



CASE STUDY

Austin Independent School District (AISD)

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) has succeeded in developing a model for systematic and systemic social and emotional learning (SEL) for all of its 85,596 students that focuses on explicit skills instruction, SEL integration, and classroom and school climate and culture. AISD's SEL strategic plan drives SEL implementation. The plan has evolved over the years based on the district's experience, assessment data, and changing conditions. The SEL design committee and the SEL advisory committee gave input and approved the original plan in 2011. After the first year these committees merged into one committee whose members continue to gather and review data, revise the strategic plan, and advise the district and SEL leaders on many aspects of SEL implementation. In spring 2014 a cross-section of district stakeholders, working with consultant facilitators, developed a new strategic plan.

SEL Implementation Strategy

AISD has designed SEL implementation around the district's "vertical team" structure. A vertical team consists of a high school and all its feeder schools. In the 2011-12 school year vertical teams applied to imple-



ment SEL, and the district selected the Crockett and Austin High vertical teams. They added Eastside Memorial, McCallum, and Travis vertical teams in 2012-13, and the Akins and part of the LBJ vertical team in 2013-14. Bowie, Reagan, and the rest of the LBJ

vertical team were added in 2014-15. As of January 2015, AISD is serving approximately 85,000 students through its systemic SEL effort and by 2015-16, all 129 schools in AISD will be implementing SEL.

DISTRICT INFORMATION

1111 W 6th Street
Austin, TX 78703
(512) 414-1700
www.austinisd.org

Dr. Paul Cruz,
Superintendent

Enrollment: 84,591

Race/Ethnicity

Black: 8.0%
Latino: 59.5%
White: 25.9%
Other: 6.6%

Other Subgroups

Economically
Disadvantaged: 59.7%
Limited English Proficiency:
27.6%
Special Education: 10.1%

Schools: 129

Elementary: 84
Middle: 18
High: 16
Other: 11

Staff: 12,053

Teachers: 6,369
Other Professionals: 3,162
Support Staff: 2,522

SEL Leadership

Sherrie Raven,
SEL Director

SEL Website

www.austinisd.org/sel

Evidence-based SEL programs are an important part of AISD's implementation strategy. Elementary and middle schools are using explicit instruction materials from [Second Step](#), a [CASEL SElect](#) program. In AISD elementary schools, lessons are generally taught weekly by the classroom teacher and reinforced in all areas of the school. In middle school, lessons are taught during advisory or as part of a core class, such as English or social studies.

High schools are using [School-Connect](#) as their explicit instruction resource. In several high schools, ninth-graders attend the [Methods for Academic and Personal Success \(MAPS\)](#) class to develop SEL skills and study skills to help with the transition to high school. In other high schools, explicit SEL instruction is provided in advisories or core content courses. In addition to explicit SEL skills instruction, AISD's SEL initiative focuses on integrating SEL across academic learning, as well as classroom and school climate and culture. The annual Curriculum Writers Cadre, in which master teachers and content specialists write exemplar lessons, now integrates SEL objectives and instructional methods into all lessons in all subject areas. The AISD Athletics Department is implementing a character education program in collaboration with SEL. All schools in AISD are implementing the Whole Child, Every Child initiative, a collaborative effort across district departments that frames SEL as a district-wide effort, not an isolated program.

Examples of the district's approaches to improve classroom and school climate include:

- Providing professional development to teachers and principals in the use of Peace Areas and Peace Paths in elementary schools.
- The use of evidence-based programs in several schools that address climate and culture, such as Responsive Classroom and Tribes.
- Providing training and guidance so that all AISD schools and the central office have implemented activities to earn the ["No Place for Hate"](#) designation by the Anti-Defamation League. AISD is the largest district in the nation to earn this designation.

AISD SEL Guiding Principles2

Mission: Provide the tools for academic achievement, sound decision-making, positive relationships, and lifelong success.

Vision: Create a culture of caring and personal responsibility.

Each school creates a steering committee to lead its SEL work. The steering committee attends a two-day introductory SEL training provided by the district at the beginning of implementation. Each steering committee designates a campus facilitator who serves as the liaison with the district's SEL Department, which assigns an SEL specialist or coach to each school. The SEL specialist supports implementation on campus by providing professional development, observing lessons, providing feedback on integration of SEL skills and explicit instruction, and developing campus plans with the steering committee.

In spring 2011, AISD joined two other districts in the first cohort of [CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative \(CDI\)](#). Five additional districts joined in spring 2012. As a collaborating district, AISD receives an annual grant of \$250,000 for three years from the NoVo Foundation and the support of two CASEL consultants, who provide technical assistance via phone, email, and in person (up to 50 days per school year). As part of the CDI, AISD leaders have participated in annual national meetings that have helped build district leadership expertise and fostered sharing and collaboration among districts.



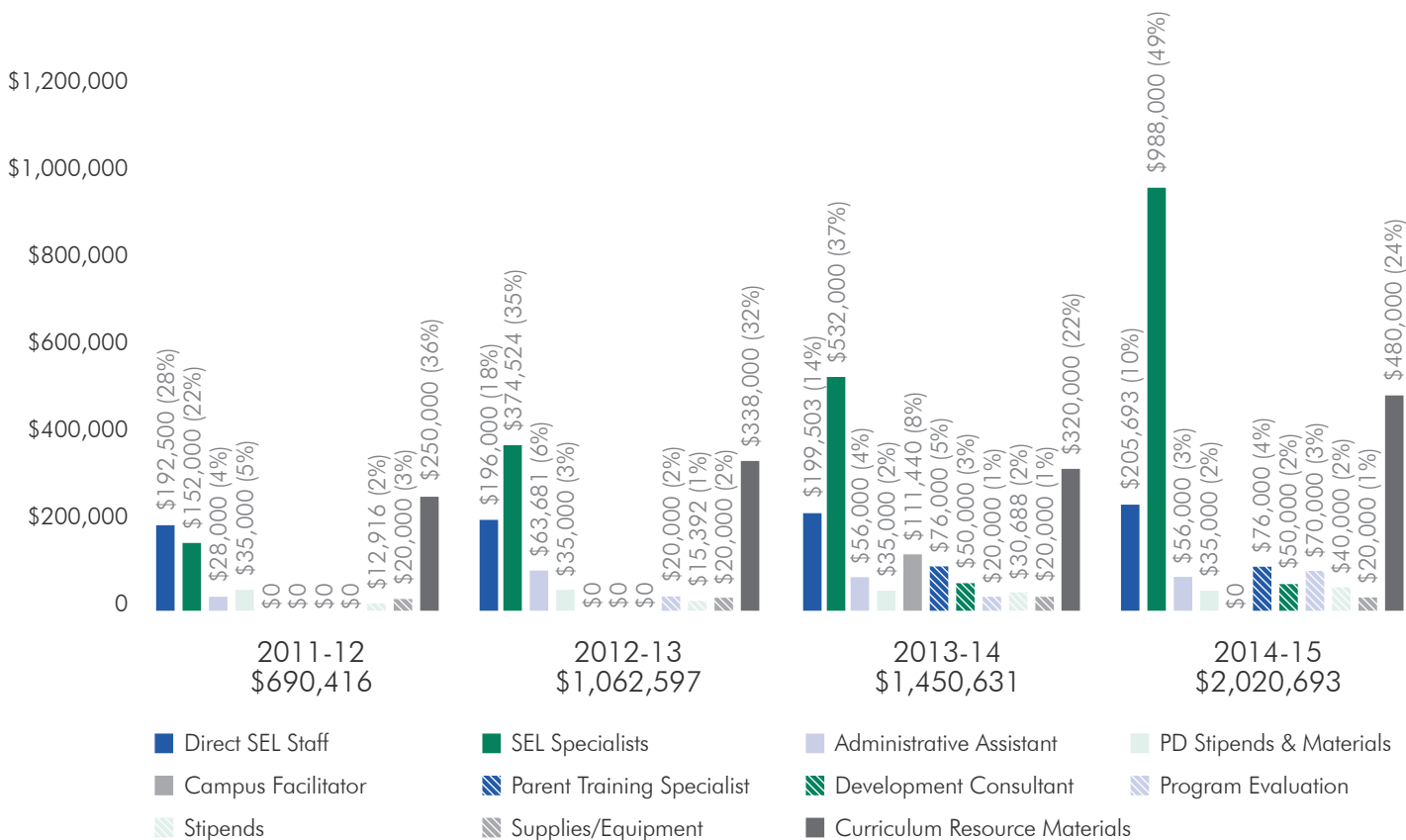
AISD's SEL Department consists of a director, a program specialist, 13 SEL specialists, a parent education specialist, a lead Methods for Academic and Personal Success (MAPS) teacher, and an administrative assis-

tant. The department has a central location, although specialists spend most of their time at school sites. They meet weekly to plan, share information, design professional development for schools, and for their own professional development. In addition, the SEL Department funds a full-time SEL program evaluation specialist in the district's Department of Research and Evaluation.

Until her departure in spring 2014, the former superintendent, Meria Carstarphen, consistently included SEL in her opening address as a top priority for AISD. She also engaged in planning meetings, highlighted SEL in many public addresses, and looked for and discussed SEL during school visits. The current superintendent, Paul Cruz, continues to support SEL in the same manner.

AISD's SEL Department collaborates with many other departments and programs in the district and the city. AISD is a key member of [Austin Ready by 21](#), which builds and connects supports and opportunities so that all youth are prepared for college, work, and life. Through Ready by 21 [Youth Services Mapping](#), students and parents can locate services and supports in their community, including academic enrichment and support, and social, emotional and behavioral health. The AISD departments of SEL, Cultural Proficiency and Inclusiveness, Fine Arts, and Coordinated School Health work together as part of the Whole Child, Every Child initiative. The SEL Department has also provided training to after-school providers from the City of Austin, 21st Century Schools Programs, and Third Base after-school care.

AISD SEL Expenditures 2011-2015



AISD's primary expenditures in the first years of SEL implementation were SEL specialists and direct SEL staff, which combined, account for 54 to 69 percent of the district's annual budget each year. SEL Specialists remain the largest expenditure, even as the district's SEL budget tripled over four years from \$690,416 to a little over \$2 million.

SEL Budget Strategy

In AISD, SEL budget development began with their vision of the SEL experience and outcomes for every student, parent, and staff member at all school sites and across the community. From the beginning of AISD's districtwide SEL initiative, there has been a strong coalition in support of SEL, including the superintendent and other district leaders, community members, and local foundations. All are united in their desire for all students and staff to grow their social and emotional competence and develop a "purposeful, respectful, innovative, dedicated, ethical, and collaborative" culture across the district.

AISD District leaders realized that dedicated SEL personnel would be their biggest expense if they were to achieve the systems change and implementation depth they were seeking. The district began with coaches serving an entire vertical team but have since changed to having each coach support either elementary or secondary campuses in one or two vertical teams. The second largest expense is the cost of evidence-based SEL programs and curriculum resources.

Midway through the first year of implementation, the SEL director developed a six-year budget. District leaders and a group of local donors committed to funding this comprehensive plan to support and sustain systemic and systematic SEL. That commitment has included significant federal funding to support teacher professional development through SEL specialists (also called "SEL Coaches"). This component of the SEL budget grew for the first four years as the number of schools implementing SEL expanded, necessitating additional coaches (see Figure 1). Local donors provided additional funding, which, along with the grant from NoVo Foundation, provided full funding for the first two and one-half years.

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In November 2012, three local philanthropists who initially supported AISD's SEL work issued a \$1 million challenge to other local foundations to support the district's SEL effort in the coming years. This funding challenge yielded \$2.4 million in grants and donations over a three-year period. The fundraising process included an introductory informational luncheon, many communications, site visits, proposals, and meetings.

SEL Director, Sherrie Raven, SEL staff, and CASEL consultants, have made significant efforts to increase district leaders' SEL knowledge and expertise, and this has paid off in many ways. According to Raven, "It has always been important for the senior cabinet to know about SEL and understand what we are doing and why." In December 2012, the district's Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Nicole Conley, attended a CASEL SEL financial sustainability workshop in Chicago with Raven. Dr. Marguerite Roza of Georgetown University's Fiscal Analysis Unit facilitated the workshop during which she made a compelling case for why district leaders need to think early and creatively about ways to sustain SEL long-term. This shared experience increased the CFO's knowledge of SEL and strengthened the relationship between the CFO and the SEL Director. Raven also appreciates AISD's Execu-



tive Director of Innovations and Development, Michelle Wallis, for supporting the district's intensive fund development efforts and donor relations work and for collaborating on large spreadsheets used in planning, budgeting, and sustaining SEL.

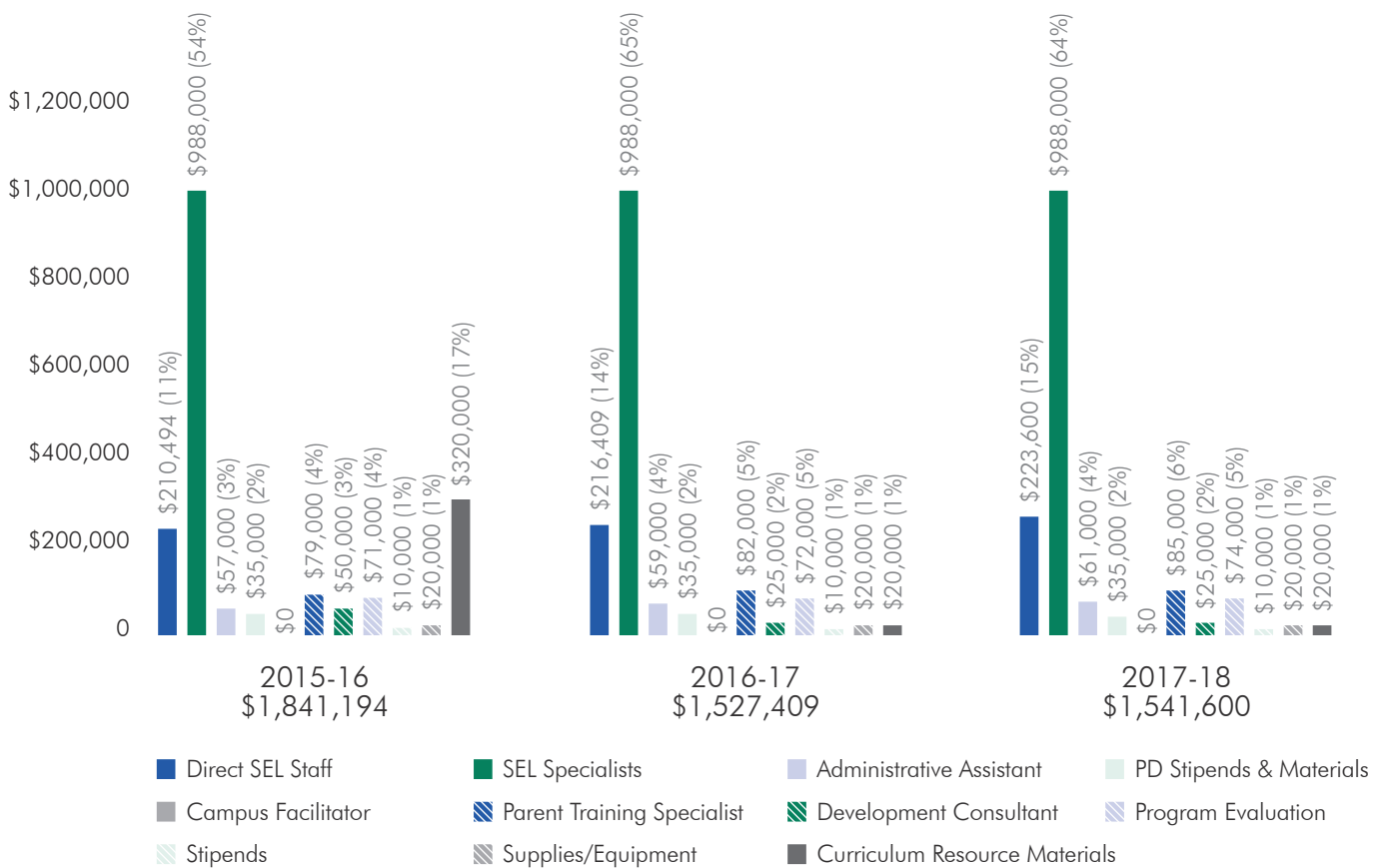
Sustaining SEL

Soon after deciding to implement SEL districtwide, AISD began site-level implementation of evidence-

based programs to provide explicit SEL instruction for students. As schools in the last cohort of vertical teams begin SEL implementation in August 2015, the first cohort of schools will have been implementing for four years. Having gathered SEL implementation data and combining that data with student outcome, school climate, and teacher survey data, district leaders can assess the level of services needed for schools that have been implementing SEL for three or four years. The [AISD Research and Evaluation Department](#) has issued three SEL implementation reports, and leaders and staff are using them to guide AISD's SEL planning.

Teacher, administrator, student, and parent engagement in SEL is key to sustaining SEL in the coming years. As AISD scaled up, the SEL Department developed local SEL standards and an SEL brand that includes communications, posters for all school sites, a website, and flyers and informational materials. Workshops and courses for parents are broadening community awareness about SEL. Efforts targeted at district and school site leaders, community partners, and donors are increasing SEL knowledge and expertise, and building support for sustaining systematic and systemic SEL in Austin.

AISD Projected SEL Expenditures 2016-2018



As all schools are implementing during year 5 (2015-16), the purchase of evidence-based programs is for replacement only. Consequently, AISD's total expenditures drop from \$1.8 million in 2014-15 to \$1.5 million in 2017-18.

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Ensuring that AISD has the necessary financial resources to fund SEL is just part of the district's approach to sustainability. AISD has invested in program evaluation to determine the impact of districtwide SEL on students and adults, as well as school climate and culture. The professional development and coaching models, combined with curriculum and instructional resources, are changing instruction and strengthening SEL constituencies. Consequently, as district leaders plan for sustaining SEL in the coming years, they continue to assess, redefine their goals and actions, and determine what financial resources they will need.

AISD intends to keep the number of SEL specialists constant as they add 16 schools in the summer of 2015. Since personnel is the greatest expenditure, the planned 2015-16 budget reflects a point of inflection as the total cost of implementation falls for the first time. In 2016-17, when all schools will have received their curriculum and instructional resources, the district will have an additional \$300,000 decrease in annual SEL expenditures (see Figure 2 below). However, as AISD continues to expand SEL beyond explicit SEL



skills instruction to integration and improving culture and climate, there will be a need for additional evidence-based curricular materials, instructional resources, and professional development. The current AISD budget model provides for professional development support, but each school will be responsible for the ongoing costs of evidence-based programs for improving culture and climate.

With funding from multiple grants, the \$1 million match challenge, and current district and federal funds, SEL in AISD is fully funded through the 2015-16 school year. The district and local funders are determining how to fill gaps in subsequent years. It is important to note that district, state, and federal funding are not assured, given changes in laws, regulations, and the unpredictability of government funding levels.

Austin has a well-developed SEL fund development strategy. At its core is a fund development team consisting of:

- Three local foundation leaders with a long-term vision and financial commitment to support AISD in providing high-quality SEL to all students.
- District leadership, including the superintendent and cabinet-level staff.
- The SEL Director with support of the SEL Department.
- The Executive Director of the Office of Innovation and Development.

This team is highly capable of defining and communicating the vision and goals for SEL, identifying and engaging potential funders, developing proposals, and following through on donor relations and reporting.

Given the history of the Austin Independent School District in implementing reforms to meet student and community needs and the current status of social and emotional learning, the future of SEL in Austin is bright.

A key approach to engaging potential funders is taking them to visit a school that is implementing SEL. The visit is arranged with the school staff by SEL Director Sherrie Raven. Members of the fund development team participate in the visit and often, time permitting, the superintendent will take part in the visit or meet with prospective donors. A member of the team follows up with the potential donor(s) based on relationships with the funder and the funder's programmatic interest. According to Sherrie Raven, "All funders will

tell you that the site visit makes the biggest difference in their funding decision. Seeing SEL in action, along with meeting teachers, kids, and principals is vital.”

SEL implementation in AISD is a large-scale systems change strategy, providing a significant, and many would say, necessary dosage of SEL for teachers and students. This strategy is beginning to show impact on student outcomes. District leaders have built sustainability into the implementation structure in many ways. AISD’s plan for sustaining SEL focuses on:

- Codifying practice and learning into policy, as all AISD schools will be SEL schools in 2015-16. Goals include ensuring that SEL is part of teaching and learning expectations, that there is ongoing SEL professional development, and that SEL remains an integral part of the district culture.
- Continuing to build a supportive constituency for SEL through high-quality programming, research and evaluation, development of SEL awareness and expertise in the community, and effective communication.
- Recognizing that as SEL matures, there will be a continuous need for high quality professional development and support for teachers and principals.
- Moving toward realization of the district’s vision for SEL while seeking to lower costs as more staff are trained and one-time costs are removed from the budget.
- Continuing to engage the local and national philanthropic community in supporting SEL, while working with supportive district leaders to maximize district funding.

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Resources

1. Source: <http://www.austinisd.org/sel/implementation>
2. SEL Guiding Principles: [Core Values, http://www.austinisd.org/node/4633](http://www.austinisd.org/node/4633)

This case study was conducted by the Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The purposes of the funded project, Identifying Effective Financial Strategies to Sustain Social and Emotional Learning, were to document different districts' approaches to sustaining social and emotional learning (SEL) and to create financial models (scenarios) and planning tools that districts can use to determine how to sustain SEL long-term.