature changed the laws allowing Austin to keep a greater portion of the copper penny yield, the district would have to consider putting it back to voters to increase the property tax rate if it wanted to see that additional revenue.

Texas's 86th legislative session will convene on January 8, 2019 when it is anticipated that school finance will be a priority. It is not clear if any potential changes in school finance law will be favorable for AISD.

**Safeguards:** This recommendation would be rescinded if the legislature addresses the recapture formula and AISD gets to keep a greater share of the copper penny yield.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district could consider eliminating the copper penny as a rebate or reduction year by year rather than a full roll back.

**Dissenting Concerns:** The district should not decide what to do regarding the copper penny until after the upcoming legislative session.

This cannot be decided given the uncertainty of whether or not the state will cap property taxes. This scheme only seems to work if we can do a swap with the City but that won't work if the tax cap is severely lowered. The priority should be increasing revenue for the district, not lowering taxes.

Explore the use of SB 1882 opportunities to gain approximately \$600,000 in funding per campus, providing that at least the following safeguards are in place:

- The community served is involved (parents, teachers, CACs, PTAs)
- Campus practices do not exclude students requiring special education services
- Disciplinary policies and procedures are aligned with those of AISD
- The school is integrated into its vertical team
- Include the right to cancel the contract with 30 days of notice
- Ensure teachers that work under these agreements have the same protections as other AISD teachers, such as 3-year contracts
- Schools that exercise this option should offer varied programming and not all be STEM oriented
- Give Mendez—which is currently operating under an SB 1882 agreement because it was threatened with closure for failing to meet state standards—a full year to assess results before entering into more agreements

**Level of Support:** 68%

**Financial Impact:** Up to \$600K per campus

**Context:** Senate Bill 1882 allows a state-approved entity such as charters, universities and other eligible non-profit entities to partner with traditional ISDs with the goal of improving the educational experience and outcomes at those schools. The legislation allows three types of partnerships:

- Turnaround Partnerships where the ISD contracts with a partner to turnaround a campus that is not meeting state assessment standards
- Innovation Partnerships where the ISD contracts with a partner to innovate at an existing campus that is meeting state assessment standards
- New School Partnerships where the ISD contracts with a partner to launch a brand-new campus/school model.

**Rationale:** The primary rationale is the hope that the infusion of money can bring about opportunities that the district could not otherwise fund at campuses that pursue these partnerships. For example, Mendez teachers received professional development in project based learning and restorative practices.

**Safeguards:** The district has a valuable tool in looking to Mendez as a sort of pilot to give the district a sense of the potential risks and rewards associated with these types of partnerships. The Task Force would like to see a comprehensive report on how the situation at Mendez has played out from the perspective of students, teachers/staff and the community. This would allow time to reflect on lessons learned to ensure any future pursuits don't have unanticipated or unfavorable outcomes.

Most of the Task Force members who support this option have expressed that the district should proceed very cautiously and ensure robust safeguards are in place when exploring SB 1882 opportunities. The district needs to ensure that no dollars come at the expense of campus communities having a say in what is best for their school and that any arrangement maintains the Board's ability to ensure that campus practices are in alignment with the district's core values.

If the district pursues these opportunities, members would like to see the district support the deep involvement of campus communities (students, teachers, parents, community partners) in the visioning process rather than a top down approach. This is particularly important in regards to decisions around pedagogy and potential partners. There is a strong desire to ensure that any partnership prioritizes rich, authentic approaches to learning and does not make sacrifices in that regard for short term gains. Current teachers and parents should be able to form proposals for partnerships/pedagogy before outside organizations are invited to.

Another area of concern is the potential implications for district employees at affected campuses. SB 1882 has some protections for teachers and staff built in but those protections seem to be up for interpretation. In the case of Mendez, the district ensured stronger protections for teachers by guaranteeing that any teacher that did not want to stay at Mendez, was offered employment at another district school. Additionally, all Mendez teachers are still district employees.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Even given the above outlined safeguards, there are still members who are not comfortable with the district seeking 1882 partnerships. Members expressed that while in theory this sounds like a good idea, charters have a questionable history of promoting existing inequalities. There is concern that 1882 arrangements are just short-term fixes that will further erode democratic engagement within a school community. There is also a fear of the district opening itself up to charters since giving them a foot in the door could precipitate further erosion of public education. Additionally, there are already some concerns and challenges arising out of the Mendez partnership.

**Resources:**

[https://tea.texas.gov/Texas\\_Schools/District\\_Initiatives/Texas\\_Partnerships\\_\(SB\\_1882\)/](https://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Schools/District_Initiatives/Texas_Partnerships_(SB_1882)/)  
<https://www.statesman.com/NEWS/20180830/Teacher-groups-sue-state-over-turnaround-partners-for-failing-schools>

## EFFICIENCIES AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

Go Green by reducing total utilities billed to M&O by strategically using I&S funds

- Rapidly implement cost effective elements of the Energy and Water Management plan.
- Update school grounds in non-athletic areas for native & xeriscape non-irrigation as I&S expense for M&O relief
- Consider solar roofing and installations to offset electricity consumption at lower I&S tax cost vs. M&O utility fees

- Develop a multi-year equipment replacement plan targeting the least energy efficient items, and a reasonable savings payback period for use of I&S funds vs. M&O utility and maintenance costs.
- Negotiate with City of Austin for further rate reductions for all school sites operating within City of Austin utilities, enabling a lower total tax rate for Austin residents.

**Level of Support:** 100%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** The City of Austin charges AISD for utilities at a discounted rate, however, it does not subsidize further since there are multiple school districts within city limits that would require equitable support. AISD's taxation rate to pay for utilities is substantially higher than any other local peer and it is the only district in the Austin area at a taxation penalty due to recapture.

**Rationale:** AISD spends about \$18M on utilities annually with most facilities failing to meet Energy Star rankings. AISD's Energy and Water Management believes it can save \$3.2m to \$4.2m. AISD should pursue multiple strategies to reduce its utility costs aggressively and explain the I&S costs associated.

Saving on utilities while enhancing facilities and going green can be a great way to not only free up M&O dollars for the district but lower costs to taxpayers too. Texas has created a unique situation with taxation where it is usually far cheaper to invest in infrastructure than to continue paying higher annual operating costs. Every \$1 of M&O spent on utilities is about \$2 tax dollars, while every \$1 in bond I&S dollar for reducing utility costs is \$1 for taxpayers. It can be hard to pass bonds and explain to voters why, so it will take a well-designed plan with strong communication.

**Safeguards:** The district should pursue investments providing that the time for amortization of the initial cost of the improvement is less than the anticipated life expectancy of the building so not to sink more money into buildings that will ultimately need to be closed/modernized.

### Strategically invest in IT plan to enable an efficient district of the future

The plan would include analysis and controls with focused benefits including:

- Reduction in employee time spent on clerical, input, and data entry type tasks
- Optimization of district resources including people, equipment, expenses, and materials
- Connecting classrooms with leading edge teaching information resources
- Increasing the efficiency of employees at their everyday work, with less downtime
- Success should see more educator time with students and the need for less support staff

**Level of support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** In 2018, AISD budgeted \$28.1M in data processing. To put this in perspective, Fort Worth, which has a similar student population to AISD, budgeted just \$13.7M. Collected insights indicate basic district information infrastructure fails, lacks connectivity between systems, lags behind industry norms, and leaves room for significant inefficiencies within and between departments. While AISD has shown substantial improvement in this area with anticipated 2019 spend of \$21.5M, it is still considerably outspending its peers.

**Rationale:** IT can be expensive, difficult to execute and challenging to fund. It can be even harder to justify that expense in a financially difficult environment. IT can also enable happier,

and more productive employees who work longer, from more places, and achieve more every day. It can bring unique resources and experiences to the classroom. It can enable procurement leaders to make better decisions, finance teams to better implement controls, and shift the daily grind to information systems – freeing employees to do more. It takes focus, a strategic plan, and clear goals tied to cost, value, and impact on the larger district strategy. AISD should be operating against a longer-range plan, leveraging I&S dollars, to reduce IT's cost while doing more for IT's internal and external users. Such a strategic IT plan can be an enabler for the district's educational vision.

**Resources:**

2017-18 PEIMS district financial budget reports:

[https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/school.finance/forecasting/financial\\_reports/1718\\_FinBudRep.html](https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/school.finance/forecasting/financial_reports/1718_FinBudRep.html)

### Optimize maintenance spending

- Prioritize the most expensive maintenance items across the district for removal or replacement through I&S funds as part of an annual evaluation. Clearly explain to taxpayers the tax costs to maintain vs. replace.
- Establish a district-wide facility equity scorecard and apply it to each student facility for use in public view.
- Prioritize maintenance and I&S work based on the scorecard with a focus on every campus being inviting.
- Consider creating outsourced city-wide contracts with fair-wage partners for maintenance work vs. incremental staffing.

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** AISD outspent the average of its peers in maintenance costs by nearly \$15 million in SY 2016-17 (The most recent year of data currently on TEA website as of this writing). At the same time, there is an overwhelming sense that most communities feel their school is not adequately maintained.

About 30% of the roughly \$10M annual cost of maintenance labor was spent at four district sites, and about 30% more was spent at 15 of 136 locations. Prioritizing those sites for removal or replacement could in turn reduce the recurring annual cost of maintenance labor by up to 60%. Since the district keeps 100% of the property tax revenue from the I&S tax rate yield while it keeps just under half of the dollars it collects for the M&O tax yield, it effectively costs taxpayers half as much to pay for maintenance out of the I&S fund.

The facility equity scorecard would be in response to the belief that cosmetic appearance (wall-hangings, paint, etc.) has a psychological impact on students, teachers and parents. The intent is that every student at every campus believes their school is inviting and well maintained without the need of PTAs to subsidize. The rating could easily be accomplished by adding a question on the annual Parent, Student and Teacher Surveys about the visual and functional quality of their school. The maintenance team could then respond to and report back the work they do to address deficiencies.

The district could also potentially save costs by contracting fair wage partners to provide quality work, while having increased capacity to rapidly address campus issues.

**Safeguards:** Equity should also be a priority when determining the order of facilities receiving attention.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Outsourcing has the potential to lead to an inferior product and poorer treatment of employees and fewer employment protections.

**Resources:**

AISD Work Orders:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13vOITpZ3Sggf4fdfyBdBA9CviKJm0C5-2pGTuQKxk4/edit>

AISD peer comparisons:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ENbmjDRpblp26zuCrC5II07uwvZcWXh>

TEA PEIMS Financial Data: <https://tea.texas.gov/financialstandardreports/>

Evaluate school start and ending schedules, and specialty programs to create more full-time transportation jobs with less total employees for a net lower cost goal

**Level of Support:** 84%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** AISD budgeted nearly \$33M for transportation in 2018 but receives no state funding to cover these costs due to its chapter 41 designation (meaning it pays the state in recapture). If the district were to receive transportation funding it is estimated that it would amount to roughly \$5.5M. This means that over \$28M of the district's transportation costs are considered elective by the state.

**Rationale:** On a per student basis, AISD significantly outspends its peers in transportation. At the same time the district reports a cost per route mile that is lower than its peers. This indicates there is opportunity in when and how routes are staffed.

The district allows campuses to adjust their own start times which leads to schedules optimized for campuses rather than being optimized for controlling transportation costs.

Currently, 270 people are part-time and 370 people are full-time. Some of those full-time, and part-time employees are being provided additional work at campus to help supplement pay or provide a complete workday. Most, if not all, have full employee benefits. If the district could increase the number of full-time transportation employees, it could reduce the number of total employees thereby significantly reducing benefits costs.

**Safeguards:** High schools should start no earlier than 9 a.m. as it has been scientifically proven that teenagers do not function as well in that scenario.

This strategy needs to be balanced with the needs of student programming and not just transportation efficiencies. The district will need to be careful to watch for equity impacts.

**Dissenting Concerns:** More research is needed.

There is concern that this may look good on paper, but it will not work with how busing is scheduled. It would be a disservice to district transportation employees.

**Resources:** <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2015/p0806-school-sleep.html>

Evaluate alternate legally compliant and safe transportation options for students experiencing homelessness to comply with McKinney-Vento

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** TBD



**Context:** The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that stipulates that school districts must provide free transportation to students experiencing homelessness to and from their school or origin, that is, the last school they attended before losing their home.

**Rationale:** This is a national challenge with many districts seeking alternate solutions. The district currently uses full-sized school buses, though there may be other safe and more cost-effective options that should be explored such as more economical vehicles or arrangements with CapMetro.

The district should also ensure the State of Texas is adequately dispensing federal compliance dollars to Austin and other urban districts who pay for transporting children from surrounding communities into the city.

An analysis of how many students currently take advantage of the service as well as improvements in identifying need could help lower the cost per student.

**Safeguards:** Any alternatives should not come at the detriment to students.

### AISD must act to ensure all programs are accountable and strategically aligned

- The District should adopt the District Management Group Academic Return on Investment (AROI) framework and establish Sunset provisions every “x” years for any new funding investments under a governance structure that discreetly measures and monitors program results and performance.
- Provisions should apply to all existing internal program investments and external contracts to hold programs and partnering entities accountable for results.
- As a practice going forward, the district’s budget should include evaluative costs for any investments that are made in programing whether from the general fund or grants.
- Program deliverables and results must be aligned with the district’s Strategic Plan or Campus Improvements Plans; and must demonstrate progress on improving student outcomes (academic, SEL, attendance, behavior, expulsions, etc.).
- All meaningfully impacted staff, parents and/or partners should be periodically consulted on whether or not to maintain a program on campus.
- AISD cost per student for programs should be publicly available and visibly posted on campus with benefit services.
- Services provided should be specific and measurable with quantified outcomes. Verification of non-duplicative services should be performed prior to signing any contracts.
- Programs providing teacher training should be funded and performed on non-instructional days to keep teachers in class with their students
- Every AISD department should be accountable on an annual basis, to the board, campus, community, and students for the performance of their programs and must demonstrate that given programs have the support of their constituents in order to continue.
- AISD should consider which leadership role will hold departments accountable to the board for adequate information to gain annual program spend approvals.

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** Several Task Force members expressed concerns about the number of dollars spent on district programs and external partnerships with little transparency regarding program effectiveness. The district underwent a sunseting process in an attempt to address this challenge in the past but failed to act on the findings of that work. Given the limited amount of time at hand, the Task Force agreed that individually evaluating the merits of each district program or partnership was beyond the scope of their work and expertise. This recommendation was developed instead to outline how the district can offer more focused programming with the end goal of ensuring that demonstrable, positive student outcomes are at the center of decision-making.

The DMGroup is currently working with the district to strengthen its ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of both in-house and external partner programs. What is key for the Task Force is that this work result in standard operating procedures for sunseting programs that do not meet expectations.

**Rationale:** AISD has many internal and external partner-based programs that aim to accomplish many different things. Many of these are great efforts that end up competing rather than complementing one another.

While community partners provide offsetting value, the partnerships often require AISD to expend resources that may not be in alignment with its strategic funding priorities and serve as a distraction. Greater governance and standard evaluation and review process should be implemented to determine if the outcomes achieved by internal and external programs merit the dollars spent.

The district does evaluate many of its programs but there is not always funding set aside for that purpose. It must become standard practice to include evaluative costs in any program proposal. Furthermore, it is one thing to evaluate a program, it is another to draw a line and discontinue a program. The district must both improve its ability determine the Academic Return on Investment of its programs and initiatives and adhere to guidelines setting a bar that must be met in order to justify continuation of services.

Gaining campus stakeholder feedback should be one important element in making determinations but it is not everything. For example, Austin Partners in Education found that one of its most beloved programs, the 2nd grade reading program, had wonderful reviews from teachers, parents and the classroom coaches or tutors, but had absolutely no ability to show improved performance on the part of the students. Community perception is one thing but the district must expect measurable improvement in student outcomes if funding is to be continued. APIE discontinued the 2nd grade reading program and shifted those dollars into programs that have both positive public perception and a demonstrated ability to improve academic achievement and SEL competencies.

**Auxiliary Options:** The cost per student for a given program should reflect all funds going toward that program, not just AISD general fund expenditures, to provide greater transparency.

### [Undertake a complete review of special education in the district](#)

The review would encompass: purpose, implementation, uniformity of outcome and use of dedicated resources such as staffing

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** The need for this review was informed both by insights gleaned from the District Management Group Publication *Spending Money Wisely* and from parent and staff experience. To be clear, no one is suggesting the district balance the budget on backs of students with special needs. Individual Education Plans and accommodations should be driven by student need, not the budget. That being said DMGroup outlines how schools can more efficiently structure the time of adults providing these services, simultaneously saving money and getting better outcomes. This can be done not by taking service minutes away from students but instead by standardizing time staff members spend serving students, which research shows can vary anywhere between 30-70%.

One of the challenges identified by parents and teachers on the committee is meeting the requirements of students' Individual Education Plans. When the district fails to deliver these plans with fidelity, it often results in mediation where the district must then commit to expensive compensatory services to avoid even more expensive legal action. The bottom line is AISD outspends its peers in Special Education, but is not necessarily able to boast better outcomes. More than anything there needs to be consistency, increased competency and greater equity in the delivery of these services.

**Safeguards:** The goal is to be more effective and equitable and not a budget reduction strategy.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district needs to increase training to support more inclusion and less pull outs and interventions for struggling learners. AISD has not led in the delivery of progressive Special Education.

**Resources:**

For FY2016-17 Special Education student count is 8,647 (See TEA Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), page 18:

[https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker?\\_service=marykay&year4=2017&year2=17&debug=0&single=N&title=2017+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&program=perfreport.perfma.st.sas&prgopt=2017%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=district&search=district&namenum=Austin&district=227901](https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&year4=2017&year2=17&debug=0&single=N&title=2017+Texas+Academic+Performance+Reports&program=perfreport.perfma.st.sas&prgopt=2017%2Ftapr%2Ftapr.sas&ptype=P&level=district&search=district&namenum=Austin&district=227901)

<https://www.dmgrouppk12.com/docmanlinks/dmj/32-spending-money-wisely-getting-the-most-from-school-district-budgets-e-book-1/file>

Using FY2016-17 financial data, the AISD Special Education allotment from the state was \$55M while district expenses totaled \$93M.

Undertake a complete review of the use of interventions and consider a reduction in expenditures

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** Studies have shown that the use of interventions cannot necessarily be linked to improved student outcomes. Interventions are widely used across AISD and come at a high cost. The district should be able to demonstrate with research and data from its own practices, a connection between the use of interventions and improved student outcomes or it should limit or discontinue the practice. Anecdotal evidence indicates that interventions may be used as a way to avoid the identification of students needing special education services. This is cost

avoidance that comes at both a high fiscal cost and at the expense of students not getting the individualized education plan they might need.

**Safeguards:** The goal is to be more effective and equitable and not a budget reduction strategy.

**Dissenting Concerns:** There are students that need further “wrap around” services, i.e. tutoring, academic assistance, etc. that are not necessarily “Special Education.” AISD needs to provide these services and must be able to identify the students needing them.

**Resources:** [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20164000/pdf/20164000\\_es.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20164000/pdf/20164000_es.pdf)

Centrally manage current uncoordinated district activities including professional development, travel, entertainment, etc.

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** The District Management Group argued powerfully in *Spending Money Wisely* that professional development especially tends to be hidden all over in ISD budgets: travel and registration fees, contracted services, salaries and stipends, substitute costs, etc. The Task Force found AISD to be no exception. According to DMGroup, the first step to bringing down costs is gaining a full understanding of how much Professional Development is actually costing by bringing scattered expenses into single budget categories. Ultimately their recommendations can even help districts ensure a stronger connection between Professional Development and student achievement.

The Task Force has also discovered that the types of management or controls on travel, entertainment and purchasing that many in the private sector have long learned to live with, do not exist in AISD. The increased use of P-cards could help address this.

**Resources:** <https://www.dmgroupk12.com/docmanlinks/dmj/32-spending-money-wisely-getting-the-most-from-school-district-budgets-e-book-1/file>

Implement change in budget methodology to account for projected vacancy savings for wages, salaries, and most benefits

Continue to budget for health-related benefits at 100% per FTE.

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** Revenue Neutral

**Context:** AISD budgets wages, salaries, and benefits for positions (FTEs) assuming 100% staffing levels. In reality, there are positions that are not filled for part or all of the year. The amount not spent due to vacant positions is called vacancy savings. For example, if the AISD budget shows a shortfall of \$30M, but wage, salary, and benefits expenses end up lower than budgeted for the year by \$8M because some positions are vacant, then the actual shortfall is \$22M.

Estimating yearly vacancy savings, and recognizing them in the budget process, would allow the stated shortfall to be reported as \$22M.

There would be no actual savings or funds freed up for use—budget reporting would only be recognizing the anticipated budget discrepancy up front, rather than noting it at the end of the year.

**Rationale:** This is an established budgeting methodology used by other entities including the City of Austin.

There is a preference to err on the side of caution until AISD has shown through audited annual financial statements that it can manage the transition well. It would be prudent to practice a year or two demonstrating that the vacancy savings methodology is being implemented properly for non-health-related expenses before expanding the methodology to include health-related expenses. This would account for unquantified (but likely minor) risks facing the workforce due to the potential for poor forecasting early on in the adjustment process.

### Close/consolidate schools, redraw boundaries, and phase out “diversity choice” busing with these necessary conditions

80% of members felt the following conditions should be satisfied:

- Elementary, middle and high schools throughout the district must be considered
- Boundaries should optimize permanent capacity of schools, considering current and forecasted future enrollment patterns, including some transfers, and avoiding over-enrollment and under-enrollment
- District must engage community in conversation about boundary changes and the need for all AISD schools to be great
- Create fairly resourced and equitable schools across the district and promote them

76% felt the following conditions should be satisfied:

- School closures, consolidations and boundary adjustments should increase the socio-economic and cultural diversity at schools and must be balanced east and west of Lamar

72%...

- Closures cannot occur exclusively in schools that are currently under-enrolled, in part due to small population in district-created attendance zones
- Schools to remain open must have equitable, rigorous, culturally-responsive programs
- Current Vertical Teams should be assessed for re-assignment based on new boundaries, with the intent to promote the boundary priorities through the high school level
- If school consolidations are to be considered it must be done together with boundary changes as part of a comprehensive plan

68%...

- Re-invest part or all of savings into the campus communities impacted by consolidations in order to compete with charter schools
- Children and parents should not perceive that they will now have a lower grade education due to AISD programs, support and performance of their new campus

64%...

- Limit travel time for student and increase efficiencies in transportation
- Reallocate bond dollars to new combined schools (including reevaluating need for new campuses)
- Provide after-school programs (extended education) and more education resources at each campus impacted by consolidations/boundary changes

60%...

- Focus on maintaining community integrity and equity when selecting a campus for closure
- Boundary changes should be intentionally staggered to enable current recommendations and student to have choice of completing at their current campus

56%...

- Remaining campuses should have the facilities or space to accommodate enrollment increases

52%...

- The attendance zones of any new schools coming online should be considered in the conversations around school closures/consolidations

36%...

- Intentionally improve STAAR or other school measurements to enable better education experience at the consolidated campuses. All campuses should be education destination of choice superior to nearby charter schools

24%...

- Implementing the changes in a way to limit impact to currently enrolled schools

12%...

- Limit impact to home property values

**Level of Support:** 84%

**Financial Impact:** estimated savings of \$800,000 - \$1.2m per campus. This does not consider savings on “diversity choice” bussing or potential additional costs that arise from students living longer distances from their assigned school.

**Rationale:** A 2010 efficiency study conducted by MGT Consulting Group indicated that AISD was operating seven extra elementary schools and one extra middle school. Around that same time enrollment began to decline while the number of facilities the district operates grew. With financial pressures on the district, it is difficult to justify some campuses requiring roughly twice the average funding per student due to underutilization of facilities. Those are dollars that could be spent on student supports and programming rather than on overhead.

AISD is significantly below its state and urban peers in terms of average students per classroom. Being so far from target class sizes comes at a substantial cost. The district is also significantly above its peers in campus administrator to student ratio due to these positions among others, being fixed costs. This forces the district to consider difficult choices such as creating “small school” staffing guidelines which further limit the resources available to the district’s small schools.

Studies show that at the elementary level, students do indeed perform better in smaller school settings, but it is important to note that what is meant by small in these studies is around 500 students. AISD has 15 elementary schools with under 300 students. This causes inefficiencies that have not only financial consequences but more importantly academic consequences. Some schools have grade levels with only one classroom meaning that teacher does not have a professional learning community. Further, small schools are having to make increasingly difficult decisions to cut electives or other campus support staff, which is not good for students and creates a climate of uncertainty for staff.

Furthermore, purposeful reconsiderations of attendance zones and vertical teams could have a net positive impact on student achievement. Research indicates that schools that are both culturally and socio-economically diverse benefit all students.

At present, 31 AISD schools are populated by more than 90% economically disadvantaged students. Most private funding lands in a relatively small number of schools on the west side of town, while Title I schools are more concentrated in the east, creating an unhealthy divide.

**Safeguards:** This would have to be a thoughtful, deliberative, well-planned out process with a multi-year timeframe, done through the lens of equity. Because historical inequities in the size and delineation of attendance zones have largely contributed to today's enrollment trends, current enrollment numbers should not be the only criteria that factors in to decisions around consolidations and closures. While closing currently under-enrolled campuses might seem like the easiest way to address enrollment challenges, it is critical to note that boundary changes can be used as a tool to alleviate under and over-enrolled schools.

AISD should be careful not to enhance segregation patterns already present in the community. Also important is that racial minorities and the economically disadvantaged do not bear the brunt of busing to new campuses at higher rates or distances.

This can only be a good thing in the community if it is done creatively to maximize socio-economic diversity at schools and build better, stronger schools across the district.

It cannot be forgotten that AISD's school buildings and communities have rich histories. Any changes need to ensure that impacted communities are involved in the process and that the results are a net gain in opportunities and resources for those areas that have been historically underserved. Closing a school entails a grieving process for many so the district should plan well ahead.

There are studies that show that students do not necessarily benefit from school consolidations and closures. That is why AISD must be intentional in what it is trying to achieve with school closures beyond a financial benefit. The bottom line is, Task Force members want to see students in well-resourced, well-maintained, diverse, culturally responsive learning environments where all students receive rich, engaging instruction. Since that is not the current reality, it is hoped that by consolidating students into fewer, more adequately resourced schools the district can seize the opportunity to truly ensure that all students receive the support and resources they need to succeed.

**Auxiliary Options:** One member indicated that if closures were to occur, it should only be done *after* boundaries have been changed.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Three members indicated that under no conditions would they support the closure/consolidation of schools.

One member abstained noting that this was a difficult choice but felt that closures/consolidation, boundaries and diversity choice should be considered with a separate set of similar, yet specific criteria.

**Resources:** <https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-benefits-of-socioeconomically-and-racially-integrated-schools-and-classrooms/?agreed=1&session=1>  
<https://tcf.org/content/report/how-rationally-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/?agreed=1>  
<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/47765/how-socioeconomic-diversity-in-schools-helps-all-students>  
<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Why-Texas-school-districts-should-rethink-13476262.php>  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1FPXhD88bXsL99XoLEj9QWf1ZGMzRTQnt>  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1HdqSzSYIBb789zc1yEnQ4THjVo5YIYI>  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HdqSzSYIBb789zc1yEnQ4THjVo5YIYI>

## Eliminate 6th grade classrooms in elementary schools

**Level of Support:** 100%

**Financial Impact:** \$67K

**Context:** Six elementary schools in AISD (Pease, Barton Hills, Bryker Woods, Mathews, Lee and Maplewood) maintain 6<sup>th</sup> grade on campus.

**Rationale:** This can lead to smaller class sizes than is efficient at the middle school level and a lack of age-appropriate equipment, resources and facilities. Moving the district to a consistent treatment of 6th graders by sending them to their zoned middle school (O. Henry and Kealing) could bring student to teacher ratios closer to the target, thereby increasing efficiency. The baseline savings is estimated at \$67K annually or 1.0 FTE, but it is likely greater if all efficiencies are considered.

**Safeguards:** This decision should be driven by the Academics Department to determine if the data shows an educational difference between 6th graders housed in elementary vs. middle school campuses.

## Partner with developers to build affordable, family-friendly, and workforce housing or related services on unused AISD properties using 99-year leases or a land-banking approach

Preference should be given to AISD teachers and staff, families who left AISD due to gentrification, and families with school aged children. Partnering with the City, Foundation Communities and other non-profits, as well as commercial developers should be considered.

**Level of Support:** 84%

**Financial Impact:** Has potential to be a new revenue source or at the very least, help boost enrollment

**Rationale:** AISD is one of the larger landowners in the city with approximately 2,100 acres or 3.3 square miles of land.

As the district considers consolidations and closures, it must also decide the fate of the properties it takes offline. Schools are a major community asset so the district needs to ensure that any community that stands to lose its neighborhood school should gain an alternative asset or resource.

Not only could these properties be a source of revenue, they could also help address enrollment challenges by making it easier for families to stay or return to their neighborhoods. It could also allow teachers and staff to live in the neighborhoods where they work, which can strengthen relationships with students and families and have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

The use of 99-year leases or land banking would ensure that as the city grows and changes over time, the district will maintain the option of returning some of its land to educational purposes. Once land is developed it is very difficult to acquire the large parcel sizes needed for a school campus so the district should be careful not to let go of ownership since it may need these properties in 30-40 years

**Safeguards:** Likely and current neighborhood residents should be involved in determining the preferred future use of the campus property. The district should also take great care in



selecting a partner by requiring applicants to submit their housing management policies and application criteria and process as a part of their proposal.

An analysis of the fiscal impact and other implications should be conducted prior to implementation of any such arrangement.

**Auxiliary Options:** These should not just be apartments/multi family. Families should have choices of varying housing types and ownership pathways.

**Dissenting Concerns:** The District is not a Realtor. Developers are about making money for their own benefit, which may not be in the interest of the District.

**Resources:**

<https://www.communityprogress.net/land-banking-faq-pages-449.php>

Update the Magnet school model by investing in every campus equitably to build great community schools

AISD should re-evaluate transporting students across the city for specialty programs and re-invest the incremental funding to make middle schools and high schools across the district equally effective for high performing students

- Increase Magnet type class offerings, extra-curricular, technical resources, and art resources at each secondary campus
- Increase transparency about the funding and availability of special programming at each campus to ensure equitable opportunities
- Move specialized teachers and equipment between campuses vs. every day moving students
- Consider campus scale when making boundary & bond investments to enable more specialized courses

**Level of Support:** 84%

**Financial Impact:** This is recommended as either a cost savings or revenue neutral, depending on how implemented.

**Context:** AISD provides additional funding to a number of campuses providing differentiated educational experiences. The district spends more per student at these campuses but the dollars are not obvious due to how costs are distributed. The Task Force captured some of the cost variance but struggled to get the full picture of exactly how much funding magnet schools and schools with specialty programs receive.

For example, AISD spends \$3.4M on transportation for Kealing, LASA and Fulmore alone. Those three schools receive \$1.5M in incremental student funding, or funding that goes above the standard allocations that all campuses receive according to district staffing guidelines. Divided over all magnet students at those campuses, that comes to over \$2,000 per student above the standard allocation. While these campuses may still have a cost per student that seems to be on par or even below the average across the district, it appears that high enrollment at magnet campuses is largely responsible for the low to average cost per student. This obfuscates the incremental funding. What further clouds the issue is that magnet campuses have much lower concentrations of students needing additional supports such as Special Education, English Language Learners, etc.

The above study looks only at the three magnets, Kealing, Fulmore and LASA, but the district dedicates additional resources above the standard allocation to many other schools. AISD

spends another 760K on transportation for Ann Richards students and \$300K to bus students who elect into or out of Gus Garcia YMLA or Bertha Sadler Means YWLA. Ann Richards is similarly funded incrementally through private sources. The link to the spreadsheet below outlines the additional funding for specialty programs such as Fine Arts and IB.

**Rationale:** Many of the district's magnet and specialty programs are nationally recognized and provide fantastic opportunities for those enrolled. Without magnets, parents worry their child won't have access to important technology, language, and arts education, and many students believe their future is less bright going to their local campus.

This is the issue the Task Force wishes to see the district confront by thinking differently about the magnet model in this modern age. Several members whose kids attend magnets indicated that they would not be sending their kids to magnets if they felt their neighborhood school provided comparable opportunities. Members expressed a number of reasons for their discomfort with the current magnet model:

- There are historical grievances and upheaval due to the district's admissions policies, implementation and administration of magnet schools and specialty campuses.
- Magnets are serving to divide local communities since most models do not integrate students and doing so would unfairly burden neighborhood students by setting the bar higher to be guaranteed acceptance into UT or other programs based on class rank.
- Neighborhood schools have their most academically advanced students leave the community for magnets
- Magnet programs lack adequate diversity despite efforts to address the problem.
- Comprehensive schools with over 1,000 students should be able to support specialized/advanced art, music, or technology classes.
- Selectively offering opportunities to certain groups of students as though such opportunities are not suitable for all students is problematic.
- Magnets continue to benefit only a select group of students, similar to charter schools.
- The magnet model stonewalls resources from reaching a critical mass of students who are typically minorities, English Language Learners, and/or receive Special Education services.
- Magnet students' standardized STAAR scores mask under-performance at the co-located comprehensive schools.
- Magnets provide separate and unequal education experiences for students.

Moving resources, expanding access or pointing to gains for students of color obfuscates the root causes of inequity which must be addressed to transform education outcomes. Otherwise, rather than reinventing the urban school experience AISD will continue to reproduce a stratified class system where some students get good education and associated benefits while other students get vocational or subtractive education based in remediation.

While the primary focus of this rationale is magnet programs, the bottom line is that the Task Force values the diversity of educational opportunities AISD offers and acknowledges that these offerings cost money. The issue is that the Task Force would like to see the district be more equitable in terms of the dollars it allocates to ensure that all students succeed. The cost of bussing in particular is difficult to justify considering dollars spent on transportation for the few could be better spent on additional opportunities that benefit the many.

**Safeguards:** It should be reiterated that members are not saying that the district should defund specialized programs. Members value the advanced academics offered by magnet schools, Fine Arts and International Baccalaureate programming, etc. Instead, members are challenging the district to make those opportunities more universally available and truly practice the belief that all students have the ability to thrive given such opportunities.

**Auxiliary Options:** The Task Force voted on alternative options to this option below, however one member suggests that if the above recommendation is not advanced then the district could consider spreading the magnet schools out geographically across the major transportation divides, i.e. north/south of the river, east/west of 35. This would minimize transportation problems for parents who are transferring their children to the advanced programs.

**Dissenting Concerns:** This is an important conversation but the district should consider furthering the conversation with a well-educated task force for this sole purpose of equity. Another member in no way supports the above recommendation.

**Resources:**

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PUcdl5nLhZz1D8cE8BAo8DQQze6DFyw3xyXi0wfRgu/edit#gid=1454731227>

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1M5YKC7AsBRXRsneP0-4autccXR5Ylh1P>

Offer transportation to magnet students on a sliding scale

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** The district would need to develop scenarios to determine the optimal approach

**Context:** This option was initially provided by the district. Note that 84% of members are in favor of the option of reimagining the magnet model altogether. Members chose to vote on this option as an alternative to that recommendation.

**Rationale:** The magnet programs provide families with a private-like experience within the public-school system. Many families whose students attend district magnets could afford to pay for private tuition but choose to send their kids to AISD magnet schools because of the richness of the opportunity. For those families, it would not be an undue burden to pay fees to cover the cost of transportation for not only their own children but to also subsidize the cost to bus students who cannot afford it.

Fees would be on a sliding scale that starts at \$0 for those who cannot afford to pay at all.

It is understood that a significant administrative burden might accompany this recommendation and that the district would have to weigh that in its calculations.

**Safeguards:** There is uncertainty as to whether this should be accomplished via a program fee or optional transportation fee. The concern is that families would simply opt out if it were tied to use of transportation services. There is also concern that families who cannot afford to pay might be discouraged to apply to magnets for fear of an added cost, not recognizing that it might be free to them. Some families might also be reluctant or have barriers to apply for a waiver. The district would need to ensure its approach would mitigate these potentially negative impacts.

**Dissenting Concerns:** This alternative would unfairly burden middle income families who do not qualify for free transportation but who are not so wealthy that the cost would be insignificant.

## Remove additional weighting for magnet schools applying equivalent staffing guidelines to magnet campuses and standard campuses

**Level of Support:** 80%

**Financial Impact:** \$1.5M

**Context:** This option was initially provided by the district. Again, note that 84% of members are in favor of the option of reimagining the magnet model altogether. Members chose to vote on this option as another potential alternative to that recommendation.

**Rationale:** The general intent is to become more transparent and equitable with incremental funding that goes above the standard campus allocations. Incremental funding should be based on the needs of the student populations striving toward more regionally balanced availability of unique enrichment opportunities across the district.

Magnet schools don't need the additional weights to be successful since they have the top tracking students and they have little trouble recruiting highly qualified teachers.

There is a lack of clarity on how much incremental funding magnets receive above the standard allocation. For example, the staffing guidelines currently allocate fewer FTEs to LASA for campus administrators and counselors so some of LASA's incremental funding is used to make up for that discrepancy. The intent would not be to reduce funding below the standard allocations but to bring the magnet school allocations in line with that of comprehensive schools.

**Auxiliary Options:** The district could also approach the concepts of weights for magnet schools based on student need, rather than simply allocating based on a campus's magnet status. For example, weights could be applied to the magnet campuses' economically disadvantaged population.

There is also some concern as to how this option would impact students currently enrolled in the magnet schools. The district could consider a gradual phase out of weights so the impact was not felt all at once.

**Dissenting Concerns:** This option needs further, more in depth review.

## AISD should consider releasing comparisons of average AISD TEA testing outcomes compared to those of competing charter schools

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** Potential to increase enrollment

**Rationale:** Families do not necessarily have a clear understanding of the difference between AISD and charter schools in terms of offerings and outcomes. AISD should be marketing in both English and Spanish since charter schools are targeting our families in largely Spanish speaking neighborhoods. While the district does publish this data, it does not seem to be reaching the families it needs to be reaching most, namely, the ones leaving the district to attend charters. The district cut its district-wide marketing budget last year so would need to come up with creative ways to more cost-effectively market itself. Some ideas include capitalizing on social media or partnering with CTE partners and students to prepare this type of marketing at a lower cost.

**Auxiliary Options:** AISD could create metrics beyond the test and graduation rate to demonstrate the success of a campus and show the superior programming. STAAR data should not be the only indicator. The success of a school community is not defined by a test score.

Establish a task force or other appropriate body to provide an easy to understand explanation of the district's myriad secondary offerings including: magnet schools, Fine Arts, Career Launch, Early College High School, International Baccalaureate, etc.

**Level of Support:** 76%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** AISD has an advantage over charter and private schools in terms of the variety of its offerings. AISD must have a simple to understand statement of what it offers if it is to capitalize on that advantage. The district's new website is a good start; however, it does not go far enough to explain how all of the programs and opportunities compare to one another and why students might be drawn to one opportunity over another. It seems that these programs take different approaches as to how to prepare students for 21st Century jobs and families should be given a clearer understanding of the philosophy behind the various approaches.

**Auxiliary Options:** It may be better to have consultants do this with steering from an advisory committee. The district may not get recommendations of real impact if left to special interests.

**Dissenting Concerns:** There is no need to establish a Task Force to get information that people currently in the district can provide. The curriculum department could reach out to individuals and campuses and gather all this information. To some extent this is already happening.

**Resources:**

<https://www.austinisd.org/schools/compare/4+5+6+1>

Eliminate board runoff elections awarding the seat to the candidate with a plurality of votes

**Level of Support:** 72%

**Financial Impact:** \$200K

**Context:** Currently, if a candidate does not win a majority of the votes, the race goes to a runoff election. Plurality voting would instead award the seat to the candidate with the most votes and does not require the winner to receive a majority.

**Rationale:** This is a simple change and is common across Texas. Eliminating run-off elections would increase the possibility of "splitting the vote" where two candidates with similar platforms lose to a third candidate whose platform is inconsistent with the platform that has the majority of support. Another possible outcome is that the candidate who receives the most votes in the regular election could end up losing in the runoff election. Even recognizing these possibilities, the Task Force recommends the change believing that the cost of these low-turnout runoff elections outweigh the benefit.

In the event that the technology becomes available in the future, members would like to see the district use ranked choice voting, an approach that allows voters to rank their preferences when there are three or more candidates—as is done in in Maine for example—to avoid this problem altogether.

**Resources:**

## STAFFING

AISD should not increase the student to teacher staffing allocation for the next budget year because adequate research and stakeholder engagement have not yet occurred

**Level of Support:** 92%

Further research, collection of data specific to AISD and stakeholder engagement should take place before any decisions are made around the teacher staffing ratios.

**Rationale:** The district should not make short-term staffing allocation changes without first studying the past impact of larger class sizes on student performance and without first considering the impact on existing staff. If there is an impact on existing staff—either through an unreasonable workload, uncompensated increase in workload or a reduction in force—such actions will have a financial impact via decreased morale and increased turnover. These costs across multiple years should be factored into staffing allocation decisions.

Individual campus considerations also deserve mention in that turnover of experienced teachers at the hardest to serve campuses should be a major outcome to be avoided.

Increasing the staffing ratio works against the district’s goal of attracting and retaining experienced teachers.

Research indicates that increasing staff-teacher allocations would negatively impact students' educational outcomes.

**Safeguards:** Considerations of staffing ratio changes should include a report/review of how much can be done through attrition and how many staff would have to be let go. This would include total number of staff to be lost with breakdowns by campus, plus total by each level: elementary, middle and high school.

**Resources:**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XzRIIYI79Eyxr7o8mckDELpSZB8bvXBuWrrzU9\\_gtDc/edt](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XzRIIYI79Eyxr7o8mckDELpSZB8bvXBuWrrzU9_gtDc/edt)

AISD should not move to a 7 of 8 model at this time

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Context:** The 6 of 8 model has secondary teachers delivering instruction for 6 of 8 period (or 3 of 4 in block schedules)—the other two periods are a planning period and a professional learning period.

**Rationale:** It was made clear to the Task Force that an uncompensated 12.5% increase in workload for teachers would have a considerable cost in terms of teacher morale and likely turnover, which ultimately has a negative financial impact. There is also concern that it would have a negative impact on student achievement since teachers use their planning time to prepare lessons, collaborate, and mentor other teachers and students.

**Safeguards:** The Task Force could not find anything to suggest the district knows how many hours of work it takes to perform a given job. Before considering such an increase in the

instructional workload of secondary teachers, formal research should be conducted on teacher workloads and stakeholder engagement should take place. Additionally, if changes are to be made, the district needs to be prepared to provide adequate tools and resources to enable teachers to be effective enough to reduce the number of planning periods.

Austin ISD should evaluate workloads across the district including central departments to determine appropriate workload for given roles before making changes to staff ratios

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Context:** This option ties in with the conversation about secondary planning periods and the 6 of 8 model.

**Rationale:** This kind of analysis at both central and campus level would be appropriate before acting on changes to campus staffing allocations. If the district expects to make good decisions around staffing levels or how much planning time is needed, there needs to be a better understanding of expectations around standard workloads and compensation.

The evaluation should include core vs. non-core teachers, reductions in central departmental/functions according to enrollment, etc. A time study of counselors in particular would be helpful as there are many anecdotal stories of their time being used for tasks other than counseling.

This type of evaluation could also inform decisions around weighted student allocations for special populations such as ELLs, students receiving special education services, etc. This would help ensure the district allocates funds equitably based on students and their specific needs. For example, if we had a clearer understanding of the additional time commitment associated with certain tasks/requirements (ARDs, LPACs, etc.) we'd be in a better position to determine which positions might need additional weights.

Certain items should be examined in the future by creating accurate savings estimates and providing a cost-benefit analysis to clearly understand impacts before implementing. These items include but are not limited to:

- Reduce department-level staff development and substitute costs
- Surcharges to employ retired applicants
- Weight adjustment in campus administration staffing formula
- Reduce Central Support Specialists

**Level of Support:** 100%

**Rationale:** For the items listed above, members felt more information would need to be provided to fully understand the implications. For example, what sorts of Professional Development would be impacted? What would be the cost of eliminating surcharges to employ retired applicants? Which weight adjustments would be under consideration? Which central support specialist have the greatest impact on teacher and student success?

Exploration should not be confined by the list of options that was provided by the district.

AISD should set a formal goal of reducing staff turnover and implement programs to achieve this goal by addressing issues related to culture, work climate, employee satisfaction, benefits and compensation

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** Potential to generate \$8M in savings if turnover is reduced by 25%

**Rationale:** It is estimated that the cost of a single new hire for an urban school district is upwards of \$20K. AISD has a 14% annual turnover rate across approximately 11,800 employees, which can cost AISD up to \$33 million annually when factoring costs such as recruitment, hiring and training. When employees leave the district after just a few years, the district does not see a full return on its investment.

In particular, teacher turnover has a negative impact on student achievement. Since teacher effectiveness is a high predictor of student success and teacher effectiveness is generally not the highest in the first few years of teaching, the importance of reducing teacher turnover becomes self-evident.

Teacher turnover also has a negative impact on equity as AISD sees higher turnover rates in its Title I schools.

Factors such as competitive pay gaps, negative climate and culture and struggling leadership can all contribute to turnover rate and should therefore be considered in any efforts to address turnover.

**Resources:**

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/the-cost-of-teacher-turnover>

[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/092011_education_greenstone_looney_shevlin.pdf)

[content/uploads/2016/06/092011\\_education\\_greenstone\\_looney\\_shevlin.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/092011_education_greenstone_looney_shevlin.pdf)

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/33321/1001455-The-Impact-of-Teacher-Experience.PDF>

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-brief>

AISD should consider using the BSTF as a foundation to create a strategic budget committee with a 2-3-year time-frame

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

**Rationale:** One of the key values Task Force members arrived at is the link between what is best for students and what is best for teachers. Because of this strong link, discussions around staffing must be holistic and marry the well-being of both students and teachers. There is concern that under the present timeline given to the BSTF, the implications of hastily made decisions cannot be fully appreciated. Extending some version or extension of the BSTF would allow rigorous and thoughtful examination of the issues and long-term impact of decisions. The kinds of decisions the BSTF is being asked to make have an impact on teacher experience and effectiveness over multi-year periods. Therefore, any approach to staffing and budgeting should also be a multi-year process that looks not only at the current year needs but also ahead. An extension of this work would also create more opportunities to share the work with the community and gather meaningful feedback. It could also allow greater subject matter expertise to inform some of the decisions.



Furthermore, greater planning could go behind the overall concept, structure, operating procedures, charge, facilitation method, timeline, community engagement strategy, etc. Members acknowledge that the district already has multiple bodies advising on the budget including the Budget and Finance Advisory Committee and the Staffing Guidelines Committee. The work could potentially be carried forward by either of these bodies but would need to adopt a new and clearly defined charge, goals and authority, giving them the space and resources to accomplish transformative work. Furthermore, the membership of those bodies would have to be revisited if they were to take on this work, as the Staffing Guidelines committee is comprised only of central and campus administrators and the BFAC is largely comprised of parents with just one teacher at the table.

**Auxiliary Options:** Special consideration should be given to those who've participated in one of the district's budget-related advisory groups. The district could create a rubric or scoring as part of how applicants are selected so there is transparency. Strong consideration should be given to board appointments/approval of members and an appropriate balance of staff, community, parents should be attained.

**Dissenting Concerns:** This is a lot to ask individuals to commit to, particularly considering the district continues to do what it wants in spite of the work of Advisory Bodies like the BSTF.

The district should manage operational expenditures toward peer averages while maintaining a focus on Community, Equity & the Classroom

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** A focus on Plant Maintenance and Operations, Transportation and Data Processing could render an eventual savings of \$32 million.

**Rationale:** AISD outspends peer averages in most categories. The focus here is on devising strategies for the district to work its way toward peer *averages*; this should not be a race to the bottom but an intentional trek toward the middle.

The Task Force acknowledges that peer comparisons have their limitations as one size does not fit all. For this reason, the district should look at both spending per student and spending as a percentage of total budget and should take into consideration district size, demographics and the distinction between rural/urban. All these elements should be used to determine the appropriate benchmark comparison for various functions in the budget.

There are likely areas where the district out-spends its peers for valid reasons, because we have different values or priorities. That is acceptable and welcome but the crux of the issue is that the district should be able to point to those areas with a compelling case as to why we are justifiably different *and* should be able to show how those extra dollars are resulting in better outcomes. For the sake of this recommendation, areas that touch instruction, community services and security were left out as an acknowledgement that our values support greater investment in those areas, particularly if they are linked to increasing equity in outcomes. That being said, there should be an emphasis on ensuring that as spending is further from teachers and the classroom, the district needs to be ensuring that both data and teacher feedback can back up the effectiveness of the spending.

This trek toward the center can be achieved over the course of a few years but clear direction should be given that a shift in culture is taking place where costs falling outside of peer alignment need to be appropriately justified.

The Task Force acknowledges that declining enrollment and under-utilized, aging facilities have a significant impact on student-based peer comparisons. Work orders often already go unfilled longer than is ideal and there are fixed operational and staffing costs that put meaningful pressure on the budget. While it is hard to quantify how much of the district's out-spending of peers can be linked to these challenges, the Task Force is not convinced that those challenges are solely responsible for the higher spending. It is hoped that some of these factors will be mitigated as new facilities come online and old ones are potentially phased out through consolidations.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Due to the complexities that every district has in accounting, comparing ourselves to peer averages is troublesome.

While peer averages can be considered, they should not be considered the "gold standard." Lowering our expectations to match surrounding districts will surely prevent AISD from reinventing the urban school experience.

**Resources:**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1ENbmqjDRpblp26zuCrC5II07uwvZcWXh>

The district should establish and conform to peer-based staffing ratios and expenditures at Central Administration

- Base Central Administration staff ratios on peer district comparisons and total student population
- Establish a baseline of staff included in Central Administration for consistency in which roles are included in this definition
- Establish a 3-year attrition-based plan to meet stated ratios
- Utilize targeted functional limits and reassignment of roles to get there
- Future hiring would be based on staff ratios rather than freezes

**Level of Support:** 79%

**Financial Impact:** up to \$2.5M annually

**Rationale:** Although AISD may be below the state average in Central Administration spending as a percentage of total budget (2.9% vs. 3.1%), AISD is above average among its peers for Central Administration spending per student. AISD's Central Administration became very lean after the 2011 state funding cuts but has gradually grown over the same time period that enrollment has been declining.

While it is understood that many costs are fixed, the district should consider a reduction in Central Administration staff that is tied to enrollment decline. It is plausible that in some areas, a decline in enrollment could result in a lighter workload, while in others, it may not. In instances where it does not, the district would have to consider going without certain capacities or functions that are not as tightly aligned with student achievement or the districts strategic goals.

**Safeguards:** This shift could be achieved through attrition and working with staff to re-define roles. As stated in the previous recommendation, there are likely areas where the district out-spends its peers for valid reasons, because we have different values or priorities

**Dissenting Concerns:** Same as concerns for the prior option regarding peer comparisons.

The district should decentralize Central Administration functions by re-assigning some resources and positions directly to the campuses that they serve

- Reassign those roles related to campuses/classrooms to the campus.
- Strategic centralized direction from AISD should focus on resource utilization.
- Let campuses control areas where they are doing well (close to core).
- Central Administration should truly be for non-campus functions & directional goal setting.
- Specialists could teach one section on campus (connection to instructional core).

**Level of Support:** 88%

**Financial Impact:** Unknown, but should not incur an overall cost.

**Rationale:** While many of the centralized positions exist to support teachers and ensure rich instructional content is made available to them, the distance from the classroom inevitably creates a degree of disconnect. By placing more of those positions at the campus level, it could open up a best of both worlds opportunity where campuses receive high level, centralized support services from someone who is spending a significant amount of their time in the classroom and walking the halls of a campus to support campus goals.

In the face of shrinking resources, the district should prioritize resourcing campuses and flattening the structure of Central. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers do not value some of the central supports they receive or it could be the case that they are spread so thinly that their impact is not widely felt—i.e. one staff member supporting an entire vertical team. Central support staff should be expected to live under a structure tied to enrollment, similar to the one that campuses are expected to operate under.

**Auxiliary Options:** Because there may not be enough to go around, a more regional approach might be better for serving multiple schools.

The district's Staffing Guidelines Committee explored the idea of "supercoaches" that could support a campus in all critical areas (SEL, behavior, core subjects, arts, technology, etc.) so that for a campus, instead of seeing numerous people infrequently, you might see one person several days per week. The BSTF was not, however, informed of this option so members did not have the opportunity to discuss it.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Certain items should be examined in the future by creating accurate savings estimates and providing a cost-benefit analysis to clearly understand impacts before implementing.

The district should investigate which departments and staff from Central Administration could feasibly be located at under-used campuses and sites across the district

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** Has potential to reduce Southfield Building renovation costs and reduce occupancy allowing the district to potentially rent out space as an additional revenue source

**Rationale:** The intent here is to reduce renovation expenses at Southfield and more fully utilize existing capacity at campuses. Current renovation expense forecasts are out of line in light of the budget shortfall.

Co-location of centralized staff should be viewed through several lenses:

- Potential benefit to a campus of hosting a central department
- Prop up the usage of a district site, including under-enrolled campuses that could remain open
- Using existing district facilities more efficiently to host central staff and reduce the cost of Southfield renovations and usage
- Recouping cost of renovating Southfield including by subletting portions of the building and having tenants pay for desired renovation/build-out in those areas
- Determining which renovations are necessary at Southfield for remaining staff vs. those that are nice to have--We are not currently in a “Nice to have” budget environment

**Safeguards:** This should only be done assuming it will not create additional challenges to serving children and communities effectively. There is an interest in a trial or pilot of this approach to provide meaningful insight on effectiveness and efficiency, however, the option is time-sensitive as renovations are currently underway.

It is understood that some operational functions need to be centralized and back office efficiencies should not be sacrificed. While whole departments such as payroll or HR may need to stay together for productivity, it may make sense, for example, to put Payroll or Accounting on a particular campus, while Human Resources, which receives many visitors should probably be at Southfield.

[AISD should invest in a Master Teacher program that includes pay differentials for teacher effectiveness and changes the structure for teaching and class assignments to a Team model](#)

- Master teachers should be selected from the 3,500 teachers with 6+ years of experience.
- Program should be developed in a way that funnels more experienced teachers with a demonstrated history of increasing student growth and proficiency into teaching at Title I schools.
- Teachers should have demonstrated experience developing novice teachers and building strong team dynamics that benefit student learning.

**Level of Support:** 84%

**Financial Impact:** Would depend on the number of schools that implement and what pay differentials were adopted

**Context:** A team teaching model is where for example, 100 students are assigned to a team of three teachers: a master teacher, a teacher with mid-level experience and a novice teacher, compensated accordingly, rather than four teachers being assigned 25 students each.

**Rationale:** AISD teacher salaries are above state averages for starting teachers and those with one to five years of experience but they are \$3,000-\$5,000 below the state average for teachers with 6+ years of experience. AISD has a higher percentage of new, inexperienced teachers than the statewide average. The salary structure is reflected in the outcome, i.e. student achievement suffers if the district cannot retain highly effective, experienced teacher—understanding that the two are not *necessarily* correlated.

Title I campuses experience higher teacher turnover and tend to have less experienced teachers, which negatively impacts equity. The program should therefore be modeled to incentivize highly effective teachers to stay at Title I campuses.

Teachers do not always feel valued as professionals and often feel that they lack authentic opportunities to lead and grow as educators. The master teacher model would provide support for new teachers and give more experienced teachers the opportunity to grow their leadership skills while earning a higher salary.

Members are amenable to seeing this type of program incorporated into the current Professional Pathways for Teachers compensation program. Since PPfT is still in its early stages, conversations should be had as more teachers understand the program and begin to earn additional compensation.

**Safeguards:** This type of decision should be informed by input/consensus from education professionals and administrators along with district leadership.

The district needs to be able to measure a teacher's history of increasing student growth and proficiency, but needs to determine what measures it will use, i.e. PPfT/Student Learning Objectives STAAR scores, etc.

The district should consider this option after looking at best practice data.

**Auxiliary Options:** Although it was not voted on specifically, many members saw an opportunity to tweak PPfT to make it a better instrument for incentivizing strong teachers to teach and stay in Title I schools, Improvement Required schools or schools that have larger populations of ELLs or students receiving Special Education services. The way PPfT is currently structured, teachers teaching in those types of campuses have the opportunity to accumulate points more quickly through their appraisals, which means they could see their base pay increase at an accelerated rate. Some members expressed concerns that teachers could accumulate those points and later transfer to a different campus. The district could explore the option of teachers only keep the "extra" points or some portion of them so long as they are at a Title I/Cohort I school. This would fundamentally change the promise of PPfT permanently building a teacher's base pay.

Members also proposed holding principals accountable for teacher turnover. Understanding that there can be a high level of turnover when there is a transition in leadership, principals should be given a grace period when they first start at a school. Furthermore, principals need to be able to let go of underperforming staff members without it negatively impacting their performance review. If there are any consistently underperforming staff, then the principal should be penalized for holding onto them but they should also be held accountable for losing high performing staff.

**Dissenting Concerns:** While there is support for pay differentials for effectiveness among teachers, the team-teaching model is not always what is best for a campus considering many other factors.

AISD has PPfT for their professional development, compensation and appraisal system. Any additions to a system that develops "master teachers" should be invested in PPfT.

**Resources:** <https://www.dmgrouppk12.com/docmanlinks/32-spending-money-wisely-getting-the-most-from-school-district-budgets-e-book-1/file>

The district should create new staffing models for very small schools for the upcoming school year

**Level of Support:** 64%

**Financial Impact:** \$3.4M

**Context:** The small school staffing model accounts for the growing number of schools with small student populations. The model would bring the student to staff ratios of small schools closer to that of the larger schools. For example, currently a middle school with 450 students gets the same Assistant Principal allocation as a Middle School with 1298 students (2 FTEs). The small school model creates a set of new, lower thresholds so that very small schools would not get the same allocations as larger ones for some positions. This could mean smaller schools may have to allocate partial roles to one individual, e.g. one employee may be allocated as ½ teacher and ½ counselor.

**Rationale:** Many members were ambivalent about this option. While it did not make it out of subcommittee as an official recommendation, members chose to include it in the final survey to see where everyone stands.

It does not seem reasonable that a school with 450 students should have the same assistant principal allocations as a school with 1298 students. In reality, the smaller campuses are likely using those allocations for different positions.

**Safeguards:** Garza should not be included in the small school staffing model as it provides an alternative for the entire district--and staff there provide online modules for the entire district.

**Dissenting Concerns:** Small schools already lack economies of scale and cannot offer many of the same benefits of a larger school. Reducing the allocations would create additional challenges for those campuses and have a negative impact on equity. The impacts of this option could be further studied after boundaries and consolidations are addressed and the district moves away from a very small school model.

The district should look at alternative staffing models, but simultaneously consider the impacts to equity and support at small campuses. This should not be hurried for the 2019-20 school year.

Eliminate cell phone stipends and negotiate with cell phone providers for affordable data-plans for staff, with staff providing their own device and coverage

**Level of Support:** 96%

**Financial Impact:** 209K

**Context:** Currently 428 staff receive a monthly stipend of \$40-\$60. Historically, AISD provided devices and plans for their staff before cell phones and data plans were as ubiquitous. The district moved to stipends as the most cost-effective way to compensate staff for the use of their personal devices.

**Rationale:** While employers may have the responsibility to provide their staff with the tools needed to perform their jobs, work related data puts an inconsequential burden on a modern cell plan. Furthermore, those who are required to be instantly reachable tend to be more highly compensated for their role. Ideally the district would limit hidden costs of programs such as the cell phone stipends as it is an administrative burden and likely has a trivial impact on recruitment and retention.

**Safeguards:** Any elimination of cell phone stipends for bus drivers, teachers, SROs etc. should be carefully studied for safety implications.

**Resources:** [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1C4\\_rj5pYGgrq0uDL27CtWQxsW2xYQCEJ](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1C4_rj5pYGgrq0uDL27CtWQxsW2xYQCEJ)

AISD should establish a rigorous process to factually and fairly evaluate all aspects of big decisions, such as staffing changes

**Level of Support:** 92%

**Financial Impact:** TBD

Identify and implement best practices for effective decision-making including:

- Analysis of potential outcomes, pros, cons, who is affected, who opposes, who supports
- Fiscal analysis across all funds for any proposal, including implementation cost
- Methodology to consistently measure and review outcomes

**Rationale:** Policymakers and district leaders will benefit from having this information as they make decisions. Analysis as described above will bring clarity to the dialogue while also increasing and public understanding of the challenges and potential solutions. Awareness of all potential implications will help with prioritization of budget reduction efforts. Increasing understanding and visibility of the financial impact is particularly important.

**Disenting Concerns:** The leadership team should have good decision-making processes or they can't be true leaders. Making that decision-making process more transparent is better than saying what it should be.