AUSTIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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DATE: November 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: Year 1 teachers and certified staff met online during the month of October to review effective parent communication strategies, including the use of various communication tools and parent-teacher conferences. Year 2 teachers met in person to review CEU and licensure requirements and procedures. They also discussed effective parent communication strategies. Year 3 teachers met in person to discuss benefits enrollment and CEU/licensure requirements. They also began learning about strategies to support students who have experienced trauma and ways to better meet their needs in the classroom.
- Strengths Development: School leadership teams are deepening their Strengths-based leadership work this month through a focus on leveraging differences and building stronger partnerships. Team members are examining how their CliftonStrengths shape workplace behaviors, how complementary talents can support shared work, and how greater understanding can prevent misunderstandings. Leaders will apply this learning within staff teams and consider ways to help students recognize and contribute their individual strengths during collaborative work.
- Principal Professional Development: Principal learning this month focused on Mathematics Teaching Practices. Principals explored the practices of Establishing Mathematics Goals to Focus Learning and Posing Purposeful Questions. They examined what these practices are, what they should look like in the classroom, and identified future learning needs for both them and teachers to support effective implementation. Principals also spent time reviewing ways they currently support, and could further strengthen, the implementation of the Packer Profile across all grade levels. Principals discussed evaluation scenarios and explored coaching strategies to support staff growth and development, using scenarios to ground their discussion.
- K-4 Grading and Reporting: On the November 3 professional development day, K–4 pilot teachers and grade-level leaders continued the district's grading and reporting work through collaborative calibration. Using completed student assessments, teams scored student work with common rubrics and examined the consistency of scoring across classrooms. This process provided an opportunity to identify areas needing greater clarity and to revise rubrics and assessment tasks as needed. The work represents another important step toward creating clear and consistent grading and reporting practices across our elementary schools.
- Human Resources Department: Sue (Talent acquisition, HR Survey, Practices documentation)
- Family and Community Engagement:

- TalkingPoints continues to be utilized extensively as a two-way communication tool throughout the district. As part of the MTSS family engagement process, a subcommittee has begun putting together helpful tools and guidelines for teachers using TalkingPoints. We are beginning to review mid-year implementation data to identify successes and areas for growth in our implementation of this communication system. Kristi Beckman and Corey Haugen will present information about our digital tools for school success at a family engagement event that Austin Aspires is hosting on November 4th. Topics will include Parent Portal, TalkingPoints, and healthy screen time habits. Kristi Beckman and Amy Thuesen will present a workshop on "AI Tools for Clarity in Communication" to District Leadership Team members to support the implementation of digital communication tools. The goal of the session is to empower school leaders to communicate clearly and effectively with families. We will be sharing tools in Microsoft Copilot and TalkingPoints that can help educators share information in plain language, which can help improve communication with all members of our community, especially those who rely on translations to understand.
- McKinney Vento Programs: Varinh continues to support our families experiencing homelessness with resource connections. She attended a training at MDE this month to learn more about how we can partner with other community providers and learn from other districts about best practices for supporting students in transition.

Packer Profile for all learners

- Grow Your Own: Students are actively engaged in a variety of learning opportunities. Colleen Owens is teaching Introduction to Education as a concurrent enrollment course at the high school, helping students explore the teaching profession and develop an understanding of what it means to be an educator. As part of the coursework, students have begun completing the required 10 hours of classroom observation. Membership in the Grow Your Own (GYO) Future Teacher Program remains strong. Recently, students participated in a field trip to the Twin Cities to learn more about charter schools, including a visit to Avalon School. College visits are currently being planned to further support students' exploration of careers in education.
- Packer Profile Implementation: Recently, we brought together external partners to continue strengthening the Packer Profile and ensure our work reflects the skills and attributes students will need beyond our schools. The conversation provided an important opportunity to hear perspectives from community partners and consider how we can create stronger connections between students' learning experiences and their future pathways. These partnerships are an important part of making the Packer Profile meaningful, relevant, and connected to the broader Austin community. We look forward to continuing to engage our partners as this work develops.
- Integration Programming:
  - Check & Connect: Kristi and Varinh have presented the Check & Connect referral process to district MTSS teams, and we're excited to actively begin the implementation of this intervention. Varinh has begun to receive Check & Connect mentorship referrals from building MTSS teams. Austin Aspires Navigators will be partnering with us to mentor students, and they have also been trained and will use the same referral and tracking process as the success coaches. We have established our tracking process in eduCLIMBER and look forward to gathering data about the success of this intervention as we begin to work with students.
  - Native American Parent Advisory Committee (NAPAC): Achievement & Integration will be partnering with NAPAC to host a screening of the PBS film, "Medicine Ball" at the Paramount Theatre on November 12th. Pizza will be served at 6:00 PM and the film screening will begin at 6:30 PM. Tickets to the event are free and can be reserved through the Paramount website. Medicine Ball follows two Native college athletes as they navigate basketball and college life at the University of Minnesota—Morris, located on a former Native boarding school site. Their journeys reveal how basketball became a source of resilience, hope, and cultural pride in Native communities. All are welcome!

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

- MTSS Implementation: Katie/Andrea/Michelle (District MTSS Team, Linked Teams)
  - Tier 1 Instruction: During October professional development, secondary principals facilitated learning that reinforced previous professional development on goal setting, structured lessons, explicit

instruction, and multiple exposures. They also revisited key vocabulary routines, including the New Word Routine, Morphology Routine, and Frayer Model. Principals shared the instructional look-fors that should be evident in classrooms to support high-quality teaching and student learning. These discussions focused on how consistent implementation of these practices can strengthen student engagement, comprehension, and academic achievement.

- READ Act Implementation: Our first cohort of secondary educators is approximately one-third of the way through its structured literacy training. Their first one-hour live session is scheduled for November 3. The district continues to refine Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading interventions and strengthen the use of intervention and progress-monitoring data to guide instructional decisions within our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Administrators, instructional coaches, and other district educators who teach reading have participated in professional development through the Regional Literacy Network. This learning supports the implementation of comprehensive literacy reform outlined in the Minnesota READ Act.
- EL Program Review: This year, the EL Department launched participation in Project RESPECT, a year-long professional learning program developed by WIDA, the organization that provides Minnesota's English language development standards, assessments, and instructional resources for multilingual learners. Project RESPECT is designed to strengthen educators' knowledge and skills in supporting students who are learning English while also achieving success in grade-level academic content. As part of the program, our EL teachers work collaboratively as a district team while also engaging with their building-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to reflect on their learning, share instructional practices, and apply new strategies to support multilingual learners. With support from the Minnesota Department of Education and WIDA, our EL teachers are engaging in professional learning focused on culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, effective language and literacy practices, and strategies that increase student engagement and achievement. The program also helps educators strengthen family partnerships and build their confidence in supporting multilingual learners. Through this work, teachers are gaining practical tools and research-based strategies that support the district's commitment to providing a safe, welcoming, and high-quality learning environment where all students can succeed.
- Math Program Review: The Math Program Review continues to advance across the district with a strong focus on understanding the new mathematics standards and student mathematical practices. At the elementary level, teachers are engaged in the process of unpacking standards and deepening their understanding of how the student mathematical practices support learning and instruction. Secondary teachers are reviewing curriculum resources and materials to ensure alignment with the new standards and practices. Across all grade levels, the emphasis has been on building a shared understanding of expectations for student learning and creating greater coherence in mathematics instruction from kindergarten through high school.
- GT Program Review: The GT Program Review work continues to move forward as we refine and align services across the district. Recent efforts have focused on identifying and adding acceleration interventions within eduCLIMBER to better document, monitor, and support advanced learning opportunities for students. In addition, PLC teams will continue to use designated collaboration time to review program components, ensure alignment across grade levels, and strengthen consistency in the identification, programming, and support of gifted and talented learners. This ongoing work will help create a more cohesive and data-informed approach to meeting the needs of advanced learners throughout the district.
- District Media Center: As November approaches, our library team is creating engaging book displays that connect reading to students' lives. At the elementary level, exploring themes of gratitude, kindness, and reflection through literature. Across the district, we are also featuring collections and displays that celebrate Native American Heritage, providing students with opportunities to learn about and appreciate the rich cultures, histories, perspectives, and contributions of Indigenous peoples. At the secondary level, students are filling our library spaces for BARR days to pause, recharge, and connect. Along with exploring new books and resources, they are enjoying opportunities to use VR headsets, 3D pens, and other technologies while also embracing opportunities to unplug through board games, puzzles, and collaborative activities. Across all APS libraries, fostering a culture of reading throughout the district through regular library visits, thoughtfully curated collections, and expanded opportunities for student choice. By helping students discover books that reflect their interests and experiences, we are supporting literacy growth, encouraging lifelong reading habits, and ensuring that every student has access to engaging, meaningful, and inclusive reading opportunities.

Excellence in Resource Management

- Curriculum Review: The secondary mathematics curriculum review is currently in the initial evaluation phase. Review teams are examining several mathematics programs, including Savvas enVision, Amplify Desmos Math, Imagine Math, McGraw Hill Reveal Math, and Cengage Big Ideas Math. Throughout the review process, teachers are analyzing alignment to Minnesota's new mathematics standards and student mathematical practices, while also considering instructional quality, student engagement, assessment tools, intervention supports, and usability for teachers. The goal is to identify a comprehensive, standards-aligned curriculum that provides a coherent learning experience for students and supports strong mathematics instruction across grade levels.