



DATE: October 2026

TITLE: Academics and Administrative Services

TYPE: Information

PRESENTER(S): Katie Baskin, Executive Director of Academics and Administrative Services

BACKGROUND:

The Office of Teaching and Learning oversees curriculum, instruction, staff development, and Federal Title programs for the district.

The Human Resources Office is responsible for employee recruitment and orientation, contract negotiations for all bargaining units, employee relations, student and employee data practices, and staffing with building/program administrators.

Support and resources to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment

- **Teacher Mentorship:** During September, Year 1 teachers met in person to participate in a check-in, review evaluation processes, and receive an introduction to EduClimber presented by Corey Haugen. Year 2 and Year 3 teachers met jointly for a check-in, a review of evaluation processes, and a discussion of this year's mentorship program. During the meeting, participants also provided feedback on topics they would like to explore throughout the year. A new component of this year's programming for all cohorts will be a teacher panel featuring experienced educators. This opportunity will allow participants to ask questions, gain practical insights, and learn from veteran teachers' classroom experiences.
- **Strengths Development:** Principals and School Leadership Teams will continue their strengths-based leadership development by examining how individual and team talents can be intentionally applied to leadership responsibilities, decision-making, and collaboration. Through structured reflection and discussion, teams are identifying ways to leverage their collective strengths to improve communication, enhance team effectiveness, and better support staff and students. This work is helping build greater self-awareness, trust, and leadership capacity across our schools while reinforcing the district's commitment to a positive and collaborative culture.
- **Principal Professional Development:** Principal professional development focused on examining attendance data and exploring how building leadership teams can effectively analyze data, identify root causes, and mobilize the school community to improve student attendance. The session continued with EduClimber professional learning, where principals explored the creation of custom data walls and reviewed attendance metrics, including the distinction between overall attendance percentage and consistent attendance. These discussions highlighted the importance of using multiple measures to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student attendance patterns. We concluded the professional development session with reflection on our back-to-school professional learning. Principals discussed what is working well, identified adjustments that may be needed, and highlighted key information that should be communicated moving forward to support successful implementation across schools.
- **K-4 Grading and Reporting:** K-4 grading and reporting planning continues to progress as grade-level teams refine the standards that will be communicated to students and families. After reviewing and confirming aligned essential standards, teams are now piloting common assessments and proficiency rubrics to strengthen consistency in grading practices and ensure student achievement is measured and reported in a clear, meaningful, and equitable manner.

- **Family and Community Engagement:**
 - Talking Points continues to be widely utilized across the district. Equity coordinator, Kristi Beckman, and the success coaches have been sharing information about this tool at parent meetings. A column about TalkingPoints has been submitted to the Austin Daily Herald to help increase community awareness about this tool and help families utilize it effectively. We are bringing together a committee through our MTSS teams to review and refine our TalkingPoints implementation process.
 - The Teaching & Learning team continues to collaborate with the enrollment office, counseling staff, and ML leadership to align our onboarding experience for newcomers and their caregivers.
 - Check & Connect is an evidence-based intervention that links students with caring and supportive adults. Success Coaches and Austin Aspires Navigators have been trained and will begin mentoring students this fall. Family Engagement Specialist Varinh VanVugt has worked closely with Information Services to design data monitoring tools in EduClimber so that we can track student growth through this intervention.
 - Success Coaches have worked closely with health services staff to help communicate with families about immunization requirements and provide connections to families in need of local providers to meet vaccination requirements.
 - Success Coaches have been busy scheduling interpreted conferences for grades K-6, which will be held in October and November. We have continued to refine and improve Bookings as a tool for conference scheduling, which is a tool included in our Microsoft Office suite. Teachers at the secondary level have five scheduled progress update windows scheduled throughout the year in lieu of scheduled conferences. During the first scheduled progress update window, teachers have been reaching out to families utilizing TalkingPoints and Parent Portal and requesting language support from success coaches to ensure families are informed about student progress.
 - The Native American Parent Advisory Committee has an upcoming event. They will host a free, public film screening of the PBS documentary, "Medicine Ball" in November. More details to follow.

Packer Profile for all learners

- **Grow Your Own:**
 - The Grow Your Own program started the school year with its first Future Teacher Club meeting and a field trip. Students had the opportunity to attend the Fall Drive-In hosted by the South Central Uniserve, where they connected with and learned alongside current educators. Additional college visits, guest speakers, and field experiences are being planned throughout the year to further support students' interest in the teaching profession. This group continues to demonstrate a high level of engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment as they explore future careers in education.
 - The three students selected to receive Grow Your Own (GYO) scholarships successfully began their college coursework this fall and are off to a strong start in their educational journeys.
 - Colleen Owens and Andrea Malo facilitated the Education Pathway at Career Quest, engaging students from across Southern Minnesota in a variety of interactive activities designed to explore careers in education. Students participated in hands-on learning experiences, including math activities, read-aloud sessions, teacher trivia, classroom scenarios, and other activities that highlighted the diverse skills and opportunities within the teaching profession. The event provided students with meaningful exposure to a wide variety of careers.
- **Packer Profile Implementation:**
 - The Packer Profile is becoming more visible in our buildings, and students are engaging more closely with the content and opportunities provided. Signage throughout the district encourages conversations about careers even with our youngest learners at the CLC.
 - At Austin High School/Austin Online Academy/Alternative Learning Center students completed their first lesson of the year on September 30th. Communication was shared with families early in the week, allowing them to understand what is coming for their student. Additionally, communication will be shared following the lesson including ways to engage in conversation with students connected to exploring their futures.

- Students in the 9th Grade Seminar Course had their first speaker on September 30th. Jane Bumgarner presented to students about career pathways. This directly connects to their seminar course and the Packer Profile initiative.
- Ellis Middle School has been working to determine the best way to highlight the Packer Profile during 7th and 8th grade. Career exploration will be the main vehicle for students while integrating the connections across the curriculum. We are excited to explore further and create a plan that will support all learners.
- Integration Programming:
 - Digital Futures Team: Kristi Beckman and several of the success coaches will be participating in the Digital Futures team. As AI tools evolve and are increasingly being utilized to help support language access for families, it is important to ensure that diverse voices in the community are heard about the effectiveness of these tools, which may be much more accurate and reliable in some languages than others.
 - Cultural Competence: The first session of the Cultural Competence CEU training for staff re-licensure was offered on October 3rd. A second session will be held on January 30th.

District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners

- Tier 1 Instruction:
 - Secondary teachers continue to deepen their understanding and implementation of high impact teaching strategies, with a particular focus on vocabulary instruction. Professional learning has centered on evidence-based word-learning practices, including the Frayer Model, new word routines, and morphology instruction.
 - Elementary teachers are continuing their work with high impact teaching strategies as a continuation of their literacy learning. The focus in September was worked examples and multiple exposures. This focus supports teachers in helping students build understanding through guided models and repeated opportunities to engage with essential concepts over time.
- READ Act Implementation:
 - The READ Act requires us to do more than identify students who are struggling readers. We need to understand what is contributing to a student's reading difficulty so we can provide instruction and intervention that addresses their specific needs. STAR Reading helps us identify who may be struggling. CAPTI helps us understand why.
 - CAPTI Read Basix provides information about specific components of reading, including word recognition and decoding, morphology, vocabulary, reading efficiency, sentence processing, and reading comprehension. Students in grades 4–12 who are required to complete CAPTI are currently testing or will begin the assessment process soon. CAPTI results, along with other student data, will help us identify specific areas of need and determine appropriate evidence-based instruction and intervention.
 - Another important component of the READ Act is ensuring that educators have the knowledge and skills needed to support students in becoming proficient readers. As part of our continued professional development in evidence-based reading instruction, newly hired paraeducators will complete four READ Act training modules through Infinitec during upcoming professional development days.
- EL Program Review:
 - The English Learner (EL) Department recently completed the annual distribution of federally required Parent Notification letters to all current and newly enrolled EL families across the district. These letters provide families with information about their child's performance on the most recent English language proficiency assessment, WIDA ACCESS, as well as details regarding the English Language Development (ELD) services their child receives at school. This year, with the support of our Success Coaches, Kristi Beckman, and Ryan Mayers, the department expanded family accessibility by creating audio recordings that explain the information contained in the Parent Notification letters. Using QR codes included with the mailing, families can access these explanations in their home language. Audio translations were provided in French, Karen, Karenni, and Spanish. This initiative represents an important step toward

strengthening communication with multilingual families and making critical educational information more accessible.

- **Math Program Review:** Mathematics curriculum work continues across all grade levels as the district prepares for the implementation of new mathematics standards and the selection of future curriculum resources.
 - At the elementary level, teachers have begun unpacking standards and benchmarks to develop a deeper understanding of what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level. This work is helping educators identify key learning targets, clarify expectations, and ensure instructional alignment across classrooms.
 - Secondary teachers are focusing on the Standards for Mathematical Practice and examining how students should engage with and learn mathematics. In addition, they have begun the curriculum review process, exploring instructional resources and programs that align with both the new standards and best practices in mathematics instruction. Together, these efforts are building a strong foundation for future curriculum decisions and high-quality mathematics teaching and learning across the district.
- **GT Program Review:**
 - Gifted and Talented teachers met in September to review fall family communication letters, discuss strategies for engaging families during parent-teacher conferences, and continue their work examining student identification practices. These conversations focused on strengthening partnerships with families and ensuring equitable access to gifted programming.
 - In addition, GT teachers are collaborating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to advance their curriculum alignment efforts. Through this ongoing work, teachers are reviewing curriculum resources, aligning learning experiences across grade levels, and ensuring that programming continues to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted learners.
- **District Media Center:** Hundreds of new books and materials for students have been shelved into libraries across the district. We are working on creating a consistent vision for library spaces to help students as they transition as well. We continue our work of making books and materials more visible for students and easy to find based on interest, curiosity, and grade levels to help students fall in love with reading.

Excellence in Resource Management

- **Curriculum Review:**
 - New curriculum and equipment are being implemented across our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs this fall. While a few purchases are still being delivered and installed, the overall transition has been positive. These new resources are enhancing student engagement through hands-on learning experiences and providing stronger connections between classroom learning and future career pathways.
 - We have begun an initial review of secondary mathematics curriculum resources to assess their alignment with instructional goals, standards, and student learning needs. Selected mathematics programs may be piloted later this fall to inform future curriculum decisions and support continuous improvement in mathematics instruction.
- **Human Resources Department:** Kelly Education continues to actively recruit substitute teachers and work to fill as many open substitute positions as possible. Our goal is to build a strong pool of qualified substitutes who can help meet the needs of our schools and provide consistent coverage when staff members are absent. Red Rover Hiring went live on Monday, September 17th. While we are still learning the best ways to utilize the system, we have already identified many great and efficient features within the program. These tools should help streamline our hiring process, save time, and allow us to more effectively identify and hire the best candidates possible.

