Campaign for Equity

Austin Voices for Education and Youth

FEBRUARY-MAY 2020
Over recent months, Austin has engaged in an intense conversation about the future of our public schools. Austin ISD has proposed school closures and consolidations in order to achieve cost savings that would allow for more funding going to campus programming. Many Austinites have questioned the benefits of the plan when weighed against the costs to the affected communities and families.

At the heart of the conversation has been the term “equity.” Does the plan guarantee that ALL students, no matter their context, need or zip code, receive the education that they need to fully participate, prosper and succeed as adults in the 21st Century?

Any plan for the future of education in Austin also needs to seriously consider the many pressures our families and communities experience as Austin grows. These include housing affordability, homelessness, access to resources, transportation, earning a living wage, and immigration. A plan that limits rather than increases access to education adds yet more pressure.

We believe that Austin can do better. This is an important crossroads moment that will affect our city for generations to come. We can either double down on a vision of education that reduces equity and diminishes our commitment to public schools for all, OR we can believe in a future that grows our school district and does not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Austin Voices and many others think the answer is to put equity at the center of any conversation about the future of our public schools. We believe that there are community-based ideas, solutions and resources that can provide great schools in every community, with each and every child receiving the education they need to succeed. However, any process going forward needs to recognize that the voices from the communities most affected by current planning have not been sufficiently included in the conversation.

“We believe that in the United States of America, every child should have access to a world class pre-K through 12 system of education in their neighborhood and in safe walking distance of their home. And if not, then we have to ask, “Why not?” And we know that America ranks 19th amongst countries around the world in education. But when you take out poverty, America ranks number two, which means that we know how to educate children. It’s just a particular group of children that we refuse to educate.”

-Jitu Brown (Journey for Justice Alliance)
Campaign for Equity
Developing a vision of growth and equity for Austin’s public schools

**OUR GOAL**
- Create a “Vision for Growth and Equity” plan to present to AISD by May, 2020 that will focus on growing AISD’s schools, supporting excellence across all AISD campuses, and highlighting equity gaps and opportunities across Austin’s “Crescent of Opportunity.”

**OUR PROCESS**
- Work with community partners to host a series of activities and actions that increase community participation and voice
- Highlight existing campus and community planning efforts, and help new ideas grow

**OUR BELIEFS**
- Schools should be imagined and planned by those who use them everyday, including students, teachers, staff, parent, and community partners
- Every community and every student deserves high-quality schools in their neighborhood, without barriers of transportation or access.
- Each school must have equitable financial, material and programmatic resources adequate to provide each student the opportunity to learn to the highest standards
- Each student must be provided powerful curricula through instructional and support systems that meet their individual needs
- Sustainable Community Schools that use coordinated partnerships to reduce barriers to learning, improve conditions for learning, and increase opportunities for enrichment have proven themselves locally and nationally as an equitable and effective.
- Austin is a rapidly expanding city, and public schools should be growing in enrollment.
- Because charter schools are not locally accountable, are not obligated to educate all children, and have no obligation to stay open in a community, they should not be seen as a substitute for the obligation of public schools to provide high-quality Pre-K-12 education in every community in Austin.

**FOCUSING ON FIVE COMMUNITY CLUSTERS**
- Schools and neighborhoods share vital connections, and great schools help sustain strong neighborhoods. In order for children to be successful in schools, families need access to basic resources (housing, healthcare, safety, workforce opportunities, recreation spaces and programs, fresh food, public services, and transportation.)
- A plan for educational equity also looks at equitable distribution of resources across five clusters of communities: North Austin, Northeast Austin, Central East Austin, Montopolis/Dove Springs and South Austin.
- Current planning leaves areas of Austin with concentrations of minority and low-income students without neighborhood schools, as well as barriers of transportation and access to resources.
OUR ACTIONS

Campus and Community Equity Survey and Bus Tour, building on past research and mapping equity gaps across five clusters of communities in Austin.

“Get on the Bus” Transportation Equity Survey/Campaign, aiming to increase safety, eliminate transportation barriers and reduce distances children walk to school.

Town Hall Meetings (both virtual and in-person) discussing equity concerns and opportunities with local and national leaders.

Youth Equity Summit in collaboration with project partners, bringing student voice to the forefront of envisioning the future.

Community-based campus planning supported at schools threatened with closure or consolidation, with the goal of producing positive alternatives to district proposals.

Community partner meetings and work sessions, aimed at addressing campus and community gaps and inequities.

Special Events focused on educational equity, including Stand Up for Schools (March 2), Unity Walk/Kids Fest (April 25) and other events TBA.

Parent organizing through AVEY’s Family Resource Centers, including workshops and parents producing video blogs.

Development of a vision for increasing equity across Austin in a context of growth through strong, sustainable community schools.

TIMELINE

FEBRUARY

- Finalize development of equity survey
- Meet with community and campus leaders
- First community partner work session
- Town Hall Meetings begin

MARCH

- “Get on the Bus” campaign begins
- Community partner planning continues
- Equity Survey and Bus Tour project begin
- Stand Up for Schools event
- Youth Equity Summit

APRIL

- Equity surveys and transportation campaign continue
- Unity Walk/Kids Fest event
- Project team drafts proposals at city-wide work session

MAY

- A vision for increasing equity is presented to community stakeholders and AISD Trustees

MORE ABOUT AUSTIN VOICES

For 17 years, Austin Voices has helped schools and communities work together to improve educational outcomes for ALL children. AVEY serves thousands of families annually in its five roles: Practitioner, Trainer, Advocate, Collaborator and Catalyst. Using the framework of Community Schools as an umbrella for school improvement strategies, AVEY works with campuses to reduce barriers, improve conditions and increase equity.

In March, 2020, Austin Voices is launching the “Campaign for the Future” to sustain our work in 2020 and beyond. To find out more, go to: austinvoices.org/campaignforthefuture

Our Equity Campaign Partners:

Austin Voices is partnering on this campaign with community groups, faith-based coalitions, higher ed partners, and grassroots nonprofits, including Child Inc, River City Youth Foundation, AAYHF, and others.