

Teacher Induction Program

New Teacher Orientation Week

2020–2021

Introduction

Austin Independent School District (AISD) annually hosts a week-long orientation for teachers, instructional coaches, librarians, and elementary counselors who are new to AISD as part of the Teacher Induction Program (TIP). This orientation focuses on expanding teachers' knowledge, acquainting teachers with specific curricula and district practices, exposing them to new ideas and strategies, and providing a context for further learning. This year, sessions included the district celebration and professional learning, cohort days, and campus orientation. Additionally, time was allotted for staff to attend sessions in the AISD EDU Personalized Learning Conference, which occurred concurrently with TIP orientation week. This year, sessions were hosted virtually on August 3 through August 6 in response to COVID-19.

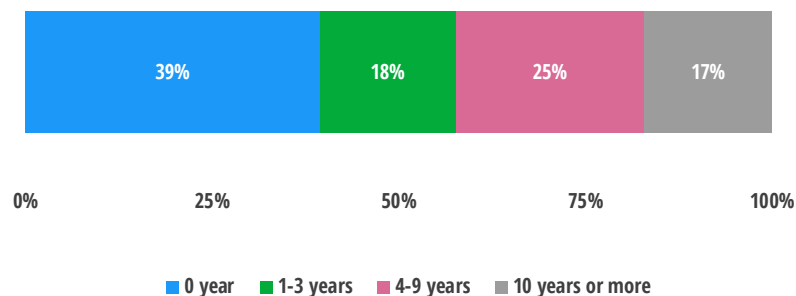
Staff who attended the TIP orientation week were asked to complete a survey regarding their experience, and results are summarized in this report. A total of 539 staff attended the TIP orientation week, and 50% ($n = 270$) of attendees completed the survey.

TIP Orientation Week Survey Respondents

Of survey respondents, 39% indicated the 2020–2021 academic year would be their first year of teaching, while 61% of respondents had taught previously (Figure 1). The majority of respondents indicated their assignment was at the elementary level (45%). Twenty-seven percent of respondents were assigned to the middle school level, 26% were assigned to the high school level, and 2% indicated all levels.

Figure 1.

The majority of survey respondents (61%) had prior experience teaching.



Source. TIP Orientation Week Survey, 2020–2021

What were staffs' perceptions of the TIP orientation week?

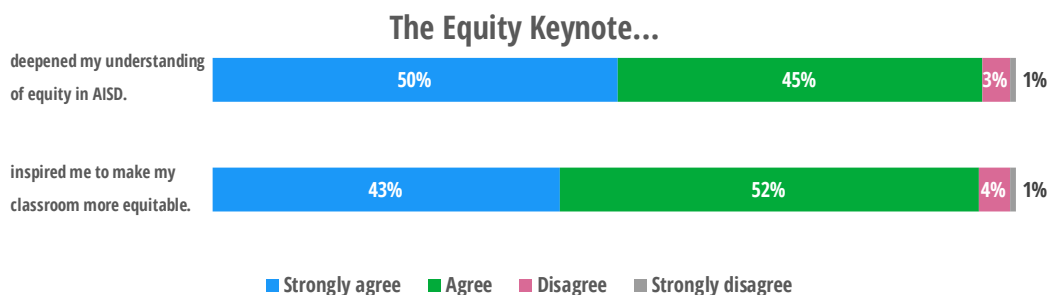
District Celebration and Professional Learning

The district celebration and professional learning (PL) day included a district welcome from the superintendent and teachers of the year, an overview of district initiatives (i.e., whole child, literacy, blended and personalized learning, and learning progression and Connect Program), an equity keynote, and a PL opportunity session focused on building relationships in a virtual environment. The majority of TIP attendees who completed the survey responded positively regarding the session. For example, 97% of respondents indicated they planned to implement the strategies modeled during the overview of initiatives, and 97% indicated the PL session focused on building relationships in a virtual environment prepared them to create an environment that fosters identity safety. Additionally, 92% of respondents indicated they learned virtual strategies that can be implemented in their classroom, such as various welcoming rituals, morning meetings, Zoom features (e.g., breakout rooms, whiteboard), social emotional learning (e.g., having a mindfulness space on Blend), and Blend strategies.

The equity keynote was a new session included in the TIP orientation week this year. Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated that the equity keynote deepened their understanding of equity in AISD, and 96% indicated that the keynote inspired them to make their classroom more equitable (Figure 2). Additionally, 97% of respondents indicated they are interested in learning more about equity in the future.

Figure 2.

Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed that the equity keynote deepened their understanding of equity in AISD.



Source. TIP Orientation Week Survey, 2020–2021

Cohort Days

On cohort days, attendees were divided into small groups relevant to their grades and/or content areas. Sessions were led by an experienced AISD teacher, who facilitated the presentations and discussions. The facilitators focused on topics (e.g., curriculum and instruction, beginning-of-the-year lesson planning) to ensure a common background with respect to information and district expectations, while modeling various strategies. The majority of respondents indicated they planned to implement strategies and/or content learned during the TIP cohort sessions in their day-to-day lesson (Figure 3). Regarding the

Induction, Mentoring, and New Teacher Support

In addition to this induction professional learning opportunity, AISD staff supports new hires throughout the year.

For example, the TIP mentoring program focused on supporting teachers who were new to the profession and the unique challenges of novice teachers.

The AISD CONNECT program is available throughout the academic year for new teachers and offers networking and professional learning opportunities.

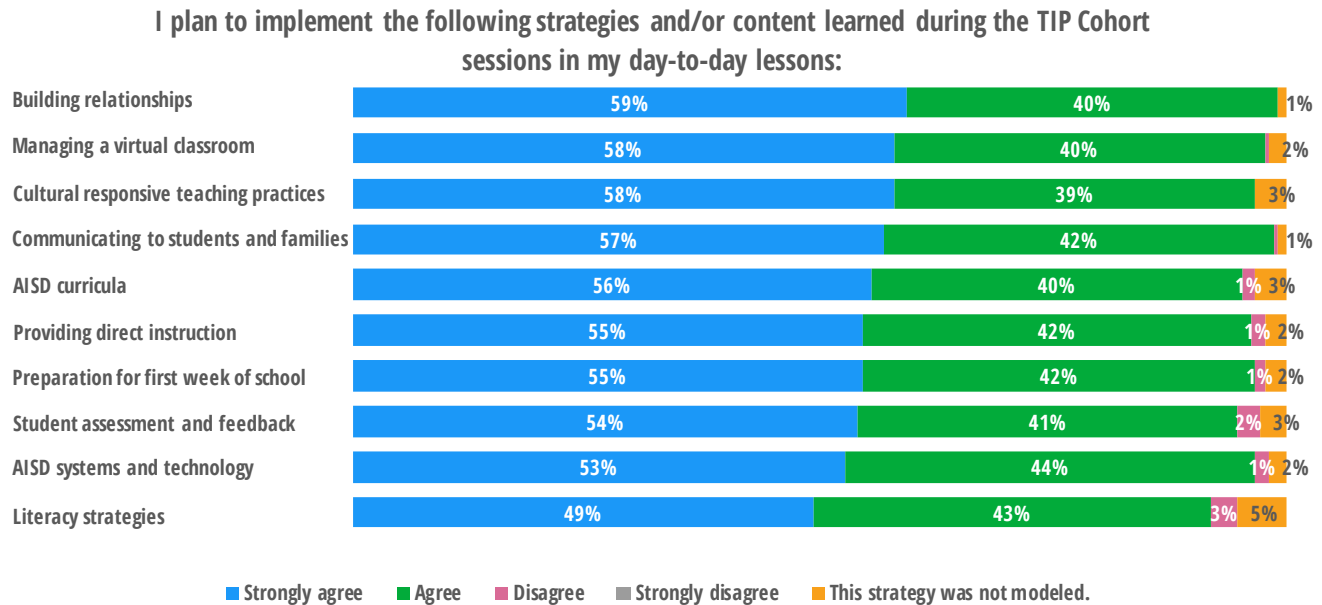
Additionally, Kick Start sessions were offered during the summer prior to the TIP orientation week. Sessions accelerated teachers new to the district who were ready to begin learning about the district. This year, many sessions included a focus on technology and curriculum in response to COVID-19.

This year, a TIP mid-year conference was also developed for additional new teacher support.

strategies learned during cohort session, the highest percentage of respondents indicated they planned to implement strategies related to communicating with students and families and building relationships. Overall, more than over 90% of respondents planned to implement these strategies.

Figure 3.

Respondents indicated the greatest agreement regarding planning to implement strategies related to building relationships and communicating with students and families that were modeled during the TIP cohort sessions in their day-to-day lessons.



Source. TIP Orientation Week Survey, 2020–2021

When asked what went well during the cohort session, common themes included being able to connect with other teachers in their grade/content area and experience level; meet in smaller groups, which offers comfort and the ability to have meaningful discussion; and the resources received. Common themes about what can be improved included suggestions regarding more interactive cohort sessions.

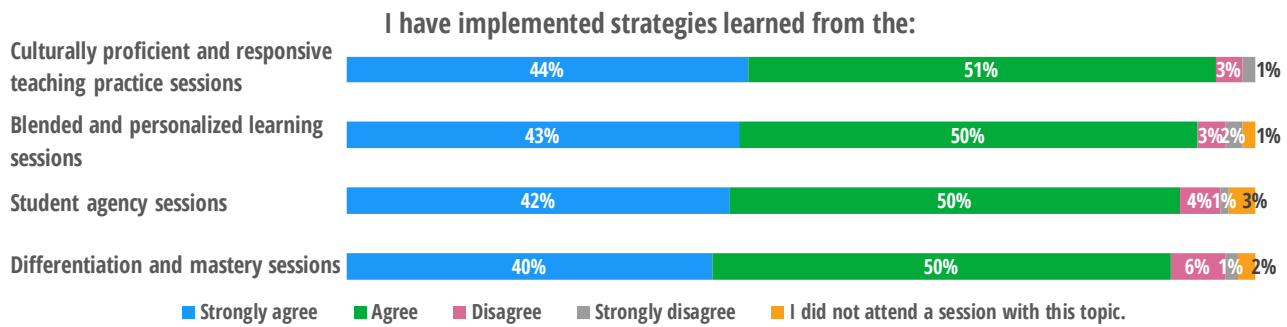
Personalized Learning Conference

The Personalized Learning Conference was held concurrently with the TIP new teacher orientation week, providing staff the opportunity to attend the conference in addition to their onboarding training. Staff were able to select various sessions over the week, based on self-identified areas of interest and needs. When asked what was most valuable about the conference, common themes included appreciating having voice and choice in their PL opportunities and the variety of PL opportunities relevant to their content area. For example, one response said, “PL opportunities aren’t always generated toward special ed. I found that this helped me choose the most appropriate sessions for my area”.

Areas of focus for the TIP orientation week and Personalized Learning Conference included culturally proficient and responsive teaching practices, blended and personalized learning, student agency, and differentiation and mastery. The majority of respondents indicated they had implemented strategies learned from the Personalized Learning Conference (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Respondents indicated the greatest agreement regarding implementing strategies learned from sessions related to culturally proficient and responsive teaching practices.



Source. TIP Orientation Week Survey, 2020–2021

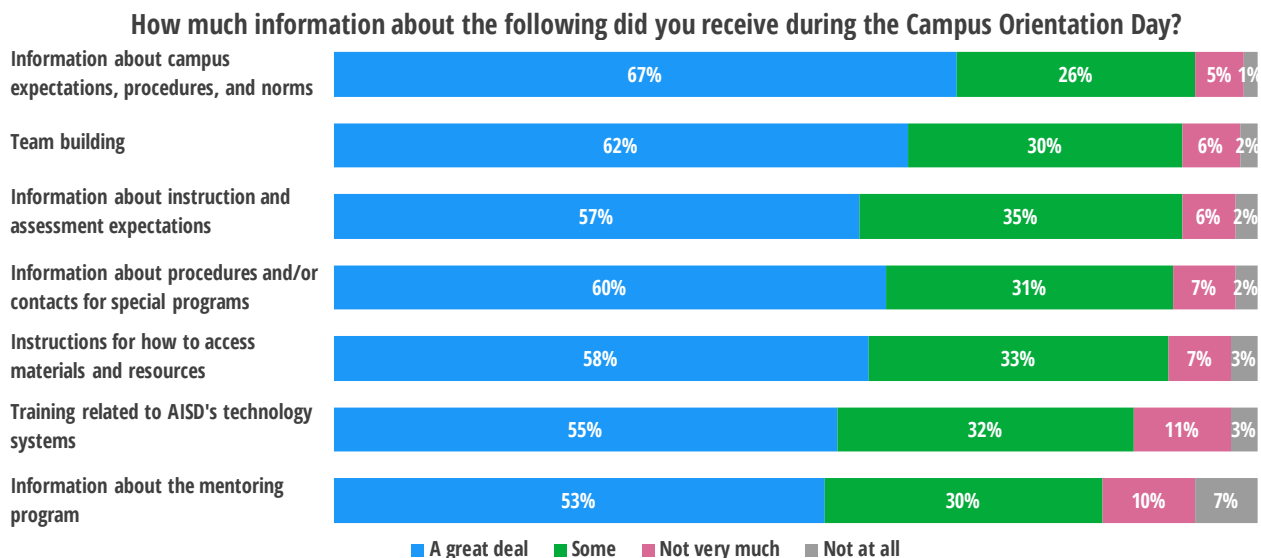
Campus Orientation Day

The campus orientation day sessions focused on ensuring new hires had an opportunity to learn about their assigned campus’s culture and climate, expectations, and initiatives. While the PL Department provided suggestions for topics to include during the orientation day, campuses organized the events at their discretion. The majority of respondents (94%) indicated the campus orientation day was a valuable experience. Common themes about what went well during the campus orientation day, as reported by TIP attendees, included being able to meet and develop relationships with colleagues, meet with campus administration, and get information about their campus. However, many respondents suggested they would prefer an in-person campus orientation in the future, if possible, but understood the reason for the virtual nature of the 2020–2021 orientation.

Attendees were asked how much information they received during the campus orientation day (Figure 5). Results indicated staff may have wanted more training related to AISD’s technology systems and information about the mentoring program. While, respondents indicated the least agreement with receiving information about the mentoring program; this is likely due to the mentoring program being available only to teachers with two years of experience or less.

Figure 5.

Respondents indicated attendees received the most information about campus expectations, procedures, and norms.



Source. TIP Orientation Week Survey, 2020–2021

What additional topics/support would have been helpful to include in the TIP orientation week?

A number of respondents stated that they would like training related to AISD systems (e.g., TEAMS, DEEDS, eCST) and administrative platforms (e.g., requesting a substitute, entering time off) during the orientation week sessions. In particular, many indicated they would have liked more training for the Blend system and other online platforms that are used frequently or on a daily basis. Although AISD systems were discussed during various sessions of the orientation week, the PL Department noted this was a challenge to address, because some AISD systems were not available until classes began; therefore, new hires were unable to have hands-on practice using the software.

Conclusion

Overall, results suggested the orientation week activities were successful in inducting the new hires into the district even with the transition to online sessions. The majority of respondents indicated positive experiences across sessions. However, some respondents suggested this PL opportunity could be improved by having AISD systems available to use during training sessions or more training for AISD systems. Recommendations include allotting time during the TIP orientation for attendees to provide an overview of using common AISD systems (e.g., videos).

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