



What is the Middle Level Education Plan (MLEP)? In 2008–2009, the Office of Middle Schools developed a comprehensive plan to ensure all middle school students attain high academic achievement and develop the confidence and character needed to succeed in high school and beyond. Eight strategies and supporting action plans were developed to achieve the objectives of the MLEP (<http://www.austinisd.org/schools/ms>). An evaluation of three strategies and supporting action plans were planned for the 2009–2010 school year. They are as follows:

- Strategy 2.2: Integrate service learning into the core curriculum in a structured way that connects classroom content with community needs
- Strategy 5.2: Implement advisories in 6th through 8th grades at all middle schools to assist students in developing lifelong social skills reflected in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Character Education Touchstone
- Strategy 7.5: Develop and implement effective instructional systems for English language learners (ELLs)

In the first year of implementation, the evaluation focused on implementation and participant perceptions of the work. It also described the teacher-leader model designed to support implementation of MLEP strategies and summarized initial outcomes related to Strategies 2.6 and 5.2. Outcomes for ELL middle school students (Strategy 7.5) will be included in the bilingual education evaluation report.

Who supported the implementation of MLEP strategies within the schools? The Office of Middle Schools paid four teacher leaders from each middle school a stipend of \$3,000 (i.e., \$12,000 per school) to facilitate and support the implementation of MLEP strategies and action plans with fidelity. Across 19 middle schools, a total of 78 teachers were designated as teacher leaders and were assigned to support the MLEP in four areas: advisory, curriculum, English as a second language, and general support for the MLEP. They attended professional development (PD) sessions during the summer of 2009 and on a monthly basis throughout the school year to obtain the knowledge and skills to facilitate MLEP work.

About the data collection. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to describe outcomes of MLEP implementation in 2009–2010. Three major data sources are described below.

MLEP Activity Tracker. To describe the implementation of MLEP strategies and action plans, 78 teacher leaders across all middle schools entered data into an activity-tracking system, and approximately 62% of them entered at least one activity into the system during the school year.

Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS). The district's ECS collected data regarding the implementation of MLEP strategies. Specifically, ECS questions elicited teachers' feedback about the implementation of the service learning curriculum (Strategy 2.2) and student advisory program (Strategy 5.2). The 2010 middle school teachers' response rate was 48%, which was determined to be representative of the middle school teachers across the district.

Service Learning Surveys. Student surveys were administered online to evaluate activities supported by A Legacy of Giving. In May 2010, 98 program participants attending O'Henry, Paredes, and Small Middle Schools and 557 students attending two comparison middle schools, Bailey and Fulmore, completed the surveys. Response rates could not be determined due to lack of student participation information in the supported schools. Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) staff analyzed responses pertaining to middle schools only, and highlights of those results are contained in this report. Legacy of Giving staff also worked with Dr. Robert E. Floden of Michigan State University to describe the results of all participant surveys (i.e., including surveys of elementary school students) as a part of a national study. The full survey report can be requested from Legacy of Giving staff (<http://www.alegacyofgiving.org>).



Did middle school teacher leaders implement MLEP strategies in their schools? Teacher leaders documented 2,221 MLEP support activities between October 5, 2009 and June 2, 2010, for a total of 3,239.75 hours, in a database that was developed to document the activities facilitated by teacher leaders. The number of activities reported by teacher leaders ranged between 868 and 0 across all of the schools. Of the 19 schools, seven had more than 100 activities documented, and three had fewer than 25 activities documented. As expected, in the first year, teacher leader participation in PD activities was the most frequently occurring activity. Overall, teacher leaders reported that they spent 37% of their time (1,194.50 hours) working with other individuals or small groups of staff.

Curriculum and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher leaders recorded more minutes of activities than Did Advisory and MLEP Teacher Leaders. However, substantial amounts of time did not appear related to the MLEP support role as it was originally conceived. For example, ESL teacher leaders recorded 147 hours of testing responsibilities, including LAS-Links and TELPAS administration, and monitoring TAKS-LAT testing. Similarly, Curriculum teacher leaders recorded 58.50 hours of testing responsibilities.

Rank Listing of the 20 Most Commonly Recorded Support Activities, by Teacher Leader Role and Time Spent

Activity type	Time in hours, by teacher leader role				Subtotal time in hours
	Advisory	Curriculum	ESL	MLEP	
1. Attend professional development training	29.3	205.8	196.8	90.5	522.3
2. Lesson planning	130.5	102.8	138.3	10.5	382.0
3. Administrative tasks	24.0	50.5	139.5	5.8	219.8
4. Administrative meeting	6.0	88.5	70.8	44.8	210.0
5. Testing duties	0.0	58.5	147.0	2.5	208.0
6. Data analysis/use	1.8	133.5	31.8	18.0	185.0
7. Conference/provide feedback/debrief	7.8	35.5	87.8	24.3	155.3
8. Curriculum planning	46.8	54.8	35.0	15.8	152.3
9. Lead professional development activity/training	14.0	63.3	46.8	13.0	137.0
10. Demonstrate/model best practices	1.8	28.3	78.5	22.0	130.5
11. Prepare presentations	7.5	57.0	40.8	8.0	113.3
12. Other	1.8	12.5	83.0	8.0	105.3
13. Communicate information on campus initiatives	3.8	34.0	27.5	32.3	97.5
14. Classroom observation	19.0	37.8	24.3	11.8	92.8
15. Provides teaching strategies/best practices	0.0	47.0	35.3	7.8	90.0
16. Collect data/feedback	4.5	45.8	22.8	8.3	81.3
17. Develop curriculum	11.0	24.3	29.0	0.0	64.3
18. Monitor campus implementation	10.5	12.3	14.3	23.3	60.3
19. Conduct needs assessment	3.3	15.5	31.8	7.8	58.3
20. Update website	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.8	29.8
Subtotal	323.0	1107.3	1280.5	383.8	3094.5

Source. MLEP Teacher Leader Activity Tracking System, October 5, 2009 through June 2, 2010

Note. Activities are ranked according to the overall amount of time recorded, not by the time recorded within teacher leader role. The table accounts for approximately 97% of all time recorded. This table does not include the hours recorded by teachers with more than one role or with an unknown role.



What is service learning (Strategy 2.2)? Service learning combines academic classroom curriculum with participation in organized service experiences to meet community needs. In 2009–2010, middle school leaders could choose to implement service learning using their own plans or with support of contracted services from Legacy of Giving staff contracted for \$48,750.00. Participating schools included Ann Richards, Covington, Dobie, Garcia, Martin, Mendez, O’Henry, Paredes, Small, and Webb. In 2009–2010, the evaluation of service learning focused on the perceptions of students who participated in Legacy of Giving activities, compared with the perceptions of students who did not.

What were student outcomes related to service learning? Survey results indicated student participation in academic service learning activities was increased by a school’s work with Legacy activities. A higher percentage of students in schools supported by Legacy of Giving (58%) than of students in non-participating schools (38%) were engaged in service and volunteer activities. However, some variability existed among the Legacy schools, ranging from 80% to 40%. The most frequent reason given for student participation was “school activity.”

Regardless of whether they had participated in the Legacy of Giving curriculum, most students believed they had the understanding, motivation, and skills to deal with community needs, and could make a difference in their community. On three of five questions, a higher percentage of students attending comparison schools than of program participants indicated desired responses.

What should be considered when examining student outcomes related to service learning? The extent of program implementation has not been determined at the district or campus level. Thus, the relationship between program implementation and desired student outcomes could not be verified. Further inquiry into the fidelity of implementation is recommended to discern program outcomes for students.

Five Reasons for Participating in Service Learning

	Legacy supported schools	Comparison schools
Family involved	13%	12%
Community need	9%	8%
Friends involved	24%	19%
School activity	44%	32%
Required by parents or law	12%	11%

Source. AISD Legacy of Giving Student Survey, Spring 2010

Student Self-Evaluation of Skills and Outcomes

I understand this community's need.		
	Agree	Disagree
Legacy schools	75%	25%
Comparison schools	73%	27%
I am motivated to work on community projects.		
	Agree	Disagree
Legacy schools	60%	40%
Comparison schools	70%	30%
I have the skills needed to help my community.		
	Agree	Disagree
Legacy schools	75%	25%
Comparison schools	80%	20%
I have helped my community		
	Agree	Disagree
Legacy schools	75%	25%
Comparison schools	74%	26%
I can make a difference in my community		
	Agree	Disagree
Legacy schools	76%	24%
Comparison schools	80%	20%

Source. AISD Legacy of Giving Student Survey, Spring 2010



What is student advisory? In 2009–2010, each middle school was to begin implementing a student advisory program using a variety of resources, including AISD Character Education, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Safe Place, CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health), service learning, and academic advising activities. Schools could choose the frequency and duration of the advisory class. Through advisory, it was expected that middle school students would (a) build relationships with their peers and at least one adult in their school; (b) develop the confidence and character necessary to be contributing members of their community; (c) actively participate in activities to explore their talents, career interests, and aspirations; and (d) successfully transition to high school on time and prepared for success. Overall, \$48,320.00 was spent on the advisory program in 2009-2010.

How did teachers implement advisory in the middle schools? Teachers reported that campus leadership teams clearly communicated expectations about advisory (70%), and implemented advisory according to campus/district expectations (75%). They perceived that they were effectively implementing advisory to meet students’ needs. College and career preparation and parent communication were the areas of advisory that were implemented least often. Most of the open-ended comments from teachers indicated a need for more information about and support for using the AISD Character Education curriculum in advisory and their classrooms.

More than half of middle school teachers reported using Character Education and PBS activities and academic advising reports in their advisory classrooms.

	Percentage
AISD Character Education activities	59.6%
Positive Behavior Support (PBS) lesson plans	59.6%
Academic advising (STAR or Gradespeed reports)	54.6%
CATCH activities	44.8%
Life skills-goal setting	35.6%
Service learning activities	22.7%
Safe Place activities	22.1%

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, Spring 2010

How did teachers rate AISD’s Character Education curriculum? The district developed the Character Education curriculum, and the MLEP articulated that it should be a primary resource for advisory implementation. Teachers provided feedback about the curriculum in their survey responses.

Most teachers found the Character Education curriculum easy to use and accessible; however, they did not believe it to be useful in core content areas.

	Yes	No
Was the Character Education curriculum user friendly?	68.7%	31.3%
Was the Character Education curriculum easily accessible online?	54.7%	41.3%
Did you find the Character Education curriculum usable in core content areas?	39.3%	57.9%
Did you use the Character Education curriculum in the content area you teach?	40.0%	58.6%

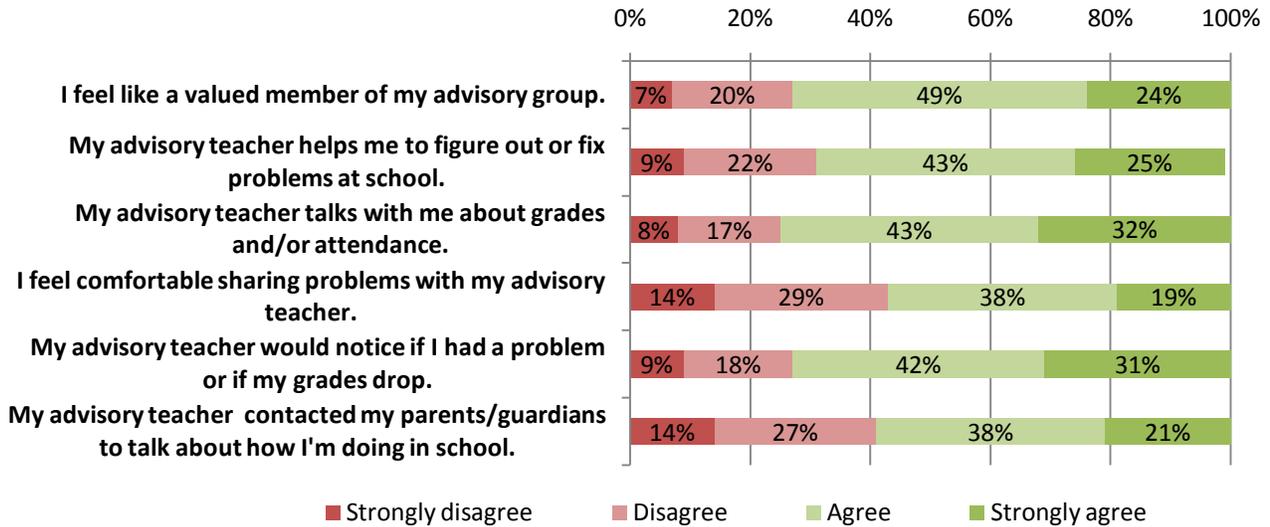
Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, Spring 2010

What about PD opportunities to support advisory? PD support was limited. Overall, 28% of teachers did not participate in PD sessions about advisory, and 64% only participated in 1 or 2 sessions. While 33% of teachers did not think they needed PD opportunities in this area, 27% wanted more help to use recommended advisory resources, and 23% wanted help with academic advising. **About 55% of teachers received professional development support for advisory from the advisory teacher leader.**

Only 27% of teachers accessed the curriculum online, and 56% received it from their teacher leaders.



What were students' perceptions of advisory? On the spring student survey administered in schools implementing Legacy of Giving curriculum and in comparison schools, **most students provided positive responses about their advisory class; however, a substantial portion of students did not.** More than 40% of the students reported they did not feel comfortable sharing problems with their advisor, and 41% disagreed with the statement about advisory teachers attempting to contact parents or guardians to talk about school performance.



Source. AISD student advisory survey questions included in the Legacy of Giving Student Survey, Spring 2010.

What should be considered when examining student outcomes related to student advisory? Although teachers identified the resources they were using in their advisory groups, they did not indicate the extent to which they were using these materials. To reduce the data collection burden on middle school students, the advisory student survey only was administered in schools participating in the service learning evaluation.

What does all of this mean? District wide, middle school campus staff began to implement the strategies and supporting action plans related to service learning and advisory. The strategies and levels of implementation differed by campus. The initial results for teachers and students indicated merit for the continued development and implementation of MLEP strategies and action plans.

Recommendation. The extent of program implementation has not been determined at the district or campus level. Thus, the relationship between program implementation and desired student outcomes could not be verified. Further inquiry into the fidelity of implementation is recommended to discern program outcomes for students. This information also would assist program staff in identifying best practices and improving professional development support for teachers and other campus staff. In addition, comprehensive program implementation data, combined with budget allocations and expenditures, would enable a study of cost-effectiveness.



About the MLEP. The Office of Middle Schools provides assistance and supervision of all aspects of teaching and learning for middle schools in AISD. This office is charged with the implementation and support of the MLEP approved by the AISD board of trustees in 2008. The mission of the MLEP is to ensure all students demonstrate high academic achievement and develop confidence and character to succeed in high school and beyond. This is accomplished by

- Engaging students in rigorous, relevant, world class curriculum and instruction
- Fostering meaningful relationships
- Encouraging respect and appreciation of diversity
- Promoting civic engagement
- Supporting students' intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being

About DPE. DPE was established in 1972 to support program decision making and strategic planning in AISD. The department is housed in the Office of Accountability and is charged with evaluating federal, state, and locally funded programs in AISD. DPE works with program staff throughout the district to design and conduct formative and summative program evaluations. DPE's methods for evaluating programs vary depending on the research question, program design, and reporting requirements. The evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. DPE also responds to information needs at all levels. DPE reports may be accessed online at <http://www.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/reports.phtml>.

About the author. After earning degrees in elementary education, curriculum and instruction, and educational administration from Texas A&M University and obtaining certifications for school principalship and superintendency, Dr. Karen Looby began to specialize in program evaluation. She joined DPE in October 2000 and supervises multiple projects focused on supporting academic success and college and career preparation in middle and high schools.

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