

AISD Central Office Climate Survey

Executive Summary, School Year 2021–2022

Background

The purpose of the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Central Office Climate Survey (COCS) is to ask Central Office (CO) employees for their perceptions and experiences of various aspects of their work environment. Employees report on how they are treated, general climate, communication between leadership and staff members, facilities and resources available to them, and frequency of bullying. The survey is administered through email every two years to all CO employees who are at least half-time, or those who report to CO. Survey data are used to assess and monitor working conditions for each area/department and subdivision and for the overall district.

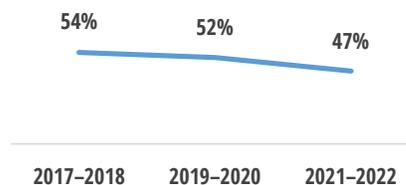
Prior to this year's survey, the last COCS was administered in spring of school year 2019–2020. Data for the current 2021–2022 COCS was collected between April 5th and June 1st, 2022. The structure of this COCS differed slightly from previous years in that AISD has undergone significant organizational changes. For example, respondents first self-selected one of the following twelve major or chief areas: Academics Office, Chief of Schools Office, District Communication & Community Engagement Office, District Police, Human Capital, Information Systems Office, Intergovernmental Relations Office, Legal Services, Office of Equity, Office of Finance, Office of Operations and Superintendent's Office, rather than selecting from only five major organizational areas as they did in the 2019–2020 survey. Within their self-selected major area, respondents were then able to select a department or work group. Respondents were asked about climate and leadership at the district level, their major area, and lastly, their specific department or work group.

Response Rate

Out of the targeted 2,544 employees, 1,186 responded, resulting in a 47% response rate. However, not all of those responded to every item in the survey. Distribution also differed from previous COCS. In 2019–2020, classified employees (i.e. bus drivers, food service, and warehouse employees) did not receive the survey since they do not report to CO.

The 2021–2022 survey, though, was distributed to all non-campus employees, in order to provide an opportunity for each employee to respond with their thoughts and perceptions about the many changes and challenges experienced the last two years. This decision, as well as the decision to translate the survey into Spanish, was made in the interest of equity. The previous COCS in 2019–2020 was not translated. Distribution of the 2019–2020 COCS targeted 1,571 employees and 816 responded, resulting in a response rate of 52%. Response rates for the last three COCS are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
The 2021–2022 COCS response rate was slightly lower than prior years, but it included all non campus staff (N= 2,544).



Source. 2017–2022 AISD Central Office Climate Survey data.

Since 2005, the AISD Central Office Climate (previously called Central Office Work Environment) Survey has been conducted to gather information about working conditions. This survey asks staff about interactions with other employees, morale, and whether staff agree or disagree (4-point Likert scale) with statements like "AISD is a good place to work."

School district central offices are becoming more widely recognized for the role they play in school achievement.

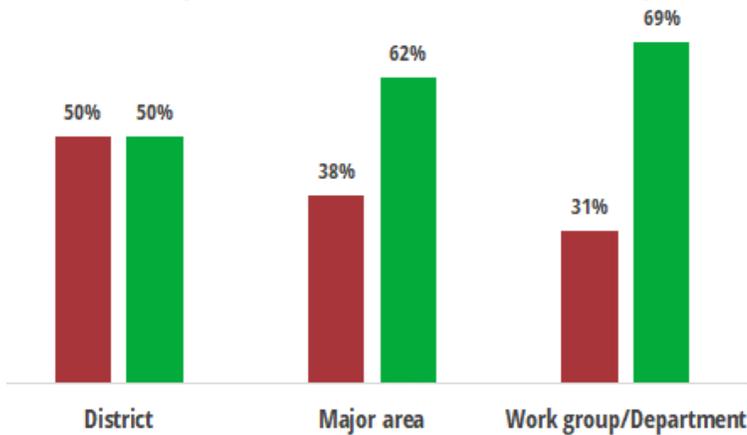
Understanding the internal communication dynamics may provide insight as to how central office staff impact campus-based personnel. Since central offices are responsible for (among other things) curriculum, hiring practices, professional development, and evaluation, research recommends fostering healthy working conditions.

Findings

Trust and mutual respect: Overall, 50% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within AISD ($n = 824$). In comparison, 62% of respondents said there is an atmosphere of trust within their major area, and 69% said there is an atmosphere of trust and respect within their department or work group (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Half of respondents **strongly agreed or agreed** there was an atmosphere of trust and respect in the district overall, and half **disagreed or strongly disagreed**.



Source. AISD Central Office Climate Survey data 2021–2022.

Stay in AISD: Similar to the last two consecutive COCS, the majority (77%) of respondents ($n = 814$) strongly agreed or agreed that AISD is a good place to work. The majority (93%) of respondents ($n = 671$) reported they would stay in AISD next year. This is three percentage points lower than the previous COCS administered during the 2019–2020 school year.

Do employees feel valued: Also of note, 47% of respondents ($n = 817$) reported they feel valued as an employee of AISD, while 29% said no and 24% were not sure (Figure 3). In addition, 70% of respondents ($n = 824$) strongly agreed or agreed that their major area leaders modelled social and emotional competence in their leadership.

Figure 3.

In the 2021–2022 COCS, less than half of respondents (47%) reported they **felt valued** as employees in AISD, 29% **did not feel valued**, and 24% **did not know**.



Source. AISD Central Office Climate Survey data 2021–2022.

In the 2019–2020 COCS an item added at the request of the Customer Service and Employee Recognition team asked what makes AISD employees feel valued. The item was modified for the 2021–2022 COCS to instead ask if employees currently feel valued as an employee in AISD. If not, a prompt was provided with an open text box for the respondent to describe why not. Of the 29% of employees who responded no, the majority of them ($n = 203$)

Do employees feel valued: Open Text Responses

An item in the 2021–2022 COCS asked if AISD employees currently feel valued. Those who answered ‘no’ were prompted to describe why.

A lot of us cry everyday. A lot of us are struggling and traumatized. We need more from the district.

The Chief has not met with us to even discuss what our job duties are or how it will impact the campuses when our department is cut nearly in half next year.

AISD needs a competitive pay scale based on other large cities within the state.

I do not receive recognition, feedback or support from leadership in my area.

Being under the threat of losing my job for the past three years is detrimental to morale and feelings of being valued and appreciated.

I am not ‘heard’ as an employee. Decisions are made from leadership without input from those which feel the consequences.

I feel like I am not being compensated for the amount of extra work and responsibility.

When you cut staff positions, you hurt the people who are left without a job, but you also add an increase burden to those left behind. No one believes that all these cuts were the only solution.

responded to a prompt with an open text field to explain why. Responses were analyzed, sorted, and categorized by theme, in an effort to help district leaders understand why employees did not feel valued. The themes and number of responses in each category are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Respondents ($n = 203$) who did not feel valued as employees in AISD could explain why in an open text field. Results of thematic analysis of these responses revealed leadership and treatment were most frequently mentioned categories.

Leadership Theme	Subcategory	<i>n</i>	Overall Theme	Subcategory	<i>n</i>
Specifically refer to AISD district leaders	Poor management	19	How employees feel they are treated	Work overload due to job cuts and vacancies	36
	Poor communication/messaging	17		Not given recognition, praise or appreciation	36
	Overall feelings related to district leaders	12		Feel not seen or listened to	23
	Staffing decisions	7		Treated like they are expendable	18
	Self-serving behavior	4		Feel treated unfairly and/or with disrespect	13
	Discrimination	1		How they are treated causes stress	7
	Total	60		Feel isolated or lack support/clear guidance	6
Specifically refer to department leadership	Poor communication	16	Lack of transparency in communication	5	
	Poor management (i.e. micromanaged)	8	Inadequate or unsafe workspace	5	
	Dont listen to our concerns	3	Feel they are micromanaged	3	
	Inefficient practices or unsafe workload	3	Total	152	
	Discrimination	2	Compensation	Need better compensation	20
	Total	32	and/or promotion opportunities	Pay is not merit-based	10
Poor or negligent leadership (unspecified)	Unacceptable working conditions	4	Lack of opportunities for promotion	6	
	Poor communication	3	Total	36	
	Unethical practices (i.e. discrimination)	8	Organizational culture	Morale/Toxicity	15
	Spending	3	No support for employee well-being	2	
	Staffing	4	Total	17	
	Poor managment	5			
Total	27				

Source. 2021–2022 AISD Central Office Climate Survey data.

Note. Some respondents touched on several themes in the same response.

Comprehensive AISD COCS results for this year are displayed in a public-facing dashboard. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, we only reported survey results with at least five responses for both individual items and disaggregated subgroups (e.g., departments, subdivisions). Without this threshold, results from small groups of respondents might be discernable to individual staff members. While the survey is not anonymous, confidentiality is ensured. Therefore, data from departments or subgroups with fewer than five employees are masked. To access the dashboard (a) go to <https://www.austinisd.org/dre>, (b) select “interactive reports,” and (c) select Central Office Climate Survey Report 2021–2022 from the interactive reports list in the upper left-hand corner of the page.



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