AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Task Force on Early Childhood Education

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Recommendations

Final Report Presented to AISD Board of Trustees
on
December 4, 2006

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Executive Summary

In direct response to the growing number of three to four year old children in our community with diverse needs, AISD formed the Task Force on Early Childhood Education to develop, with stakeholder input, recommendations on effective systems to deliver quality educational and support services to better prepare these children for academic success as they enter kindergarten and elementary school.

In responding to its charge, the task force held several meetings between May 2006 and November 2006. Findings of the task force included:

- Investing in early childhood education provides a significant social and economic return to stakeholders
- The ratio of staff to young children, as well as the access of all children to a rigorous curriculum coupled with best instructional practices are critical factors
- Appropriate assessments are critical components in the quality of an early education program
- A quality program must have well-trained, certified early childhood teachers
- A multitude of opportunities to help young children develop language, communication, and social skills should be available
- In the ideal system, parents are offered an array of options for extended day services.
- All young children deserve a holistic (cognitive, social and emotional) supportive experience in their school environment, and pre-kindergarten classrooms should be inclusive of the needs of all four-year olds, including children with identified special needs and English language learners
- Parent and family engagement in a young child's education is vital. Cooperation and collaboration between AISD and community agencies is an important component in delivering services to young children.

In addition, to reviewing a considerable amount of data and literature, the task force obtained community input by conducting over 20 personal interviews with stakeholders with a vested interested in early childhood education and held two public forums.

The task force firmly believes that all of its recommendations are important to providing a quality education to pre-kindergarten students in AISD. However, the task force also realizes that resource constraints are real and may place limitations on implementing its full recommendations. The task force also believes that following its recommendations will help lead to a number of positive outcomes related to providing a quality education to pre-kindergarten students in AISD. These expected outcomes are largely focused on improvements in curriculum, parental involvement, and social/emotional services.

Introduction

BACKGROUND

The Superintendent's Task Force on Early Childhood Education was formed in May 2006 to study services and programs for early childhood education for the purpose of recommending the model of service delivery for AISD. The Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of community stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community/business members with knowledge and experience in the area of early childhood education and policy. In May 2006, the Superintendent met with the Task Force to discuss the need to directly respond to the growing number of three and four year old children with diverse needs in the community.

The EC Task Force met twice a month to gather and analyze data, collaborating in developing a set of recommendations for high quality pre-kindergarten and early childhood special education services to all eligible students in AISD in order to better prepare children for academic success as they enter kindergarten and elementary school.

The members of the task force developed three recommended models of service for early childhood education: community-based pre-kindergarten in which services would be provided through a partnership among private childcare facilities and AISD; early learning centers which would provide education and services to students in pre-kindergarten through first grade, and campus-based pre-kindergarten which would focus on enhancing the quality of the existing pre-kindergarten services on AISD campuses. These recommendations were presented in detail to the public in an open house format on November 7, 2006 at Hart Elementary and on November 8, 2006 at Allan Elementary. The public input will be compiled and shared with all task force members and presented to the Board of Trustees in the final report.

MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of community stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community/business members with knowledge and experience in the area of early childhood education and policy. Below is a list of the members of the Task Force on Early Childhood Education:

- Mr. Sam Bryant, Director, AARO, Bryant Wealth Investment
- Mr. David Escame, Community Affairs Director, AMERIGROUP
- Ms. Janie Ruiz, Principal, AISD Gullet Elementary
- Ms. Gema Barrera, Parent, AISD Special needs student
- Mr. Albert Black, Deputy Director, Child, Inc. (Head Start)
- Ms. Vickie Black, District Advisory Council Representative
- Ms. Carmel Borders, President, Tapestry Foundation

- Ms. Peggy Cerna, Administrative Supervisor, AISD Lucy Read Pre-K Demonstration School
- Mr. Sandy Dochen, Community Affairs Director, IBM
- Ms. Elisha Fontenot, Special Ed. EC Teacher, AISD Kiker Elementary
- Ms. Kay Fowler, Director, Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Preschool
- Dr. Mary Ellen Galvan, Early Childhood Director, Region XIII, Child Care Council
- Mr. Charles Galvin, Business Leader, Qwest
- Ms. Melissa Garcia, Pre-K Teacher, AISD Sanchez Elementary
- Ms. Martha Garcia, Executive Director AISD Bilingual
- Ms. Kaitlin Guthrow, Director, Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition
- Ms. Deb Hurst, Kindergarten Teacher, AISD Mills Elementary
- Dr. Aletha Huston, Professor, UT, Child Care Council
- Dr. Mary Ellen Isaacs, Director, ACEE, UT Dana Center Americorps
- Mr. Chetan Makan, Pre-K Teacher, AISD Read Elementary
- Ms. Rhonda Paver, Stepping Stone School & Child Development Center-President, Child Care Council
- Ms. Rosario Samandi, Administrative Supervisor, AISD Pre-K Special Education
- Ms. Laura Sandoval, Kindergarten Teacher, AISD Sunset Valley Elementary
- Dr. Gale Spears, Early Childhood Director, ACC, Child Care Council
- Ms. Juanita Spears, Parent Leader, Our Voices (SB6)
- Dr. Pauline Walker, Kindergarten Teacher, AISD Maplewood Elementary
- Dr. Gale Spears, Early Childhood Director, ACC, Child Care Council
- Ms. Juanita Spears, Parent Leader, Our Voices (SB6)
- Dr. Pauline Walker, Kindergarten Teacher, AISD Maplewood Elementary
- Ms. Sue Carpenter, Program Coordinator, ELOA Grant
- Ms. Ariel Cloud, Director, AISD Early Childhood
- Mr. Joey Crumley, Strategic Planner, AISD Office of Planning & Community Relations
- Dr. Janis Guerrero, Executive Director, AISD Office of Planning & Community Relations
- Mr. Ron Hubbard, Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Austin
- Dr. Yolanda Rocha, Associate Superintendent, AISD South Elementary Schools
- Ms. Adrian Smith, Director, Success by 6

WEB PAGE

A special web site was created to ensure that members of the community are provided with information related to both the Task Force on Early Childhood Education. The web page can be accessed through both the AISD. The direct link is: http://www.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/taskforce

The web page includes important announcements, background information, literature-based research, and various materials from meetings.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Preparatory work for the recommendations on early childhood education is outlined below in the work plan. The Superintendent met with the task force to review the charge of the work to be completed on recommending services for early childhood education in AISD.

Superintendent's Task Force on Early Childhood Education **Process Overview**	
Superintendent meets with Success by Six Leadership To propose forming task force as part of his Vision 2010 plan	April 2006
Staff develops task force charter and work schedule	May 2006
AISD Cabinet receives Superintendent's Update on Formation of task force	May 2006
Staff conducts data and literature research	May-August 2006
AISD Board receives information on the selection of Task force members	May 19, 2006
Staff holds planning meeting to prepare for orientation of Task Force Members, create charter and discuss schedule	May 24, 2006
Staff develops task force web page	May 29, 2006
First task force meeting (orientation, initial discussion of interview list and protocol)	May 31, 2006
Task force members select subcommittee working groups	August Meeting
Success by Six Leadership Council receive update, charter and work schedule of Task Force	August 2006
Staff conducts interviews based on interview list and protocol	June-July 2006
Task Force Meeting (overview of AISD, State, National early childhood models)	August 9, 2006
Task force meeting (preliminary interview results; identification of issues and priorities; identify subcommittees)	August 23, 2006
Task force meeting (selection of five models or study)	September 13, 2006
Success by Six Leadership Council receive update	September 27, 2006
Task force meeting (presentation of three early childhood models: campus-based, community-based, PK center, visit to Read)	September 27, 2006
Staff develops draft of Task Force Recommendations	October 2006
Task force meeting (draft outline for Task Force Report, planning for public forums)	October 11, 2006
Subcommittee meeting (planning session for Task Force Report)	October 16, 2006
Task force meeting (final planning public forum; review of third draft of recommendations	October 25, 2006
Task force conducts community forums	November 7-8, 2006
Task force meeting (review feedback from November 15 community forums; final review of recommendations)	November 15, 2006

Presentation of draft Task Force Report to Superintendent's Cabinet	November 20, 2006
Presentation of Task Force Report to Board of Trustees	December 4, 2006

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Findings

INTERVIEWS

Methodology

Task force members provided input for the development of an interview protocol, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative items. Members of the task force also provided input into the categories of interviewees and recommended the names of individuals to interview. The following categories were represented among the interviewees: Practitioners, including: AISD teachers in Pre-K and PPCD programs, private for-profit and nonprofit childcare centers directors, professional association leaders, and higher education experts. Also included were parents of students from the various groups, including Hispanic, English Language Learner, African American, special needs students, and others, such as leaders in business/industry and community organizations.

Detailed results are provided in Appendix 1. Interviews were conducted over a 4-week period using the protocol found in Appendix 2. Most interviews were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone, with a few individuals responding via email. The small sample size may over-emphasize some opinions, while not fully representing others. For example, respondents who had similar associations with the AISD Pre-Kindergarten and Early Childhood Education Program tended to have similar ideas about how the program works and what needs improvement. All 8 of the remarks concerning the inclusion program on the qualitative questions came from the 6 AISD employees who were interviewed. The most negative remarks and quantitative results came from the 2 representatives of special interest groups. Parents of children with special needs provided most of the comments on special education and the need for reductions in student/teacher ratio.

To gain a broad sampling of perspectives from the community on important issues and possible priorities, 20 individual interviews were conducted with respondents from several predefined categories. Some of the most informative findings from the survey data were gathered from survey items that asked respondents to identify the greatest successes and biggest challenges or risks to the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students, and to make recommendations for improvements. Following is a summary of the most frequently occurring responses (in order of greatest frequency).

SUCCESSES

The inclusion program
The most frequently cited strength of the early childhood program was the effort to increase inclusion for special needs students.

Extended instructional day
Extended care for children after the school day helps serve more families who might not otherwise be able to participate in Pre-K and early childhood education.

Assessment procedures
Many respondents felt that the district was doing a good job of assessing the individual needs of children.

Partnerships with community groups
The encouragement of participation with private companies and concerned associations was cited several times as an important avenue to future achievement for AISD. A common related response was the appreciation noted for the district's continued efforts to seek community input from stakeholders.

Good teachers and facilities
Many praised teachers for their affection for children and commitment to excellence.

Recognition of the importance of pre-K education
A few interviewees felt that the simple fact that the district offered Pre-K services is an acknowledgement of the importance of early childhood development programs, and that this acknowledgement is an important step to build on.

CHALLENGES

Lack of funding and resources
Many felt that funding and allocation of resources were the greatest challenges. Some perceived that economies of scale seemed to dictate the types of services provided, and that children with specialized needs did not benefit from the system. Others felt that better cooperation with outside organizations could tap useful resources.

Variations in the quality of teachers and curriculum
Respondents associated with the Pre-K and early childhood programs described both positive and negative experiences involving teachers and curriculum. Some respondents felt that teachers who were not highly qualified were teaching some students with special needs. Other respondents said that it was important to allow teachers to adapt instruction to the needs of each class and not to be forced to adhere to a set curriculum.

Mixed delivery system
Although a few respondents viewed the system with 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in the same classroom as beneficial, some felt that this system created unnecessarily difficult

situations. Some respondents viewed the mixed delivery system as disruptive to children and they said that mixed delivery presents too many variations in behavior and cognitive abilities for teachers to manage.

Coordination between schools and parents
Most respondents mentioned the importance of encouraging greater parental involvement. Better communication can help parents realize the benefits that they could provide through volunteering.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Form more partnerships with other service providers
A few respondents suggested that AISD could reduce its burden and improve its services by pursuing more partnerships.

Reduce class sizes
Several respondents felt that class sizes should be reduced, especially classes for students with special needs.

Expand inclusion programs
Many said that that inclusion programs should be expanded.

Provide appropriate teacher training
Respondents stressed the importance professional development in preparing teachers to meet the challenges of educating students with special needs.

Ratings of the Quality of Pre-K and Early Childhood Programs

For the quantitative items, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement to specific statements relating to quality of education, needs and expectations, and learning environment for Pre-K and early childhood students. Respondents were also given an opportunity to explain their numeric ratings.

Respondents gave the district generally positive ratings on items that measured their level of agreement with specific statements using a four-point scale (i.e., 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree). These statements were designed to gather information about the perceptions of respondents on the education that Pre-K and early childhood students experience in AISD.

Survey Item	N	Average
Pre-K and PPCD students in AISD receive a high quality education.	20	2.98
The needs and expectations of Pre-K and PPCD students in AISD are adequately met.	20	2.68
Pre-K and PPCD students in AISD learn in a safe and nurturing environment.	20	3.29

A review of the respondents' explanations of their ratings reveals a few predominant themes that are explained below:

POSITIVE RESPONSES

AISD employs highly qualified teachers and provides exceptional programs
Most respondents indicated that they were generally pleased with the overall efforts of the district.

Teachers are very caring
A number of respondents felt that teachers have genuine concern for the safety and well being of their students.

CRITICAL RESPONSES

Program quality and safety varies among schools and teachers
Several respondents said that program services were inconsistent and that teacher quality and credibility varied.

Class sizes are too large
Some respondents cited the importance of one-on-one interaction between children and adults, and they expressed particular concern for children with special needs

Results

Note: In total, 20 individuals were interviewed; however, not all individuals responded to each item.

Interview Item #1
What do you feel are 2 or 3 of AISD's greatest successes in the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students – things we should definitely continue to do?

Responses (N = 20)	Frequency
Inclusion program	5
Extended service hours	4
Assessment procedures	4
Partnerships with community groups	4
Good teachers and facilities	4
Recognition of the importance of early childhood education	4
Strong professional development program	3
Seeking community input	3
Strong leadership	3
Best practice research	3

Quotes from Respondents

"There is definitely a sense of community among Pre-K teachers not always experienced at other grade levels."

"I'm pleased to see the district opening an early childhood education center, but I hope it won't focus on the success of that one campus and not attend to the needs of the rest of early childhood students in the district."

"The district has many good teachers who work hard and coordinate well with each other."

Interview Item #2
What do you feel are 2 or 3 of AISD's biggest challenges, risks, or threats to the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students?

Responses (N = 20)	Frequency
Lack of funding and accessibility of resources	5
Variance in teacher qualifications	4
Curriculum consistency	4
Mixed delivery system	3
Need more coordination between schools and parents	3
Student-teacher ratios	3
Concentrations of students with high needs	3
Curriculum may not be age or developmentally appropriate	2

Quotes from Respondents

"Simply, better teaching comes from smaller adult-child ratios."

"We need to make sure the curriculum remains age and developmentally appropriate."

"The mixed delivery system is a challenge, although it's a potential strength."

"Economies of scale seem to dictate the level of services provided."

Interview Item #3
What do you feel are 2 or 3 improvements AISD might make in regard to the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students?

Responses (N = 20)	Frequency
Partnerships between AISD and other service providers	4
Smaller class sizes	3
Increase inclusion programs	3
More teacher training	3
Universal Pre-K	2
Address needs of the whole child	2

Quotes from Respondents

"Increased collaboration could expedite many good things for young children."

"The quality of the adult is directly related to the quality of education of the young child."

"We need to do a better job addressing the needs of the whole child – socially, emotionally, and cognitively."

"We need to work toward a uniform delivery of service by all providers."

"We need to make sure that each school has the right teachers and the right leadership."

"We're in a position that we have to compete with other countries in a global economy – we need to look at best practices globally, not just nationally."

"The district needs to deal more with non-traditional interest groups – it needs to embrace its critics and listen to what they have to say."

Interview Item #4
On a scale from 1 to 4 – with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree – to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Pre-K and Early Childhood Program students in AISD receive a high quality education.

N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
20	2.98	3.0	3.0	0.75

Interview Item #5
Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

Responses (N = 17)	Frequency
Good teachers and programs	6
Varies from school to school, teacher to teacher	6

Quotes from Respondents

"We have the will and the capability of making early childhood programs in Austin a model for the nation."

"There are still many discrepancies in what you see and get at different schools."

"The quality of academics is diminished by large class sizes."

"Simply, not all kids are getting what they need."

"There is great program direction and scaffolding for teachers."

"Even if the curriculum is good, we need to make sure it's applied in every classroom."

Interview Item #6
On a scale from 1 to 4 – with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree – to what extent do you agree with the following statement: The needs and expectations of Pre-K and Early Childhood Program students in AISD are adequately met.

N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
19	2.68	3.0.	3.0	0.65

Interview Item #7
Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

Responses (N = 15)	Frequency
Class sizes too large	4
Special needs students require more individualized attention	3

Quotes from Respondents

"To serve them faithfully, and to compensate for their increased needs, the district has to consider early learners a priority, not stepchildren of the K-12 program, as it sometimes seems."

"We need to be more aware of the specific needs of kids, and get to know their home and family situations better."

"There are simply too many special needs students not in inclusive settings."

"There are many opportunities for professional development, but not all teachers are taking advantage of these opportunities."

"Low teacher expectations affect student expectations – we need to raise the bar and not accept mediocrity."

"There needs to be more emphasis placed on cultural understanding."

Interview Item #8
On a scale from 1 to 4 – with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree – to what extent do you agree with the following statement: Pre-K and Early Childhood Program students in AISD learn in a safe and nurturing environment.

N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
19	3.29	3.0	3.0	0.58

Interview Item #9
Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

Responses (N = 17)	Frequency
Teachers are very caring	6
Learning environments are largely safe	5
Depends a lot on the specific facilities and teachers	4

Quotes from Respondents

"Low-income children are often safer and receive greater nurturing at school than at home."

"Teachers in the district seem generally very caring and patient and take a genuine interest in their students."

"The teachers in the district tend to spend a lot of time with the kids – this is a difficult age to teach if one is not nurturing."

"Although standards have been established, there can still be many variances from them."

"We shouldn't be busing young children all across town."

Interview Item #10
Are there other ideas that you have about ways that AISD could serve young children?

Responses (N = 18)	Frequency
Encourage more parental involvement	5
Need additional emphasis on public-private collaborations	4
Smaller student-teacher ratios needed	2

Quotes from Respondents

"Parents need to be encouraged to ask questions."

"When we look at models of success, we need to make sure to look locally, too."

"It's great that the district is actually taking the time to listen to what the community has to say."

"Austin has a very strong early childhood community, and that's both good and bad … everyone has their own turf they want to protect."

"More people are seeing the importance and benefits of collaboration, and it's critical that AISD be involved."

"Community support will be critical to implementing any recommendations or plans."

"In general, we need to work on the attitudes toward children with special needs."

COMMUNITY FORUM

Methodology

The task force recognized the importance of holding a community forum to gather public input. Advertisement of the community forum was accomplished through community newspapers, television, radio and press releases.

The forums were held at Hart Elementary on November 7, 2006 and Allan Elementary on November 8, 2006.

Task force members considered a number of possible venues for the forum, most of which were in areas of the community with large early childhood needs. The task force decided to the public forums would be conducted in an open house format where a brief overview of the purpose of the early childhood task force and their recommendations were discussed and then presented in detail to the attendees. An open discussion took place after each recommendation was presented. Attendees were provided the opportunity to submit written comments to the task force and were collected at the end of each of the forums.

Prior to receiving comments from the public, task force members described their various efforts to gain community input and summarized the format and content of their draft report. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the report was a draft and that all of the community input received by the task force would be taken into consideration in the development of the final report.

Results

Participants in the forums held at Hart Elementary and Allan Elementary expressed concerns about the proposed recommendations. Listed below are the considerations of compiled from both forums.

Early Learning Center:
Considerations:

- Implementation of social services for prekindergarten students
- Using Lucy Read as the prototype or replicating the model
- AISD Board of Trustees
- A school within a school or a new building

- What impact this would have on local businesses and families
- What impact this would have on Oak Springs Elementary
- Implementing special education assessment
- Including a speech therapist as part of the staff
- Using existing underutilized schools
- Utilizing community providers to serve on the campuses

Community-Based Model:
Considerations:

- Transportation and who would provide it for the students
- Services for siblings at childcare facility
- Monitoring of staff by AISD administrators
- Implementation of PPCD
- AISD teacher responsibilities and impact on their employment
- Utilizing religious schools and possible conflict of interest

Campus-Based Model:
Considerations:

- Using Lucy Read as the Pilot instead of creating a new model
- Using an accelerated language learner model for all students' not just ELL students.
- Include a speech therapist on staff
- Include a parent specialist on staff
- Offering full inclusion for PPCD students
- Continuing with target Ratio of 1 to 18
- Implementing training for staff
- Overcrowded campuses ratios should be a priority

STUDY OF VARIOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD MODELS

Methodology

A considerable amount of data was gathered and analyzed for consideration by the Task Force on Early Childhood Education. Five different models of early childhood services were reviewed and discussed in detail.

Data was collected not only on education, but also in other categories related to education and quality of life, including population, health, and economy. Data were presented on the national, state, and local levels, as available. All data were presented for African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. In addition to current data, certain projections were also obtained.

Results

The task force reviewed each of the five models of early childhood services in the United States and derived at key components for each model. These key components were taken into consideration as the recommendations for AISD were developed. Listed below are the key components of each model:

Chicago Model: Key Leaders - Mayor and Dept. Chief Officer

- Work with the Community & Chicago Human Services to fund schools.
- Have child/parent centers, each center has their own schedule, parents select their center based on their needs/many options, services are not standardized, great virtual resources.
- Ensure that all children, ages 3 and 4, have access to comprehensive, high quality pre-school options, and support on a developmental curriculum.
- Title I funds, local/general funds, state prekindergarten funds, Head Start funds, and tuition paid by families are used to support the early childhood programs.
- Schools are very involved in with the community & families.
- Providers: Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Health Dept., CPS Head Start, Early Head Start, Private Childcare

New York Model: Key Leaders - state, public, community, local advisory board

- No charge for families for the Pre-K service, set number of communities that are involved, community partners distribute equal resources, professional development is offered to everyone, standardized curriculum, and have a diverse delivery model.
- Local communities have tremendous flexibility in designing delivery of services.
- Dollars flow through the local school district
- Rich variety in sites: public schools, childcare centers, settlement houses, Head Start.
- Services must foster healthy social, emotional and physical development.

Arkansas Model: Key Leaders- Chamber of Commerce. Received a rating of 10 (high performance)

- Started with very low funding and then built up their program. Local providers gave a 40% match to the schools plus donations.
- Contracted with 2 local universities for technology help and training, 1-10 ratio, researched-based curriculum approved by state, strong parent-infant program, assessment conducted 3 times a year, state driven funding.
- Programs are included in the districts, private and faith-based day care centers, and a university co-op program.
- Encourages coalitions with head start, private day cares, family home day cares, and ISD's.
- Parent involvement plan must be included in all programs.

- Must provide health and developmental screenings each year for students.

Tennessee Model: Key Leaders - Governor, Senate support, Tennessee Alliance for Early Education

- Adopted standards across the board
- 1-10 ratio for 4 yr. olds, 1-8 ratio for 3 yr. olds
- Scholarship fund for professional development
- Ongoing feedback from parents, researched showed that 1st graders who were in the pre-k program were benefiting from it.
- Providers include, childcare providers, head start, and public schools

TEEM Model (Texas):

- Head Start & State Collaboration model used.
- Pilot Project, work in progress, major emphasis on professional development for teachers.
- Model being used in ISD's, 2 hour on-line training, mentors provided on-line/onsite,
- Curriculum appropriate for 4 yr olds./centered around Phonemic Awareness
- Successful model for achieving reading readiness.
- Needs a parent component.
- Very low cost program.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT AISD PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

The prekindergarten program began in AISD in 1978 with 100 students and five teachers. In 1985, Prekindergarten became a state-funded program, making available a half-day program to eligible students. During this same year, the AISD Prekindergarten program received national recognition and by 1996, the AISD prekindergarten program had grown to encompass 3000 students. As we near the thirty-year mark of the AISD prekindergarten program, the district currently serves approximately 4500 students through the work of 290 prekindergarten teachers.

The AISD prekindergarten program is state funded. A grant program, established by the Texas Legislature in 1999, allows districts to obtain grant funds to provide prekindergarten programs. Since 2000, AISD has also been a recipient of the state Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, which partially funds the full-day program. As of this school year, a component for integrating prekindergarten services between schools districts, Head Start, and childcare has been added to the Expansion Grant as a requirement for continued funding. The district met the requirement for this year by placing a prekindergarten teacher in the four-year old classroom at Mt. Sinai School. AISD offers full-day prekindergarten to all identified eligible students. To be eligible for enrollment in an AISD prekindergarten class, a child must be four years of age on or before September 1st of the current school year and must be:

- unable to speak and comprehend the English language; or
- educationally disadvantaged (eligible to participate in the national
- free or reduced-price lunch program); or
- the child of an active duty member of the armed forces; or
- homeless or in foster care

Prekindergarten registration is held on all AISD elementary school campuses beginning in the first week in August at the start of every school year. AISD is required to collect current income level documentation from the family of each student who qualifies as educationally disadvantaged. For students who do not speak or comprehend in the English language, there must be proof of a current qualifying score on a state approved Oral Language Proficiency Test. Consequently, registration cannot occur in the spring prior to the year of entry into the program. Prekindergarten class enrollment must be established at each school before student transfers to another prekindergarten site can be granted. Requested student transfers are considered when balancing class sizes.

Prekindergarten classes are offered in 65 of the 76 AISD elementary schools and are available in all but the following elementary schools: Baranoff, Barton Hills, Bryker Woods, Clayton, Gullett, Highland Park, Kiker, Lee, and Pease. Any eligible prekindergarten students residing in these attendance areas are served on a space--available basis, either in the closest neighboring school or at another parent choice campus. All qualifying student paperwork is begun and processed on the home campus. After eligibility is verified, the paperwork is submitted to the Prekindergarten Office, at the Carruth Administration Center, to finalize student placement. Placement of students from campuses that do not have prekindergarten classes and parent-initiated student transfers are not processed until mid August, after the majority of eligible prekindergarten students are placed into classes on their home campuses. Prior to the start of each school year, individual school prekindergarten registration packets are sent, both electronically and in hard copy, to every elementary principal during the third week of July. Training is offered during the last week of July for prekindergarten teachers and other-staff assisting in the registration process.

By state law, prekindergarten funding can only be generated on those eligible students who are four years of age on or before September 1st of the current school year. Any child whose birth date does not fall during this time cannot be included in the PEIMS submission to TEA. prekindergarten cannot be used for retention or placement of either underage or overage students. While enrollment in prekindergarten is optional, once a student is enrolled attendance is mandatory. Attendance concerns for prekindergarten students are addressed in the same way as for other elementary students. Compliance with state regulations is mandatory and prekindergarten enrollment cannot include any students other that those who are eligible to enroll. District attendance records are monitored monthly to assist in accurate recording of data into the state student information management system (PEIMS) submissions.

Beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, Cook, McBee, and Walnut Creek prekindergarten students are served at the Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration

School. Walnut Creek Elementary continues to serve as the site for the Vietnamese prekindergarten program The Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School, opening in August 2006, is serving approximately 380 prekindergarten and PPCD students in 23 classrooms. In addition to serving as a center for the development of best practices and innovative strategies to accelerate and enhance the learning of young children, the campus has a strong focus on science education through inquiry-based learning. A new ESL instructional component designed to accelerate vocabulary acquisition for English language learner four-year olds is also being piloted at Read during the 2007 spring semester. In collaboration with the Austin Project, a parent support program is being developed to not only build strong home-school connections with Read families, but to maintain those connections as families return to the feeder campuses the following year.

The AISD Prekindergarten Matrix was developed in 2002 in tandem with other core subject areas to ensure a seamless alignment with the State Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs) were developed during the summer of 2003 to correlate with our state-adopted resource, *DLM Early Childhood Express* and the AISD Prekindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Matrix. Conceptual overviews were created to assist teachers in the implementation of the Instructional Planning Guides, providing major concepts, the overarching idea, standards, and guiding questions. In 2004, the Prekindergarten Assessment Task Force, comprised of nine teachers from campuses representing the diverse student population within AISD, developed a set of assessment rubrics to inform instructional decision-making in prekindergarten classrooms.

Administration of the prekindergarten program requires interface with multiple AISD departments, as well as collaboration with outside community agencies. and organizations, some of which include:

Texas Center for Early Childhood Development (CIRCLE)
WorkSource (local workforce agency)
Child Inc (Head Start)
City of Austin Child Care Council
Success by 6
Austin Area Texas Early Education Model Demonstration Project (TEEM)
Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) Grant through Success by 6

Current Initiatives

Prekindergarten Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs)
The AISD Pre-K Curriculum Matrix was developed during spring 2002 in tandem with other core subject areas to ensure a seamless alignment with the State Pre-K Guidelines and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The IPGs were developed during the summer 2003 to correlate with the state adopted resource-DLM Early Childhood Express-and the AISD Pre-K to Grade 12 Curriculum Matrix. They

include all core subject areas-Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies-which are integrated into a weekly format with a thematic focus as suggested by the core resource curriculum, the DLM Early Childhood Express. Implementation of the Pre-K IPGs began during the 2003-2004 school year The instructional planning guides will be revised this spring to make more explicit the expectations outline in the state Prekindergarten Guidelines, and to better ensure alignment with the expectations for entering Kindergarten students. In addition, the IPGS will be enhanced with expanded literature selections and activities that are culturally responsive and reflective of the diversity and specific needs of AISD's prekindergarten student population.

Implementation of Nine-Weeks Assessment Rubrics

The Prekindergarten Assessment Rubrics were designed in tandem with the Pre-K Instructional Planning Guide Overviews to ensure coherence between what is taught and tested. Developed in 2004 by the Assessment Task Force, a cohort group of nine teachers from campuses representing the diverse student population within AISD, the assessment rubrics were piloted by the cohort teachers during the 2005-2005 school year. After revision based upon stakeholder and consultant feedback, district wide use of the assessment rubrics began in the 2005-2006 school year. The assessment rubrics will undergo further revision based up data collected from student, teacher, and administrator surveys, and input from the Assessment Task Force leaders.

Mathematics Assessment

Prekindergarten team leaders have been trained this year on a new math assessment, *Assessing Math Concepts: Counting Objects*, by Kathy Richardson. This is one of a continuum of assessments that focuses on core concepts that must be in place if children are to understand and be successful in mathematics. Based on the idea that teachers will be able to provide more effective instruction and intervention if they understand the essential steps that children move through when developing an understanding of foundational mathematical ideas, the assessment will be introduced to all prekindergarten teachers next year.

ESL Instructional Program

Although the state currently provides no adopted text for ESL instruction at the prekindergarten level, there is strong need for an instructional program that focuses on the explicit teaching of English vocabulary to English language learners. Vocabulary Builders, an ESL program developed by Hampton-Brown publishing, will be piloted at Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School during the spring semester of 2007. If assessment data supports the effectiveness of the program, funding will be requested to implement its across the district.

Inquiry-based Science Instruction

Under the leadership of the AISD Science Department, prekindergarten teachers are being provided training to develop scientific literacy and concept/content knowledge in science. Training will support the development of early childhood practices that establish a strong foundation for student scientific literacy. In addition, an AISD science model classroom/learning lab has been established at Read to identify and refine best practices in science instruction for future replication and expansion across the district.

Collaboration with Head Start and the TEEM Project

As required by the state Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, AISD has entered into a collaborative partnership with Head Start and Mt. Sinai School to place a prekindergarten teacher in a satellite classroom located at Mt. Sinai. In addition, AISD is a partner in the TEEM (Texas Early Education Model) project, with 22 prekindergarten teachers at 13 AISD campuses receiving and implementing the TEEM training and follow-up coaching.

Professional Development

In addition to providing training each nine weeks for new teachers on the Prekindergarten IPGs and Assessment Rubrics, professional development offerings include, training in language and literacy acquisition, standards-based mathematics, the DLM textbook system, technology integration, P.E., positive discipline, and classroom organization and management. Teacher leaders meet each month with prekindergarten department staff to participate in training, engage in dialogue about best practices, participate in model science lessons, provide feedback, and problem-solve. Teachers and campus administrators have identified the area of social-emotional development as an area of challenge for many of their youngest students. Training sessions, including topics such as the psychology of four and five-year olds and psychotherapeutic techniques for the classroom are focused on the need to provide teachers with tools to support the individual needs and development of each child in the prekindergarten, while maintaining high expectations for learning.

The Status of Early Care and Education in Austin- June 2006

The mounting research evidence that early learning holds the key to continuing achievement for individuals has generated increasing interest at the local, state, and national levels.

While there is a great deal of energy focused on early learning, however, the scarcity and complexity of the current funding landscape has limited the viability and sustainability of high-quality services for children and families in our community. Austin is certainly not unique in this dilemma; throughout the United States, communities and states have stitched together an under-funded patchwork of programs to serve our most vulnerable citizens.

Basic Demographics of Austin's Young Families

Although Austin is a prosperous and well-educated community, many families struggle raising their children here. Each year since 2000, some 14,000 infants have been born locally, an increasing proportion of them to low-income, non-English-speaking mothers, the majority of whom are Spanish-speaking Hispanics. In addition, immigration (of both documented and undocumented individuals) adds several thousand more low-income, non-English speaking children younger than six to the local population each year. As a result, Austin is presently home to an estimated 85,000 preschool age children, nearly

20% of whom live in families with incomes below the poverty level and nearly one-third of whom live in families where English is not routinely spoken.

Many of these children enter school prepared to succeed in academic and social relationships, but a significant and increasing number have not had the early experiences needed to support optimal brain development and healthy adjustments.

The 2006 "Child Well-Being Report Card" and the companion "white papers" (attached) detail the results of a recent assessment of 16 indicators of child well-being. The report card illuminates some of Austin's assets--for example, the high numbers of eligible families that access our community's WIC clinics; but it also highlights deficiencies in our system of care for young children.

Early Childhood Community Mobilization

For many years, a dedicated cadre of advocates, early childhood experts, service providers, and policy makers at the local and state levels has worked to improve conditions for young children and their families in the community. In 2002, the **City of Austin Child Care Council** adopted a "Comprehensive Early Care and Education Framework", which focused on early care and education, advocacy, health and wellness, program and family supports, and planning, evaluation and coordination (attached). The **Early Start Coalition**, a consortium of approximately 30 local service providers, developed a comprehensive "vision" for young children, centered around desired child outcomes in all domains of development (attached). In 2004, United Way Capital Area Early Childhood Initiative was licensed as **Success By Six** by United Way of America. Building on the work of the Child Care Council and the Early Start Coalition, Success By Six has worked with a large coalition of individuals and organizations to set community goals for collective action, and to craft strategies for implementation and funding.

Our community's work has been complemented and informed by work at the state level. The Texas Plan, developed by **TECEC** (and included in the Task Force notebook), describes a state-wide infrastructure to support high-quality services to young children. Furthermore, the **State Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE)** created a demonstration model (TEEM) that has provided impressive results and renewed interest from state policy makers for early childhood programs. The local TEEM model has created significant professional development opportunities for early childhood teachers in Austin, and equally important, a venue for coordination and communication between Child Inc. (Head Start); child care providers (coordinated by WorkSource); and ISD administrators and teachers.
The early childhood infrastructure in Austin is also supported by:

- a diverse professional development system (including informal trainers through organizations such as WorkSource and FamilyConnections, certificate and degree programs at Austin Community College, University of Texas degree programs, Texas State University, etc.);
- a full-service child care resource and referral agency (FamilyConnections)

- Quality initiatives including Texas/Austin Rising Star quality rating system; NAEYC Accreditation Project (through ACC); child care mentoring collaborative (staffed by ACC, WorkSource, FamilyConnections); Teacher TRAC (teacher scholarships for continuing education); Jeanette Watson Fellowships (salary supplements for highly qualified teachers)
- a strong professional organization (Austin Association for the Education of Young Children);
- Non-profit agencies which support child and family development in a variety of additional ways (described in next section).

Services available to young families

Note: The following list is not exhaustive. Austin has many non-profit organizations providing outstanding services, and including all of them would be nearly impossible.

Hospital Visitation: Through Family Connections' Parents of Newborns program, brand- new parents are visited in the hospital by a child development specialist and provided a notebook of community resources.

Early Literacy Supports - Reading Is Fundamental provides Family Fun Nights and free books to young children; Reach Out and Read provides free books and information about as reading as part of the regular medical check up; KLRU does outreach programs for young children in preschool and in playgroups.

Home Visiting - Several models are operating in Austin with different eligibility requirements and curriculum, but all support vulnerable families. CIS, Any Baby Can, Healthy Families, Avance, and Child Inc. all offer home visiting programs.

Parenting or Family Literacy Classes - Any Baby Can, FamilyConnections, Avance, CIS, Austin Learning Academy, Child Inc., El Buen Samaritano, and others

Libaries/Storytimes/Museums - Austin Public Library and FamilyConnections' Family Place Library have print resources for families, educational toys and storytimes for children; the Austin Children's Museum focuses on young children and has multiple learning opportunities for families

Mental Health Services - Austin Child Guidance Center provides therapeutic programs for children and families as well as consultation-to a limited number of child care programs; Child Inc. and Open Door Preschool employ social workers to support family mental health; the Helper program matches psychologists to a limited number of preschools for consultation

Early Care and Education (also known as child care, preschool, parents day out, etc.) - see attached the lengthy report commissioned by the City of Austin

Most programs and services described above are limited by funding constraints. Few have capacity to expand services without significant new and sustainable resources.

Attachments

http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/sb6/Library /2006 reportcard.pdf

http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/sb6/Library/UWCA%20SB6%20White%20Paper%20
Healthy%20Goal%2004-04-06.pdf

http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/sb6/Library/UWCA%20SB6'%20White%20Paper%20Happy%20

Goal%2004-04-06.pdf

http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/sb6/Library/UWCA%20SB6%20White%20Paper%20
Smart%20Goals %2004-04-06.pdf

http://www.caction.org/IssueAreas/faqs/EEC

Recommendations

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Task Force studied a wide variety of options and delivery models across the nation in formulating its guiding principles, which underlie its ultimate recommendations. Specifically, the Task Force recognizes that "one size does not fit all," but that certain elements are common to an excellent prekindergarten service delivery system.

Accordingly, the Early Childhood Task Force believes that investing in high quality early childhood education produces a well-documented and significant return on that investment to the community. The Task Force further believes that all AISD prekindergarten students should receive a holistic, supportive public school experience, with a focus on the social and emotional and physical, as well as the cognitive, development of the young child. A rigorous and well-aligned curriculum, coupled with appropriate instructional practices and assessment practices, are essential to a high quality prekindergarten delivery system. Likewise, well-educated and well-trained early childhood teachers are crucial. Parents, especially working parents, should be offered a wide array of options for extended prekindergarten services, and should be fully engaged in their young child's education.

The community-at-large should assist AISD as it undertakes to provide a high quality early education environment. To ensure public school success, our young children need to be healthy, safe, well-nourished, and cared for by nurturing adults. Therefore, collaboration and cooperation between AISD and community service providers and stakeholders is essential to the development of a high quality preschool system. This is especially true for highly vulnerable families and families with young children who have special language or physical and emotional needs.

The benefits to the school district, to the families, and to the community, when served by a vigorous prekindergarten service delivery model, are considerable. Increased access to full-day services for working parents and parents in school, including the core prekindergarten day coupled with after-school services, are vital not only to the needs of early learners but to the economy of our community. School districts can save tax dollars by partnering with local childcare and Head Start centers to provide prekindergarten services in their existing facilities instead of building new facilities or purchasing temporary buildings. Accordingly to a recent study by Texas A & M University, for every $1.00 invested, high quality prekindergarten programs return at least a $3.50 to taxpayers as a result of less money spent on remedial and special education classes, welfare programs, and criminal justice services.[1]

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1 A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universally-Accessible Pre-Kindergarten Education in Texas, Texas A&M University, Bush School of Government (2006).

The Overarching Vision

In consideration of the above guiding principles, the Task Force therefore recommends that all AISD classrooms, at the earliest opportunity, should fully reflect the following essential elements of a high quality prekindergarten program:

- Full-day prekindergarten services for qualifying students
- A teacher to student ratio that reflects best practice in early childhood education
- A rigorous, well-rounded, state-approved curriculum, appropriate for young children and aligned with K-12 curricula, learning objectives, and nationally recognized assessment practices
- Fully degreed teachers with certification in early childhood education
- Excellent professional development opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals, including language and literacy acquisition, science, mathematics, and assessment practices
- Dedicated library resources appropriate for young children, including computer and technology access
- Professional staff that includes a speech therapist, a counselor, and a district mentor coach
- State of the art language acquisition materials, especially English language learners
- Age and developmentally appropriate student furniture, equipment and classroom resources
- Widest possible range of community support services for highly vulnerable and/or qualifying families directed to ensure school success
- Inclusion of children with identified special needs with appropriate classroom support

The Task Force realizes that many of the above conditions presently are implemented in AISD classrooms. But others are not. The Task Force also is highly cognizant of the fact that each of these recommendations comes with a price tag, and that some changes therefore may need to be phased in gradually over time.

Nevertheless, the Task Force firmly believes that the community vision must be that AISD will provide the highest quality prekindergarten services to young children. Nothing less should be acceptable to our community.

Pilot Study:
The Task Force therefore recommends that AISD conduct a limited pilot study on five campuses commencing in the fall of 2007, containing the following elements and consistent with the above-stated overarching vision. Findings from the pilot study would be used in the future to enhance the process of language acquisition across AISD's prekindergarten program. The pilot study would include the following components:

- Implementation in prekindergarten classrooms at five AISD campuses selected according to established criteria
- A target ratio of 2 adults (1 certified prekindergarten teacher and 1 highly trained instructional aide) to 20 students
- Targeted professional development for language and vocabulary acquisition
- Expanded, state of the art materials to support language acquisition, particularly for English language learners
- Classroom libraries dedicated to prekindergarten
- Piloting of a new math assessment for prekindergarten
- A "family component" expanded to support academic development at home
- Inclusive classrooms to serve students with special needs with "pull-ins" for needed services and regular team consultation with speech professionals
- Family and student expedited access to community mental health services
- A speech therapist as a member of the early childhood team
  A counselor
- A district "mentor coach" to support implementation in target classrooms at all five campuses
- Collaborative effort with the University of Texas to include researched-based professional development and evaluation components

Current Prekindergarten Services Delivery System and Task Force Recommendations for the Future

AISD presently provides prekindergarten services through elementary campus-based classrooms serving about 4,100 students on 66 campuses, and at Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School (a free-standing early childhood education center serving 400 students. AISD participates in the Texas Early Education Model project sites combining Head Start, private child care and public school classrooms serving about 120 students at 68 locations presently and currently has a pre-k teacher placed at Mt. Sinai School.

The Task Force recommendations with respect to each of the existing service delivery models follow. In general, however, the Task Force believes that AISD's prekindergarten service delivery model, if consistent with the overarching vision and guiding principles, should be tailored to the specific needs of each community—again, that "one size does not fit all."

I. Community-Based Prekindergarten Program

In line with the above guiding principles and vision, the Task Force also believes that AISD must make a solid commitment to growing partnerships with private child care centers in the community.

The Task Force recognizes that national trend is a prekindergarten service delivery model that includes public schools as well as community-based settings, which may include privately operated child care and federally funded Head Start providers, among others. The significance of the emergence of "mixed delivery" models nationwide is because they have the potential to break the traditional barrier between early education and child care policies and address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way. They also help strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs.

Presently AISD participates in the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) program with a relatively small, but growing, number of prekindergarten classrooms. TEEM, which is supported by the Texas Education Agency, consists of research-based curriculum, high-quality teacher training with mentoring, and teacher-administered progress monitoring for children to guide instruction.

The TEEM-based public and private delivery system expands access to high quality prekindergarten at schools and private and public child care centers, has improved school-readiness of Texas children, and increases the efficiency of public funding for statewide prekindergarten programs. This is a good first step into integration of services in our community.

The task force fully supports AISD's active participation in, and recommends the expansion of, the TEEM program.
TEEM is only one possible model, and focuses more on joint professional development opportunities than blended resources and funding streams. It does not deliver pre-k services in private child care facilities. Therefore, in reviewing best practices, the task force looked at several other mixed delivery models, including those utilized in New York, Tennessee, Arkansas, Chicago, and Houston, among others. The task force found that to better coordinate early education with the needs of working families, "best practices" typically:

- Provide some portion of prekindergarten in settings that have the capacity to provide full-day, full-year services.
- Encourage a minimum proportion of prekindergarten be delivered in child care provide full-day, full-year services
- Require and support joint planning at the local level to encourage collaboration and collegiality among early education and child care constituencies
- Conduct thorough outreach and disseminate information to all potential prekindergarten providers
- National research further has demonstrated that the community-based prekindergarten model has the potential to strengthen the quality and program standards and provide resources in community-based child care programs. Best practices in this respect include, among others, programs that:

- Set prekindergarten payments and provide dedicated resources that cover the cost of providing a high-quality prekindergarten program
- Set equivalent program standards for all community-based and prekindergarten settings
- Invest in the community-based child care teacher workforce by providing targeted resources to help teachers meet prekindergarten teacher education standards and, to the greatest extent possible, to receive comparable wages
- Make resources and technical assistance available to improve the content of early education services in community-based child care programs
- Link policies to enhance program quality across prekindergarten and child care
- Collect data and evaluate program quality and impact across settings to continuously improve performance

The Task Force recommends that AISD make a strong and lasting commitment to the expansion of the community-based prekindergarten service delivery model. To that end, the Task Force specifically recommends the following actions:

Recommendations:
An advisory committee should be formed with the Director of Early Childhood and members of the AISD staff, together with parents of young children and members of the early childhood care and education community, to continue to design the parameters of the community-based child care component of the prekindergarten service delivery model, with a report on the protocols of such a model to be made to the Superintendent according to a timeline developed by the advisory committee.

Among other things, the advisory committee would be charged with considering and reporting upon:

1.1 Providing prekindergarten services to eligible three and four-year olds at the community-based programs, possibly served in the same classrooms, and with the possible inclusion of tuition-paying students in the AISD classroom

1.2 Coordinating the administration of both the district program and private childcare facilities to work together to ensure that the hiring and evaluation of the AISD teachers would be inclusive of the needs of both partners

1.3 Assisting in setting criteria for selection of appropriate community partners, such as those accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or have Texas-Austin Rising Star certification

1.4 Identifying the standards, aligned with the AISD pre-k classrooms, that should be in place for all satellite classrooms.

1.5 Making recommendations for allocation of prekindergarten teacher positions and

funds for materials to the district's early childhood department should be made, as needed, for assignment of teachers to satellite classrooms at childcare centers

1.6 Engaging Head Start as one of the key partners in the integration process

1.7 Making recommendations as to potential funding sources, such as grants, to provide teachers with training in best guidance techniques, best practices, mental health, and social skills

1.8 Considering extended-day service at both public and private facilities

II. Early Learning Center Program

Approximately 400 AISD prekindergarten students are currently being served at the Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School. Task Force members who visited the school noted that staff members have created a very positive learning environment for young children, despite significant space, planning time, and financial constraints.

The Early Learning Center model provides an opportunity for a focus on the needs of young learners, including the development of language and literacy and enhanced professional development opportunities. The Early Learning Center model also affords the school with more time to build relationships of trust and involvement with families by focusing the human and other resources of the Center exclusively on the needs of the early learner. The Task Force makes special note of such advantages of the Early Learning Center model.

In considering whether to recommend the creation of additional specialized centers, the Task Force considered issues including cost, transportation of children, the opportunity to focus a campus solely on the needs of young learners, alignment and transition between prekindergarten and kindergarten, the importance of attracting community agencies for enhanced services, and the need for flexibility in utilizing current district facilities.

Should AISD have a need to consider the creation of a specialized campus at an underutilized facility in the future, the Task Force recommends that Early Learning Centers for students in prekindergarten through first grade be considered rather than a stand-alone prekindergarten center. [2]

The Task Force believes that expansion of the facility to include the upper grades will constitute a better use of public school facilities, and provide a longer-term opportunity to build trust with families, cement parent involvement in their young children's

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[2] It is recommended that an environmental scan be conducted to identify the areas of need. Then, should conditions arise for a new center or if an empty school is available then create a center that would serve pre-k, kindergarten and 1st grade.

education, and better address the needs of alignment and transition between the primary grades.

Recommendations:
The Task Force has determined that recommended service delivery model for early childhood education through an Early Learning Center should include the following components:

2.1 Transition component to ensure connection to kindergarten and first grade, and monitoring of students' future progress

2.2 Partnerships with community agencies for extended and expedited access to services

2.3 A curriculum and assessment practices aligned with the K-12 curricula and practices

2.4 Parent education classes dedicated to early literacy awareness and the needs of English language learners (ELL)

2.5 Staff certified in early learning practices, with prior experience working with young learners

2.6 A strong and state-of-the-art ELL component

2.7 A district "mentor coach to support best practices in instruction and to assist teachers in differentiating instruction to meet student needs

2.8 Model classrooms for early learning/primary students

2.9 Extended full-day services to accommodate the needs of working parents

2.10 A wide array of social services meeting the needs of the families of students

To the extent that the foregoing elements are not present in the Lucy Reed Prekindergarten Demonstration School, the Task Force recommends that AISD take all necessary and appropriate steps to assure that such components are fully implemented as soon as possible.

III. Campus-based Prekindergarten
As previously noted, AISD currently provides prekindergarten education for approximately 4,500 eligible four-year old students at 66 campuses and Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School. The service for campus-based prekindergarten currently includes the following components:

- Full-day prekindergarten for all qualifying students, with significant commitment of district resources to provide the additional time
- Target ratio of 1 teacher to 18 students
- Teacher use of district Instructional Planning Guides and Nine-Weeks Assessment Rubrics for Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, aligned with the State Prekindergarten Guidelines
- Degreed, certified prekindergarten teachers
- Use of a state-adopted textbook system, the *DLM Early Childhood Express*
- Multiple professional development opportunities for teachers in areas including
- Focus on hands-on, inquiry-based science instruction

Recommendations:
The following recommendations would enhance the quality of prekindergarten education provided at the campuses, and the Task Force highly recommends that AISD consider and implement the following:

3.1 Develop a more consistent approach to ESL instruction for prekindergarten, including the purchase of needed instructional materials, to create a second language foundation for English language learner students

3.2 Expand professional development for early childhood teachers to focus on accelerated language acquisition and vocabulary development, provide increased support to novice and beginning pre-k teachers, and a more consistent implementation of the district curriculum and implementation of the prekindergarten Instructional Planning Guides

3.3 Create dedicated prekindergarten staff development days and reinstate the professional development Summer Summit

3.4 Enhance the areas of the prekindergarten program that address the social-emotional development of children

3.5 Continue to refine prekindergarten Instructional Planning Guides and Assessment Rubrics to increase specificity and the alignment with state guidelines and district kindergarten expectations for entering students

3.6 Replace old prekindergarten furniture; renew and expand manipulatives and instructional materials to support identified instructional needs

3.7 Utilize existing district parent involvement resources, such as the campus parent involvement specialists, to focus on the needs of early childhood parents

3.8 Create internet-based parent and teacher resources provided in Spanish and English

3.9 Recommend changes to the existing educational specifications to include a dedicated space for parent involvement and training at each campus

3.10 Increase the connections to community childcare through shared professional development and networking opportunities

IV. Additional Administrative Recommendations

4.1 Finally, in order to enable AISD to effectively implement the above recommendations, the Task Force recommends three administrative changes*.*

4.2 The Task Force recommends that AISD increase the number of early childhood instructional specialists by at least four in Year 2007-08, and further as recommended by the Advisory Committee reporting to the Director of Prekindergarten Instruction, to support novice teachers and consistent implementation of initiatives across the district.

4.3 The Task Force further recommends that the building specifications of the district relating to prekindergarten space be amended to include appropriate space for parent resources and community social service providers.

4.4 Finally, the Task Force recommends that long-term evaluation and tracking of the academic progress and development of prekindergarten students as they progress through grades k-3, be implemented to assist AISD in the analysis and critique of the efficacy of policies, procedures and practices affecting those students.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Task Force on Early Childhood Education believes the following recommendations identified above will help lead to a number of positive outcomes related to providing prekindergarten students in AISD with a quality education. These expected outcomes for prekindergarten students include:

- Higher achievement levels
- Higher attendance rates
- Lower dropout rates
- Higher graduation rates
- Fewer special education referrals
- More students reading on grade level at 3rd grade
- Higher readiness levels of students entering kindergarten

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Task Force on Early Childhood Education further recommends that the AISD Board of Trustees consider the recommendations of the task for early childhood education services in AISD and an appropriate service to be implemented. An implementation plan would need to be developed and include the following components:

- Specific action steps
- Necessary resources
- Responsible parties
- Timeframes for completion
- Quantifiable targets
- Monitoring process with annual report

APPENDIX A
Charter

In direct response to the growing number of three to four year old children in our community with diverse needs, AISD has formed the Task Force on Early Childhood Education to develop, with stakeholder input, recommendations on effective systems to deliver quality educational and support services to better prepare these children for academic success as they enter kindergarten and elementary school. Accordingly:

1. The task force will consist of experts in education as well as community and business members.
2. The task force will review current data and research on best practices and successful models.
3. The task force will provide various opportunities for stakeholder input and carefully consider the input received.
4. The task force will be sensitive to private sector enterprises potentially affected by its recommendations.
5. The recommendations of the task force will place emphasis on interlocal collaborative efforts.
6. The recommendations of the task force will integrate a broad range of support services and parental education.
7. The recommendations of the task force will align with Board Results Policies and the Strategic Plan.
8. The Superintendent and Cabinet will have ultimate responsibility for approving the recommendations of the task force.
9. The Board will be kept informed of the task force's work and will have opportunities for discussion and comment.
10. The draft and final report of the task force as well as other key information will be made available to the public in both English and Spanish.

APPENDIX B
Interview Protocol

Interviews on Pre-Kindergarten and Early Childhood Education in AISD

Name:

Affiliation:

Experience with Pre K and/or PPCD:

Why We Are Conducting This Interview:

Recently, Superintendent Forgione formed a task force to study and provide recommendations on the model and delivery system of services for the education of Pre-K and Early Childhood students in AISD. Are you familiar with Pre-K and Early Childhood? As a member of the Austin community, your input regarding the current status of education for Pre-K and Early Childhood students in AISD is important and valued. We will be conducting a number of personal interviews to gain additional perspectives on this topic.

How Your Input Will Be Used

We will compile the results of our interviews and provide them to the Task Force, who will provide a report to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees. The Task Force will also gain input through review of district data, research literature, best practices, and various models being implemented in the nation.

Questions:

For our interview, I would like to ask you ten questions. The first three are open-ended questions. The next six seek your responses to specific statements on a scale of 1 to 4, with follow-up opportunities to explain your responses. Finally, there is another open-ended question to provide any concluding remarks you wish to make.

1. What do you feel are 2 or 3 of **AISD's greatest successes** in the education provided to PreK and early childhood students – things we should definitely continue to do?

2. What do you feel are 2 or 3 of the **AISD's biggest challenges, risks, or threats** to the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students?

3. What do you feel are 2 to 3 **improvements AISD might make** in regard to the education provided to Pre-K and early childhood students?

4. On a scale from 1 to 4 -- with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree -- to what extent do you agree with the following

statement: **Pre-K and Early Childhood students in AISD receive a high quality education.**

5. Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

6. On a scale from 1 to 4 -- with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree -- to what extent do you agree with the following statement: **The needs and expectations of Pre-K and early childhood students in AISD are adequately met.**

7. Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

8. On a scale from 1 to 4 -- with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree -- to what extent do you agree with the following statement: **Pre-K and early childhood students in AISD learn in a safe and nurturing environment.**

9. Could you please share with me why you feel this way?

10. Are there other ideas that you have about ways that AISD could serve young children?

APPENDIX C
Literature