

Aldine Independent School District

District Profile

Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size):	70
Number of Schools:	72
Number of Students:	61,500
Number of Teachers:	3,950

Superintendent: Wanda Bamberg assumed the duties of superintendent of the Aldine Independent School District in June 2007. She has 31 years of experience in the field of education, including 27 years in Aldine, where she has served as a teacher, director and executive director of curriculum and instruction. Bamberg served as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction from 2001 until 2007, during which time Aldine was a two-time Broad Prize finalist.

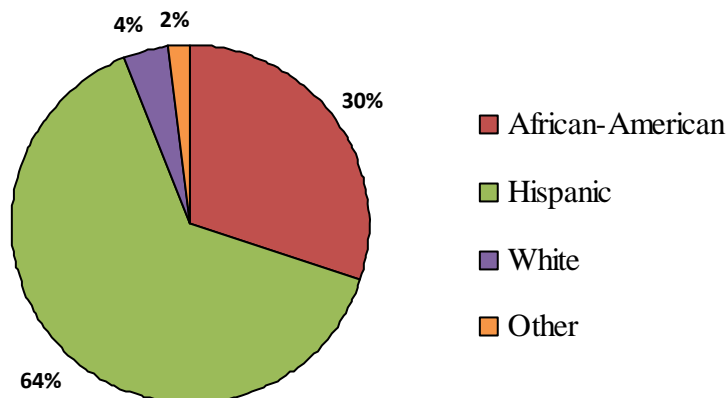
Governance: Seven-member board of education, elected at large to serve four-year terms.

Teachers Unions: Texas is a non-union state.

Student Characteristics

Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch:	80 percent
Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners:	31 percent

Student Demographics



(2008/09 estimated data)

Student Achievement

Aldine Independent School District's (AISD) student achievement gains are evidenced by publicly available data collected and analyzed by MPR Associates, Inc., a leading education research consulting firm. Among the reasons that AISD stood out among large urban school districts:

Greater overall performance

- In 2007, Aldine outperformed other districts in Texas serving students with similar income levels in reading and math at all grade levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.

Greater subgroup performance

- Aldine's low-income, African-American and Hispanic students outperformed their peers in similar districts in the state in reading and math at all levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- In 2007, Aldine's African-American, Hispanic and low-income students achieved higher average proficiency rates than their state counterparts in reading and math at all grade levels.

Greater overall improvement

- Between 2004 and 2007, Aldine showed greater improvement than other Texas districts serving similar income levels in reading at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school math, according to The Broad Prize methodology.

Greater subgroup improvement

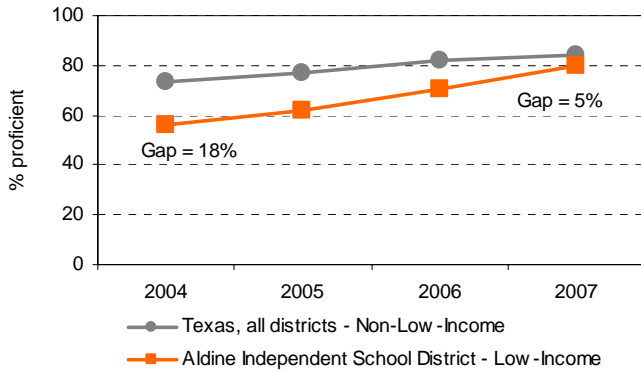
- Aldine's low-income and Hispanic students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar districts in the state in elementary and middle school reading and math, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Aldine was more successful than the state in increasing the percentage of students who achieved proficiency in elementary school reading and math and middle school math. In addition, Aldine was more successful than the state in increasing the percentage of African-American, Hispanic and low-income students who achieved proficiency in elementary reading and math and middle school math.
- Between 2004 and 2007, SAT scores for African-American and Hispanic students rose in Aldine. Average SAT scores for African-American students increased by 23 points and by 18 points for Hispanic students over this period.

Closing achievement gaps

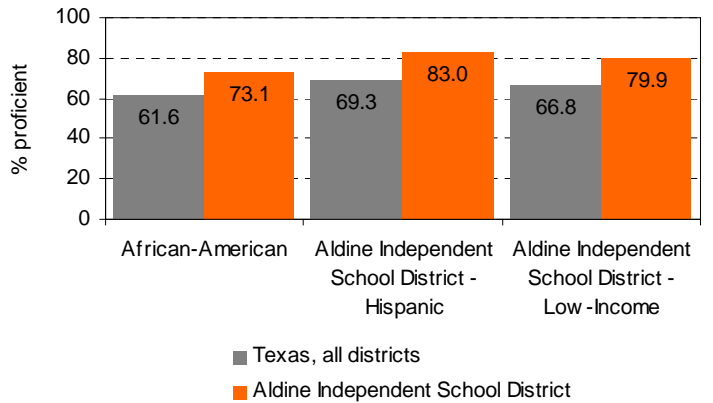
- Aldine narrowed achievement gaps between its low-income students and non-low-income students in reading and math at all grade levels.
- Aldine also narrowed achievement gaps between African-American and Hispanic students compared to the state average for white students in elementary and middle school reading and math and high school reading. For example, between 2004 and 2007, the district's African-American students narrowed the gap with the state average for white students by 16 percentage points in middle school math.
- In addition, Aldine narrowed achievement gaps between low-income students and the state average for non-low-income students in elementary and middle school reading and math and high school reading. For example, between 2004 and 2007, the gap between Aldine's low-income students and the state average for non-low-income students narrowed by 10 percentage points in elementary school reading.

Student Achievement Highlights

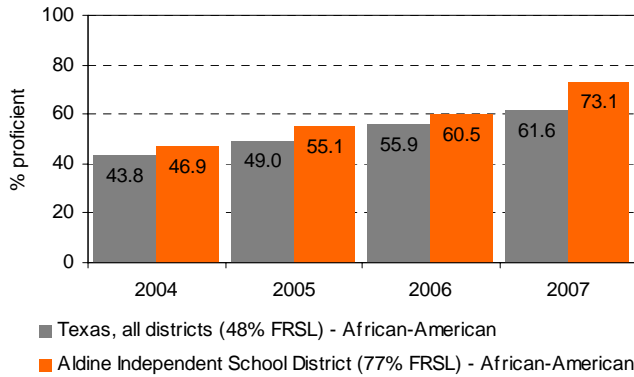
Middle School Mathematics Proficiency Rates for Low-Income Students in District vs. Non-Low-Income Students Statewide



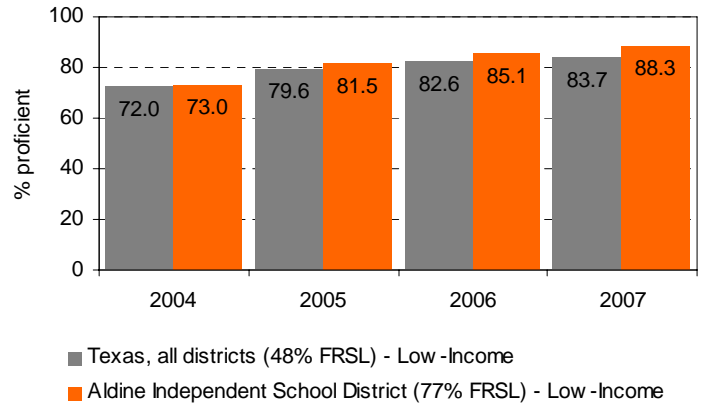
Middle School Mathematics Proficiency Rates 2007



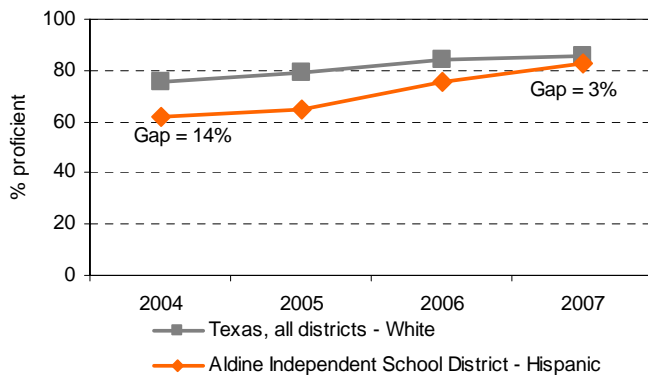
Middle School Mathematics Proficiency Rates for African-American Students



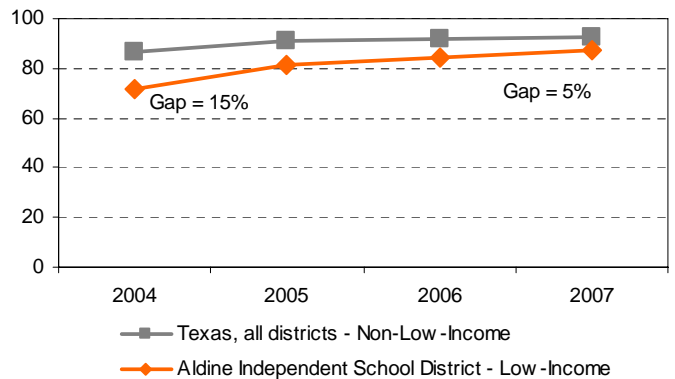
Elementary School Reading Proficiency Rates for Low-Income Students in the District vs. Low-Income Students Statewide



Middle School Mathematics Proficiency Rates for Hispanic Students in the District vs. White Students Statewide



Elementary School Mathematics Proficiency Rates for Low-Income Students in the District vs. Non-low-income Students Statewide



Key District Policies and Practices

SchoolWorks, an education consulting firm based in Massachusetts, collected and analyzed evidence of AISD policies and practices from 2004-2008 affecting teaching and learning. SchoolWorks' qualitative analysis, produced below, is based on a site visit, focus group interviews with district stakeholders and extensive documentation analysis. The criteria used for evaluation, available at www.broadprize.org, are grounded in research-based school and district practices found to be effective in three key areas: **teaching and learning**, **district leadership**, and **operations and support systems**. AISD demonstrated the following effective policies and practices.

Teaching and Learning

Research shows that effective teaching is the primary factor that contributes to high levels of student achievement. In AISD, a curriculum and assessment system that is aligned to state standards provides teachers, school leaders and district administrators the ability to monitor student learning and program implementation on an ongoing basis. Teachers use state-adopted textbooks and a range of teacher-developed materials to implement the curriculum, and they have the autonomy to select materials that will best meet the needs of their students. Instructional leadership roles are clearly defined, and individuals at all levels of the district work collaboratively to support the teaching and learning process.

Curriculum

In AISD, teachers and district-level program directors from the office of curriculum and instruction have created scope-and-sequence documents in every subject area and across K-12 grade levels that provide teachers with a roadmap for what to teach during the course of the school year. These documents, which align with the state standards called Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), are organized by six-week benchmarks that define what standards should be addressed during that time period.

AISD adopts textbooks from the state's "approved" list and views them only as a resource to deliver content and not as the curriculum itself (scope-and-sequence documents serve as the curriculum). Teachers at all grade levels also draw on other materials they have discovered or created over time. Teachers and district staff share these additional resources during common planning time and through the district's electronic curriculum management system, called TRIAND. TRIAND provides a web-based lesson planning resource for teachers. Teachers can access example lesson plans, many of which enhance lessons with electronic resources, such as documents and websites.

All AISD teachers have access to lesson plans (through TRIAND) that have been designed to meet the six-week benchmark requirements. The very best lessons, vetted by the curriculum and instruction department, serve as exemplars for teachers and school leaders district-wide. These exemplars are based on real classroom successes that have led to strong student achievement on common assessments.

While lesson plans, textbooks, documents and other electronic resources abound to ensure that instruction in AISD addresses the benchmark standards every six weeks, teachers are not expected to follow a lock-step instructional plan. Teachers are responsible for developing an appropriate instructional plan that meets the needs of individual students and ensures that they master state standards.

Instruction

Instruction and programs in AISD have been designed to consider the learning needs of all students, including students with special needs, English language learners (ELLs) and advanced students.

Over the last several years, AISD has made significant efforts to better meet the needs of its special education students by integrating them within the regular classroom. Teachers and administrators note the importance of inclusion as an instructional model for special education. Teachers have been trained in co-teaching models. Co-teaching models provide explicit techniques for two teachers to use when simultaneously working with a single group of students. In addition, the district has moved special education teachers into the regular classroom so that special education students can be educated with their peers.

AISD schools support ELL students through bilingual and sheltered English classes. In bilingual classrooms, teachers use students' native language during part of or the entire lesson. Eventually, as English proficiency increases, sheltered English classrooms provide instruction in English, but with many supports to help the English learner understand the academic content. By 2009, the district plans to make bilingual programs available in every school in the district. The district provides schools with bilingual materials equivalent to those instructional materials available to other students in English. In high school, teachers rely on native English-speaking students to serve as peer tutors for ELL students in regular classes. In addition, teachers use a unique approach called "layered lessons" when delivering English language arts and bilingual instruction to ensure that students understand the unit concept. A layered lesson breaks down the content and skills being taught into very discrete parts that are more easily understood when an ELL student faces the dual challenge of comprehending English and new academic material. For example, a lesson on inference is broken down into four layers—or four different essential skills—that students must comprehend to fully grasp the concept of inference. Teachers revisit concepts at different points throughout the year to ensure that students maintain mastery.

For students who need additional challenges, AISD has expanded its gifted and talented offerings, Advanced Placement (AP) courses and dual enrollment options so students can receive college credit for high school coursework. All teachers have been trained in gifted and talented instruction so that these practices can expand into the regular classrooms in both English and Spanish.

In addition, AP course enrollment has increased in the district. For example, at MacArthur High School—one of AISD's five high schools—AP enrollment more than tripled from 115 students in 2003 to 373 students in 2008. To encourage greater AP enrollment, the district replaced honors courses with early AP courses.

Assessment

Teachers administer common assessments, which align with the AISD curriculum and are designed to benchmark student learning at least every six weeks in AISD. The district's technology department uploads test results into the TRIAND system within hours after assessments are administered. Teachers and administrators are then able to evaluate student results the same day tests are given. Teachers, principals and district staff use assessment information to ensure that instruction and programs are meeting the needs of AISD students.

At the classroom level, teachers are able to easily interpret common assessment results on TRIAND because the interface format is well-organized according to the state standards tested. This allows teachers to identify where students have succeeded and struggled within the six-week benchmark time period. During their regular common planning time, teachers examine results and share ideas and practices that have led to successful student learning. The district provides data review protocols that structure these meetings and assist teachers in conducting root cause analyses. Teachers have flexibility to use the data to

inform their next steps in the classroom and are encouraged by administrators to try new approaches to increase student learning.

District staff also use common assessment information to make programmatic decisions, including budget allocations, professional development priorities, curriculum and student learning. After each six-week assessment, district staff compare and contrast results at the classroom and school levels to determine which programs, teachers and schools are yielding the greatest results. For example, at one elementary school, the principal and his leadership team decided to shift the entire literacy approach from a commercial program to guided reading when consistent results showed that students were not gaining comprehension skills through the commercial program.

In AISD, staff at all levels frequently make changes to curriculum, instruction and intervention programs based on data. For example, through weekly assessments reviewed by area superintendents and program directors, the district decided to completely redesign an intervention when results did not show improvement for African-American students in mathematics. At the school level, principals and teachers discuss how six-week assessments continually lead to new decisions about interventions and re-teaching. Based on individual student results on the six-week assessments, teachers may work with small groups of students who did not achieve the desired level of proficiency on the assessment. These small groups may be formed and reformed as students progress, creating a fluid support system for students that addresses their changing needs.

Instructional Leadership

At the district level, key instructional leadership starts with program directors in the office of curriculum and instruction. Program directors are assigned by content area, with approximately three program directors for each of the core content areas (mathematics, English, sciences and history). The program directors are responsible for managing the six-week curriculum benchmarks, district-wide curriculum review and refinement, common assessments and provision of professional development. Clear, common district-wide assessment processes, coupled with significant decision-making authority at each level of the district, enable AISD teachers to rapidly meet changing student needs.

At the school level, principals are key instructional leaders. They are responsible for observing instruction and for providing general support to teachers. Many schools also have assistant principals who in addition to their primary role may also serve as curriculum and content specialists. Content specialists typically spend their time either supporting teachers through modeling and guiding common planning or providing direct support to students. In high school, department chairs assume roles similar to content specialists.

At the district level, program directors and specialists have different instructional roles, though both work in concert to provide teachers with a strong network of support. Program directors focus on assessments, K-12 curriculum matters and K-12 professional development. Specialists focus on school-level support of teaching and learning. However, AISD staff also believe that instructional leadership is a natural part of many other positions within the district. In Aldine, “leadership” is viewed as a collaborative endeavor. In keeping with the theme of autonomy and flexibility at each level of the system, the district does not create rigid divisions between positions. Because all district personnel rely extensively on rich data to define problems and determine next steps, they are consequently able to step out of their established roles when needed without creating organizational confusion.

District Leadership

District governance and leadership, from goal-setting to implementation to evaluation, must support the essential work of teaching and learning in schools. To keep all components of a district focused on student learning, research shows that district leadership must set clear strategic goals and hold the organization accountable for implementation. AISD's mission, vision and three strategic priorities guide the work of all members of the AISD community. Beginning with the school board and the superintendent, AISD has clear performance goals for staff that cascade down to the school level (principals, teachers and students). District staff at all levels also undertake an ongoing process of reflection and evaluation, which includes the input of many AISD stakeholders, to ensure that practices and programs are working effectively to achieve goals district-wide.

Mission, Vision and Values

AISD stakeholders, including school board members, district and school personnel, parent organizations and community members, voice a consistent commitment to the district's adopted vision to "produce the nation's best" and its mission "to prepare each student academically and socially to be a critical thinker; problem solver; and responsible citizen." Because the district has established a variety of meetings and formal feedback structures, a range of AISD stakeholders have channels through which to support the district's mission and provide input into its operations.

Stakeholders are involved in shaping the district's mission through a number of meetings and committees. For example, the district has established a "Vertical Educational Advisory Committee" (VEAC) that draws representation from every school in the district. The VEAC—which includes more than 200 staff, parent and community representatives from each school—meets six times a year to hear reports on the district's progress and to allow its representatives to voice concerns and ideas. This process naturally ensures the community is involved in ensuring the district's mission and vision drive ongoing operations.

The district also draws the community into its mission and vision through "Leadership Aldine." Leadership Aldine is a community outreach program that recruits business and community leaders to learn how the school district operates. Through what is essentially a course on district operations, participants learn the nuts and bolts of running a public school district. Over the course of the program, community members are able to learn about how their tax dollars are spent within the school district.

Governance

The AISD board is comprised of seven members, elected at large, who serve four-year terms. The board maintains decision-making processes and evaluation systems for both the superintendent and the school board that are directly linked to the district's vision, mission and three strategic priorities to: 1) demonstrate sustained growth in student achievement; 2) implement effective student management strategies to improve student behavior, and 3) improve parent/community relations in all campuses and facilities.

One way that the school board holds the district staff responsible for meeting strategic goals is by reviewing financial reporting monthly and reviewing progress towards strategic plan goals quarterly when the superintendent and cabinet share quarterly reporting results with the board. Based on the quarterly reports, the board and district leadership jointly adjust the overall strategic plan on an annual basis to reflect changing priorities.

In addition, the board holds the superintendent accountable for achieving strategic goals through the superintendent's evaluation. The board measures superintendent performance based on how well the district has achieved its strategic plan goals. Each board member individually uses a rubric to score the

superintendent, and then the entire group determines a common score for the superintendent's performance.

The AISD board also evaluates its own performance through an annual self-evaluation process. This evaluation has led the board to begin redrafting policies to ensure their clarity. The board has been working with the Center for Reform of School Systems to improve its policy development. For example, board members shared documentation with SchoolWorks showing how they were redrafting board communication policies so that the board and district personnel would not inadvertently contradict each other. Now, when board members receive public inquiries, they are able to adeptly direct citizens to the proper district offices.

Strategic Planning

Under AISD's three strategic plan goals, the school board adopts one-, three- and five-year targets that include action plans aligned to achieving these goals. These district-wide goals then cascade down to drive goal-setting in departments, vertical teams (K-12 feeder patterns) and schools for the current year. Some goals are unique to each level of the system (i.e., district versus school), while others flow from bottom to top. Staff at all levels of the district have individual scorecards to measure their performance towards goals and to ensure continuous improvement at all levels of the district. The superintendent, assistant superintendents, staff members, program directors, curriculum specialists, principals and teachers continually reflect on district priorities, including related action plans

Goals of the district and each department, vertical team and school are captured in performance scorecards. District personnel, area superintendents and principals all have individual scorecards. Teachers report classroom scorecard data to principals, who, in turn, report school scorecard data to area superintendents. The data continue to roll up to the district level and are ultimately reported to the school board by the superintendent's cabinet. Then district leaders report the resulting snapshot of data back down to each level of the system so that all Aldine staff have a comprehensive view of the district as a whole.

Action plans designed to meet strategic goals operate in a similar manner. At the district level, action plans covering a twelve-month period and are reviewed at least quarterly. Each department, vertical team and school then creates cascading, aligned action plans. In Aldine, it is common to hear staff at all levels talking about "actions" for the year—so all have a similar operational language, linked to larger district objectives.

Goals and related action plans cascade even further down—past district-level administrators and school leaders—to teachers and, sometimes, even to students. For example, in MacArthur High School, students create action plan data sheets to address their academic goals. Through these cascading goals, AISD has created a sense of connection and shared accountability among all levels of the system.

To ensure that district priorities remain the focus of Aldine's work and that strategies to meet goals are effective, AISD uses a quarterly cycle of reflection to keep all personnel aware of new data indicating how well action plans are being implemented and goals are being met. All district departments use a peer review process to frequently survey school personnel about the quality of service that department offers. Each year, approximately one-third of Aldine's schools and district departments are involved in a peer review process that is based on Baldrige National Quality Program practices. In addition, teams of district personnel and community members provide an objective review of a department or school. The district evaluates the results of all these reviews to inform future strategic planning.

This continuous improvement approach reflects the district's belief that strategic planning should combine both a long-term view and a detailed short-term cycle of planning, action and reflection. District

leadership adjusts goals on an ongoing basis. If data indicate that changes should be made, no one feels obligated to wait for an arbitrary review date to make the changes.

Operations and Support Systems

Research shows that the design and implementation of district operations and systems directly affects how well the district can effectively support teaching and learning. In AISD, financial decisions, professional development offerings and staff management across the district are all designed specifically to drive student achievement and accomplish district-wide goals. Autonomy, collaboration and alignment are key characteristics of the systems AISD has put in place to support teaching and learning.

Allocation of Financial Resources

AISD staff have linked budgeting directly to the district's strategic plan and to the school improvement plans that cascade from the district plan. Staff consider academic needs assessments and instructional priorities at every school to ensure resource equity and a focus on student achievement when making financial decisions. The district has put rigorous accounting systems in place to allow the superintendent and the school board to monitor funds daily. The district has also established systems to evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of district expenditures.

Each year, the district prioritizes discretionary funding to support district-wide initiatives that directly support AISD's three strategic objectives. The district works carefully to balance funding for district-level programs while ensuring that schools receive maximum funds to support local initiatives and specific student needs.

The school budget process requires principals to first examine their academic needs before assigning monies to a line item. Principals first complete a needs-assessment form that is built into the school budget template. The form requires the principal to articulate the school's improvement priorities. During the budget approval process, the district budget director reviews these priorities and sends back budgets that have line item allocations that do not reflect the articulated school improvement priorities.

Accounting systems allow the assistant superintendent for finance to monitor funds on a daily basis. Every month, the school board receives a report comparing budget versus actual expenditures, cash flow and fund balance. Schools are required to keep track of expenditures against approved budgets on a monthly basis and then report to the district's finance office each quarter. These reports roll up into—and connect to—both the quarterly strategic planning report and monthly budget report presented to the school board.

To improve its business processes, the district surveys departments and schools about the effectiveness of the budgeting process and tracks the accuracy of submitted budgets to identify potential training needs. Working with other district offices, the assistant superintendent of finance examines educational results in relation to dollars spent on the initiatives—which helps the district and the school board decide what programs yield the greatest return.

Organizational Structures and Management

The district has organized schools into vertical teams under the leadership of area superintendents to ensure clear articulation of academic programming. AISD's "loose-tight" management approach promotes the achievement of goals by all employees because they share information frequently and revise plans accordingly. Although schools are expected to work toward achieving established goals and targets, there is school-level autonomy to select the strategies, programs and initiatives that best meet a school's goals. The district encourages its staff to take risks to achieve goals.

AISD schools are organized into five K-12 vertical teams, with approximately 13 schools in each team. Leadership from each school meets monthly in vertical teams with their respective area superintendent. Schools work together to ensure that students transition smoothly from one school level to the next. This is particularly important in AISD because students generally move from kindergarten through fourth-grade elementary programs, to fifth- through sixth-grade intermediate programs, to seventh- through eighth-grade middle schools, to ninth-grade centers, and to 10th through 12th grade high schools.

Area superintendents, along with heads of district offices, are members of the superintendent's cabinet. Program directors from the office of curriculum and instruction support schools by developing common assessments, updating curriculum documents, providing professional development, serving as a resource to principals and, when necessary, implementing school-level interventions. Program directors regularly meet with school-level subject area specialists and department heads.

As previously described, there is a highly structured system in Aldine for setting and measuring individual performance goals, but the system allows individuals a great deal of latitude in meeting those goals. Teachers and principals, for example, are consistent when they explain the precise targets they are expected to meet and how these goals cascade down from a single district strategic plan. At the same time, they develop unique, school-based and even classroom-based approaches without any centralized mandates. Staff are expected to make midcourse corrections or even abandon a current plan for a new strategy if preliminary results are not promising—the data drives everything.

While autonomy to innovate and take risks at every level of the organization exists, AISD staff do not make decisions in isolation. The continual flow of data linked to the strategic plan—coupled with the extensive network of meetings across schools, departments and vertical teams—ensures that decisions by small groups are made in light of strategic goals and current information.

Support for Teaching and Learning

Professional development in AISD begins with mandated district-level training and continues through embedded support provided by district and school staff, school-based initiatives and individual training opportunities. Using organizational structures that require teams to meet and make decisions is central to the success of AISD. Common planning time is available to all AISD teachers and provides an opportunity to share practices and to review student learning data. In high schools, teachers have required common planning time each day. In elementary and middle schools, common planning time typically occurs once or twice a week. Some schools bank time for several weeks in order to have extended time for planning and professional development. Publicly examining results and learning from shared successes is part of the AISD culture.

District-wide professional development begins with seven days of training each year in order to provide teachers with a clear set of professional development priorities. District-wide professional development often occurs by subject area and is most often delivered in small groups.

Specialists provide a second avenue for district-wide professional development. School-based specialists receive trainings from program directors in regular meetings and then provide turnaround training to schools during common planning or early release times.

At the school level, leadership teams may also design and implement common professional development, consistent with the district's philosophy that autonomy at the local level should drive decision-making.

Teachers also have a wide range of professional development opportunities from which they can choose. Through an online system called e-portal, teachers sign up for a significant range of offerings, all paid for by the district. Professional development sessions are provided by external organizations, program directors, principals and teachers.

During common planning time, teachers who have attended professional development sessions offered through e-portal are expected to present information back to their grade levels and/or departments to share what they have learned.

Review of data is another key activity during common planning time. Through the TRIAND system, groups of teachers assess the progress of students and consider the need for intervention or accelerated work.

For more information about Aldine's best practices, please visit www.broadprize.org and/or contact Mike Keeney, public information officer, at mkeeney@aldine.k12.tx.us or 281-985-6213.