

# Education Austin, AISD Collaborate On Strategic Compensation Pilot

The field of K-12 education is populated by competing strategies of reform and highly charged debates regarding the most effective means of increasing academic achievement for all students. The present accountability system is premised on the assumption that state standards, state testing, and public reporting of results can create the impetus for improvement that will trickle down from the state capital to school districts, and ultimately, into the classroom. The reality is that this system, while casting an important spotlight on deficiencies within public education, has failed to leverage what researchers have consistently found to be the most important factor in student success: classroom teachers.

AISD REACH, the Austin Independent School District's strategic compensation initiative to support and reward teachers based on classroom success, is a forward-thinking effort to focus on how teachers are trained, supported, assigned, and paid. The program seeks to ensure that all students achieve and have access to high-quality teachers.

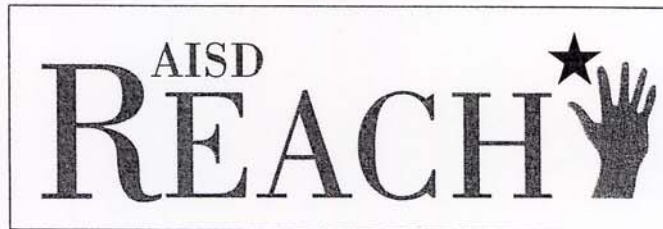
AISD REACH is a significant departure from current models of supporting teacher development and improving student learning. First off, the program recognizes the need to nurture the energy and talent of new teachers by providing them with full-time mentors, master teachers who have been freed from their own teaching duties to work directly with new teachers in their classrooms. For too long, a sink-or-swim model of induction for new teachers has led to high attrition rates, particularly at our most challenging campuses, where students who are in the most need of experienced and quality teachers are the least likely to be taught by them.

Secondly, this initiative includes an innovative model for measuring student learning. This approach requires teachers to perform a comprehensive review of their students' baseline skills and prior achievement, to identify the measurable growth they expect students to achieve, to create two student learning objectives, and to demonstrate the results of their teaching by the end of the term. This process is unique because it is based on student growth and requires teachers—not the state or district—to set rigorous goals for

their students, goals which are not tied to mandatory state tests. A teacher's success at reaching predetermined goals is rewarded with additional compensation.

While this approach presents challenges with respect to rigor and reliability, its messiness is also its most important feature, as teachers work to design a more authentic system of measuring the value they bring to students' learning and achievement. In doing so, teachers are also making explicit the many facets of their work that often go unseen by the public: analyzing data, designing student interventions, and collaborating with their colleagues.

Lastly, AISD REACH also creates an incentive for teachers who successfully work with students at Austin's highest-needs schools by providing a pay differential to those teachers. Teachers, principals, and instructional staff at campuses that show aboveaverage school-wide academic growth compared with peer campuses across the state also receive additional compensation.



The 2008-2009 school year is the second year of AISD REACH and two more schools are joining the pilot, bringing the total number of participating schools to 11. As additional schools join

the pilot in the next few years, new components supporting teachers' ongoing professional growth will be developed.

This unique project has had active participation of school district leaders, Superintendent Pat Forgione, the AISD School Board, classroom teachers, business, community and parent leaders, the Austin Chamber of Commerce, and Education Austin, the teacher's union. Through this initiative, Austin schools are striving to reach a new standard of excellence by ensuring a quality teacher in every classroom and a world-class education for every student.

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Education Austin welcomes your feedback on AISD REACH. Send e-mails to [louism@educationaustin.org](mailto:louism@educationaustin.org)  
For more information about AISD REACH, visit [www.educationaustin.org](http://www.educationaustin.org)