

CARES Team Delivers Customer Service, Employee Recognition and Support in AISD

Evaluation Summary, 2021–2022

The CARES team is a customer experience, employee recognition and support team in Austin Independent School District (AISD). CARES, which stands for Customer-focused, Action-oriented, Responsive, Empathetic, and Service-driven, provided invaluable service and support to the AISD community (employees, students and caregivers) during the 2021–2022 school year. The CARES team originated four years ago, during the 2018–2019 school year. The team has undergone expansion and adaptation, consistently operating under the guiding purpose of nurturing a positive and equitable organizational culture.

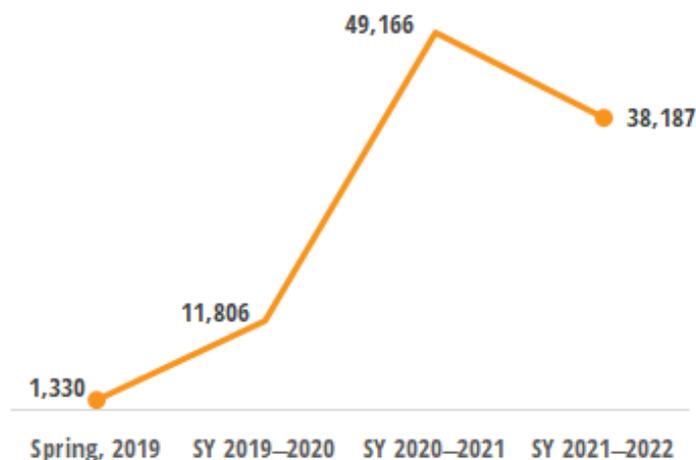
When CARES began, the team partnered with the Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) to conduct yearly evaluation. Elements of evaluation include: a theory of change, implementation targets, and performance indicators. The results of previous evaluations were published annually (DeBaylo & Hutchins, 2019; Minney, 2020; Minney, 2021). Indicators set in evaluation planning related to support, employee appreciation, campus climate, and training; and corresponded with scorecard indicators in the superintendent’s strategic plan. This summary describes these areas of impact and implementation activities in 2021–2022.

Support

Let’s Talk! (LT), a communication platform adopted by AISD in the spring of 2019, connects those who make an inquiry or request with a staff member who can provide information and support. In June, 2022, total LT dialogues surpassed 100,000. LT traffic grew so exponentially in three years, peaking during the pandemic, other departments were asked to lend support to answer LT requests. Also of note, the team reached an implementation goal this year of every campus enabling the capacity to receive LT dialogues via text message, in addition to campus websites. Implementation achievements are listed on the side panel of page two.

Figure 1

The volume of Let’s Talk dialogues received rose dramatically since its 2019 implementation, and peaked during the pandemic, with the cumulative total surpassing 100,000 in June, 2022.



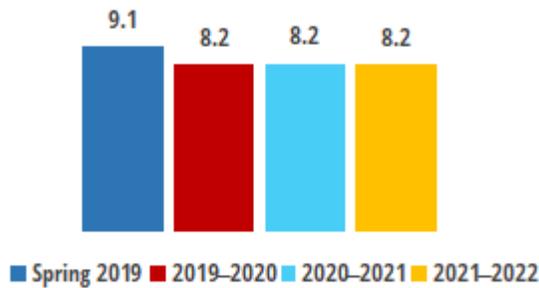
Source. Let’s Talk! data from July 1st, 2021 to June 30th, 2022.

Customer Experience Implementation Work in 2021–2022

In addition, customer service satisfaction ratings remained steadily high for LT responses, even as demand outpaced resources. (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Let's Talk! average customer service satisfaction rating remained high even with the increasing volume of dialogues, especially during the pandemic.



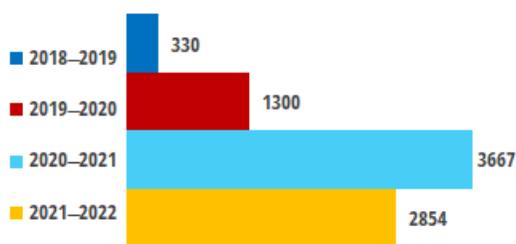
Source. Let's Talk! data from July 1st, 2021 to June 30th, 2022.

Employee Appreciation

The RAVE (Recognizing All Valuable Employees) program has continued to grow since its 2018 inception (Figure 3). Any staff or community member may nominate an employee in recognition of outstanding service through AISD's website, and awards are given out monthly. RAVEs reward employees for taking extra steps to contribute to a positive and equitable culture. Therefore, RAVEs have been utilized by the AISD community for the purpose of employee appreciation, as intended.

Figure 3

RAVEs earned by AISD employees increased in the first three years, and peaked during the pandemic.



Source. RAVE data from July 1st, 2021 to June 30th, 2022.

Figure 3

The majority (94%) of participants ($n = 305$) in the Front Office Staff Connection either agreed or strongly agreed the content and strategies presented increased their understanding and skills.



Source. AISD post-professional development survey data, 2022

- Created and distributed a CARES digital backpack, and a CARES digital toolkit to support staff members
- Offered Let's Talk refresher courses
- Addition of new team member
- Facilitated at Front Office Staff Connection professional learning event
- Organized student field trip to Central Office
- Coordinated and hosted employee recognition activities
- Assisted during teacher shortage by substituting on campuses
- Trained staff members to respond to Let's Talk specific subject areas
- Created a new rubric for campus assessment to accommodate changes to the district's strategic plan
- Supported all campuses' capability to receive Let's Talk texts

Training

In 2022, a Front Office Staff Connection training was offered to front office staff. The CARES team lead a segment on customer service highlighting communication strategies. Participants provided feedback on their experience (Figure 3).

Campus Climate Survey Results

District-wide survey administration changed in 2021–2022. In previous years AISD utilized survey tools such as: the Teaching, Empowering, Learning, Leading (TELL) survey for campus staff, and AISD Family Survey and Student Climate Survey. The items below come from student, staff, and family Panorama survey tools. The items differed on these surveys, therefore, no multi-year analysis is provided as has been presented in previous reporting periods. Aggregate results of responses to questions related to campus climate are displayed in Tables 1- 4 below.

Table 1

The majority of students in 3rd - 5th and 6th - 12th grades responded favorably about their school climate, specifically, that adults at their school are welcoming to all (90% and 83%), and all school staff work hard to answer questions and find solutions (85% and 77%).

Grade	Survey item	N	% Favorable	A lot of the time	Sometimes	A little of the time	Never
3rd–5th	Adults at my school are welcoming to ALL students.	11,352	90%	73%	17%	8%	2%
	All staff at my school work hard to answer my questions and help me find solutions.	12,779	85%	53%	33%	13%	2%
6th–12th	Adults at my school are welcoming to ALL students.	20,716	83%	50%	33%	15%	2%
	All staff at my school work hard to answer my questions and help me find solutions.	22,452	77%	34%	42%	20%	4%

Source. Panorama student survey data 2021-2022.

Table 2

The majority of family members and caregivers responded favorably to the new campus climate items regarding the helpfulness and customer service of school staff, and the majority also reported they are treated as valuable community members by school staff.

Survey item	N	% Favorable	A lot of the time	Sometimes	A little of the time	Never
Staff at my child's school go out of their way to answer questions and help me find solutions.	11,348	89%	65%	23%	9%	2%
I am able to find the information I am looking for on the Austin ISD website.	11,280	80%	32%	48%	17%	3%
I am able to find the information I am looking for on the campus website.	10,965	82%	40%	42%	14%	4%
My child's school provides excellent customer service.	11,686	89%	67%	22%	8%	2%
My child's school treats me like a valued member of the school community.	11,449	89%	70%	19%	8%	3%

Source. Panorama family survey data from 2021-2022.

Table 3

The majority of campus employees (teachers and non-teaching campus staff) responded favorably about campus climate and district support; that adults are welcoming and helpful and the AISD website provides necessary information.

Respondent	Survey item	N	% Favorable	A lot of the time	Sometimes	A little of the time	Never
Teachers	Adults at my school are welcoming to ALL students.	3888	96%	79%	17%	4%	0%
	All staff at my school work hard to answer my questions and help me find solutions.	3934	91%	63%	28%	8%	1%
	I am able to find the information I am looking for on the AISD website.	3840	72%	21%	51%	23%	4%
Non-teaching staff members	Adults at my school are welcoming to ALL students.	1699	95%	80%	15%	5%	0%
	All staff at my school work hard to answer my questions and help me find solutions.	1729	91%	63%	28%	8%	1%
	I am able to find the information I am looking for on the AISD website.	1726	81%	30%	51%	17%	2%

Source. Panorama student survey data 2021-2022.

Summary

Overall, 2021–2022 data indicates the CARES team fulfilled its goal to provide excellent customer experiences, support, and employee recognition in AISD. Campuses are perceived to have a welcoming climate and the district makes information readily available, thus aligning with the team’s work to nurture and reward helpfulness. The team also maintained agility by expanding and adapting in response to stakeholders’ needs. Prior to the 2022–2023 school year, further changes to the CARES team include: District Communication and Community Engagement will handle all LT dialogues, and a change in title and focus. The [Employee Experience and Sustainability](#) team (formerly CARES) will work to cultivate authentic relationships that lead to a sense of trust and belonging in the AISD community.

References

- DeBaylo, P., & Hutchins, S. (2019). [CARES 2018–2019 Evaluation Summary: A Brief Review of the First Year of Implementation](#). (DRE Publication 18.33). Austin Independent School District.
- Minney, D. (2020). [CARES 2019–2020 evaluation: A brief review of the second year of implementation](#). (DRE Publication 19.56). Austin Independent School District.
- Minney, D. (2021). [CARES 2020–2021: Implementation, Impact, and Adaptation](#). (DRE Publication 20.32). Austin Independent School District.



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