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## Youth Leaders Gather from Across the City



This September, student leaders from Stand Up chapters across the city gathered together at ACC Eastview for a 2 day Youth Leadership Retreat. Stand Up chapters are composed of student leaders who seek to make a difference on their campus by uniting students in order to create positive changes at their schools. The Young Leaders Retreat served as an opportunity for students to meet other Stand Up members and engage in a series of workshops.

Each semester, Stand Up students create an action project to target a problem at their schools and create an effective strategy to deal with this issue and report their findings to campus stakeholders. Throughout the retreat weekend, students learned skills in community organizing, action research, question formulating, interviewing, data analysis and action planning. Students discussed strategies to improve their schools such as how to effectively use the skills they learned together to create a cohesive and structured action plan for the semester. Ben Kramer, a Texas State University professor, joined the Austin Voices staff to show students how to build their research skills.

Although the students worked hard, the group also had fun doing team building activities and ended the weekend asking when they would be able to come together as a group again. Tim Eubanks remarked, "I think it's beneficial for the students to see that there is an organization of adults standing behind them, supporting them to make a positive difference on their campuses." Students got to know one another through cultural sharing, which highlighted each participant's unique life story.

Stand Up students from high school chapters at Lanier, Akins, Eastside Memorial, LBJ/LASA, Garza and Reagan all gathered together for the weekend's excitement. As a result, there is now a team of Stand Up leaders who have been trained on how to collect data and who have started identifying strategies for improving their campus. There is much to look forward to this year as each student, has the possibility, the power and now the skills to truly inspire and create change at their high school campus.



# Skills for Life Middle School Initiative Enters Next Phase

As the 2008-2009 school year starts, the Skills for Life Middle School Initiative is simultaneously winding down and gearing up. As we've reviewed the impact of the past 3 years of work to support AISD middle school students we are pleased to share some of our initiative highlights with you!

Since the start of Skills for Life in spring 2006 with support from the Public Education Network, Austin Voices has leveraged \$2,136,150 to support AISD middle schools in addressing the social and emotional learning needs of our students. Through this effort, we've reached over 30,000 middle school students with the LifeSkills curriculum at their schools either through their advisory periods or through our partner Phoenix House. In order to reach the students, we also trained over 400 AISD teachers to effectively teach the LifeSkills curriculum. Evaluations of our LifeSkills teacher trainings were consistently positive and included such comments as:

**"Great program! I can't wait to use it in the classroom."**

**"You all did a wonderful job and were very professional. I appreciate it. Thank you for allowing me to participate in your program. I learned a lot."**

**"Thanks for the opportunity. The training was very engaging and insightful. I feel encouraged and motivated and would love further information. Can't wait to work more closely with you."**

**"Best teacher training I have been to in 7 years!"**

**"I really enjoyed the training. The trainers were great and made the session fun and engaging."**

In addition, Austin Voices also provided positive youth development training for 475 teachers and youth service providers! These trainings were held in a variety of settings ranging from the United Way conference room to the Martin Middle School cafeteria to the Alamo Drafthouse movie theatre. Several of our trainings featured the youth development specialists and authors of *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators*, the book that 20 teachers at Martin Middle School read over the fall 2007 semester in an Austin Voices-sponsored book circle. The AISD Middle School Office and the Leadership Development Center extended this success of this book circle to create a city-wide middle school training for over 180 middle school educators inviting the authors of *Understanding Youth* back to Austin for a day long training this past July. Truly, Austin Voices' efforts to spark educator and community dialogue about what our middle school students need to be ready for college, work, and life is becoming a community-wide conversation.

Our grant from Public Education Network ended in July 2008, but we are thrilled that the LifeSkills curriculum was included in the Middle Level Education Plan as a recommended part of advisories for all middle schools at the recommendation of AISD staff, parents, and community partners. We consider it a great honor that the Austin and AISD community value the LifeSkills curriculum enough to include it! In order to ensure the success of advisories and the LifeSkills curriculum, the AISD Positive Behavior Supports Department will provide leadership and support for this important part of the Middle Level Education Plan with assistance from Austin Voices. We will partner this year with the PBS Department to support LifeSkills teacher trainings and quality implementation of the curriculum. We are so thankful for the partnership of the school district and our larger community with the Skills for Life Middle School Initiative and look forward to the coming school year.

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Help us show Austin and the rest of the state that young people can really make a difference when given the opportunity.

Please visit [www.austinvoices.org](http://www.austinvoices.org) or call 512-450-1880 for more details about membership levels.

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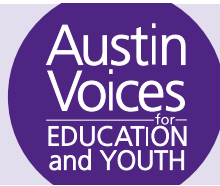
## Austin ISD Superintendent Search

As current Superintendent Dr. Pat Forgione heads into his final year, AISD begins its search for a new superintendent. The Board of Trustees has hired an executive search firm from Wisconsin to assist in the process of recruiting and hiring a superintendent for AISD.

The district conducted twelve community forums in September to gather community input, but unfortunately, turnout was much lower than expected with only a handful of participants at most of the meetings. The district also conducted interviews and focus groups with a number of key stakeholders, including business and foundation leaders, students, and educators.

Along with the public forums the community also had the opportunity to provide input by calling into AISD's telephone hotline or completing an online survey.

In early 2009, finalists will be selected and introduced to the Austin community. The Board's goal is to have a new superintendent hired by spring 2009.



## WELCOMES New Staff Members!

Austin Voices is starting the year of with great excitement, with new and old staff ready to start our new programs and continue with current ones. We would like to introduce the newest members of the Austin Voices staff **Amanda Aguirre, Alice Geaccone, Rose Gabriel and Priscilla Mendoza**. Austin Voices is also pleased to welcome four new Board Members Roger Gordon, Karrie League, Sinead O'Carroll and Melodie Zamora Summersett who are sure to make this year's Board stronger than ever. We welcome new staff and board members and look forward to a successful year.

### **Amanda Aguirre** *Business Intern*

Amanda is a junior at The University of Texas pursuing a dual major in Sociology and Government. She is a previous intern for Austin Voices where she helped create the **School Inequities Project**, identifying disparities in resources in Austin schools in order to enhance opportunities for our community's high school students. She recently completed an internship with the Children's Defense Fund doing community health outreach in SW Houston and continues to work with CDF in the creation of the "In Harms Way" report, documenting the stories of the uninsured. She hopes to continue working with non-profits with a particular interest in community organizing, children's health and educational inequalities.

### **Rose Gabriel** *Director of Operations*

Rose is the director of Operations and Finance who joined Austin Voices in September 2008. Rose directs Austin Voices human resources, performs accounting duties, coordinates daily office functions, and serves as a liaison between the Austin Voices staff and board. She has worked for various Austin nonprofit organizations for the past 15 years which include: Meals on Wheels, Family Eldercare, Austin Groups for the Elderly, Family Connections, and the Texas Association of Partners in Education. Rose received her Bachelors degree in Business Communications from the University of North Texas. She is heavily involved in her daughter's school PTA and is committed to ensuring that students and parents have a voice in the public education system.



**Alice Geaccone**  
*Program Assistant*

Alice is a graduate of Stand Up Garza and has worked previously as a Youth Consultant at Austin Voices, where she designed, produced, and marketed a line of youth-focused merchandise. Alice has also served as an AmeriCorps member at Becker Elementary School and as a GenAustin group leader. Alice was recently recognized as the 2008 Young Woman of Achievement from the YWCA of Austin.

### **Priscilla Mendoza** *Youth Merchandise Consultant*

Priscilla Mendoza is a senior at AYW high school and plans to graduate in December 2008. At her school, Priscilla has served as the Student Council Vice President and spoke for Get-in-Gear Program Fundraisers. Priscilla served as an Environmental Americorps member in 2007 participating in environmental care and raising community awareness on environmental issues. This past summer Priscilla worked in co-planning and facilitating the Texas Center for Service Learning Youth Track. Priscilla is a passionate worker with a creative spirit for organizing and will make a great asset to the Austin Voices Team.

# Austin Voices WELCOMES New Board Members!



**Roger Gordon**  
*Board Member*

Roger is a Senior Associate at Bovey & Bojorquez, LLP. Roger heads up the litigation section at Bovey & Bojorquez, a firm specializing in municipal law. In his job, Roger works on behalf of towns and small cities throughout Central Texas. Roger is a graduate of Baylor Law School and Texas A & M University where he was active in Bonfire and served as student body president. He has been involved as a volunteer and fundraiser for a variety of nonprofit organizations and political campaigns.



**Sinead O'Carroll**  
*Board Member*

Partner, Reeves & Brightwell, LLP. Sinead is a partner and she is a civil litigator representing corporate clients in commercial litigation. Before joining the firm of Reeves & Brightwell, Sinead served as a briefing attorney for Justice Harriet O'Neill of the Texas Supreme Court. Prior to attending law school at the University of Texas, Sinead served as a Teach for America middle school teacher in the Rio Grande Valley and as a kindergarten teacher at Blackshear Elementary in east Austin. She is an active volunteer at her son's elementary school, in addition to serving on the Austin Voices Board.



**Karrie League**  
*Board Member*

Karrie, along with her husband Tim, is the founder of the highly successful Original Alamo Drafthouse movie theatres in Austin. The Drafthouse has received national recognition for its innovative programming and has quickly become one of Austin's favorite icons. In 2008 Tim and Karrie were recognized by Texas Monthly Magazine as two of the "35 People Who Will Shape Our World." A longtime supporter of Austin Voices, Karrie also serves on the Boards of the Austin Film Society and Austin School of Film and as a regular volunteer at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.



**Melodie Zamora**  
*Summerset Board Member*

As an active community and parent volunteer, Melodie has been involved in her three children's schools and a variety of community organizations. She serves on the Board of the National Instruments Foundation and on the Advisory Council for the UT Natural Sciences Center. Melodie has had a long-term interest in creating opportunities for young people, especially in the field of science and technology, since her early career as an engineer at National Instruments.

**GET 'EM  
WHILE  
THEY'RE  
HOT!!**



Great News - the 2008 Austin Voices Student Planners are fresh off the press! For those of who don't already know, the Austin Voices Planner serves as a venue for youth expression and creativity featuring art, quotes, and writing from kids and teens all over Austin. Thanks to our three project leaders Alice Geaccone (Texas State University), Shayla Geaccone (McCallum High School) and Tommy Watson (Garza High School) this year's planners are better than ever.

Over the past three years, the planners have evolved into an organizing tool, bringing youth together, raising awareness, and fostering artistic passion. In the creation of the 2008-2009 planners, the level of student involvement has increased. The student team learned how to use Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, in order to produce a high quality product that did justice to the student artists' creations. Through hours of creative collaboration and the contributions of local AISD students' artwork and quotes, these planners are sure to impress.

**The planners are for sale for \$12.00 at the following stores:**

- Book Woman
- MonkeyWrench Books
- Vulcan Video
- Resistencia Book Store
- Wheatsville Co-op

You may also purchase the planners at our website [www.austinvoices.org](http://www.austinvoices.org) (a small shipping fee will be included) or just drop by the office and bring cold hard cash!

**PLAN WITH  
STYLE!**

We are currently starting the search for new artists for next year's planner, if you know youth (any age) that would be interested in publishing, please email Alice Geaccone at [ageaccone@austinvoices.org](mailto:ageaccone@austinvoices.org).

## Charting a Course for Austin Voices – Presenting our New Agency Goals

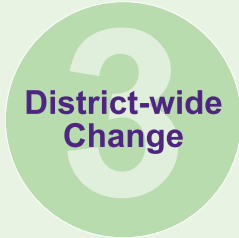
As we wrapped up our fifth year of operations in June, Austin Voices staff, Board, and students came together to reflect on our successes to date and to chart a new course for the next three years. The result of this hard work is a new strategic plan. As a starting point, we set out to define our end goals—what we wanted to impact as a result of our efforts.



By 7/2011, AVEY will have increased the ability of 550 students, parents, and teachers, by at least 25%, to create positive conditions for learning at their schools.



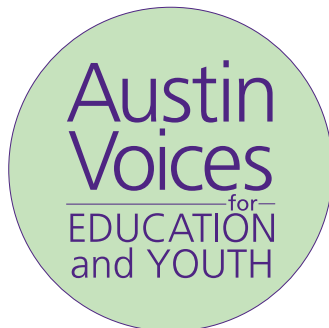
By 7/2011, AVEY will have actively engaged 85 youth leaders, and involved an additional 1,000 youth, in efforts to create positive conditions for learning at their schools.



By 7/2011, AVEY will have engaged 1,000 community members in setting priorities for the new Superintendent and school district. The priorities will be evident in future district policies.

In each of our upcoming newsletters, we will highlight one area of our program work. You will see that Austin Voices is building on its well-known expertise in youth engagement. However, many people may not know that Austin Voices has also led parent and teacher training on middle and high school campuses across Austin. As we move forward, we want to raise the visibility of this work so that our full impact on campuses can be seen. Stay tuned!

*Mobilize.  
Connect.  
Engage.*



[www.austinvoices.org](http://www.austinvoices.org)

## Thank You to Supporters

Austin Voices would like to thank our generous donors and sponsors for all of their incredible support. Your gifts will help us continue our work through the 2008-2009 school year!

### Applied Materials

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### Austin Voices Shout Out to Emma Virján

Emma Virján is an Austin graphic designer and the owner of Virján Design. She has very generously donated her time and design expertise to create beautiful Austin Voices logos and materials. You can check out her work at [www.virjandesign.com](http://www.virjandesign.com) and on our website. Emma has also just published a children's book, *Nacho the Party Puppy*, available in stores now ([www.nachothedog.com](http://www.nachothedog.com)). You rock, Emma!

### Austin Voices Shout Out to Joe Maloney

Joe is a local graphic designer who works for the Department of Aging and Disability and is a community volunteer. He is a close friend of Austin Voices and he spent the summer instructing us on how to design and lay out our new student planner in a digital format. Joe, we are grateful for your generosity and dedication to this project. We couldn't have done it without you!

### Austin Voices Shout Out to Landon Schultz and Bluebonnet Hills Christian Church

Landon Schultz is a minister at Bluebonnet Hills Church and a community activist. Landon and Bluebonnet Hills Church provided ten scholarships for Austin Voices students and staff to attend the National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation during the first weekend of October. Thanks, Landon, for your generosity and kindness! We are excited to use what we learned to improve Austin's schools!

# Executive Director Story



**Amy Averett**  
Executive Director

Welcome to the new school year! It's a cliché, but I have to say it...it seems like only yesterday that my son Walter was on the cover of our 2007 Back to School newsletter as he started Kindergarten at Maplewood Elementary. Now, he's back in his seat as a first grader in the fabulous Mrs. Martinez's class.

Since our last newsletter in June, we have gone through a number of exciting changes at Austin Voices. New staff members have joined our ranks as other staff members have moved on to other opportunities. We've added several dynamic new Board members, who have brought in additional energy and leadership. We have wrapped up a major 3-year initiative, the Skills for Life Middle School program. And we have created a new strategic plan for the next three years.

At the same time that Austin Voices has transitioned, Austin ISD is preparing for one of the biggest changes it has seen in the past 10 years. The Board of Trustees has started the process of recruiting and selecting a new Superintendent, to take the reigns from Dr. Forgione as he retires in the spring.

The job description that has been posted on the AISD website shows the great complexity of this job. Some of the key phrases that jumped out to me were "increase academic accountability", "motivating staff", "embracing and promoting diversity", "fiscal responsibility", "data-driven decision making", "developing an ethic of caring", "collaborative management style", "inspiring trust", "ability to reach out" and finally "relentless advocate for all students".

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that we are not going to get all of these qualities in one Superintendent. And, while these qualities demonstrate the values of our community, they are not necessarily the qualities on which the success of the Superintendent will be measured.

This is a critical time for the community to take responsibility for the success of our schools. The AISD Trustees need to hear clearly about citizens' priorities for the district and for our new leader. I strongly urge you to contact your representative on the school board to make your priorities known.

*Amy Averett*

Austin  
Voices  
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and YOUTH

## PRODUCTION

### Editor

Amy Averett



### Contributing Writers

Amy Averett

Tim Eubanks

Daniel Garza

Sarah Stone

Anne Webb



### Distribution

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