

The Austin Blueprint: To Leave No Child Behind
The Austin Independent School District
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In February 2002, Austin ISD Superintendent Dr. Pat Forgione, at the direction of the Board of Trustees, developed a comprehensive, systematic, and aggressive intervention plan that has improved student achievement in six low performing elementary and middle schools. This initiative, *The Austin Blueprint: To Leave No Child Behind*, involves in-depth, intensive reform designed to close the achievement gap among student groups.

The components of the Austin Blueprint are:

- Guaranteed improved student achievement to meet rigorous state standards.
- More time for Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Math every day for every child.
- Required, rigorous, and proven curricula in Mathematics, Reading and Writing.
- Every new teacher with at least two years' experience. All teachers certified in the subjects they are teaching.
- Required, targeted training – including 10 additional days – and on-going support for teachers.
- Strong, experienced principals under the direction of a Master Principal.
- Frequent assessment of students and immediate interventions.
- Enhanced technology to monitor and improve student achievement.
- Partnerships with parents and community to assure student success.
- Signed compacts with principals, teachers, parents, and students.

Lessons we think we learned during the past two and a half years of Blueprint implementation include:

- The positive impact of implementing consistent systems, structures, and supports through:
 - Curriculum aligned to state standards
 - Focused instruction with instructional planning guides
 - Explicit use of time for core instruction
 - Intensive, targeted training
 - Frequent assessment and immediate interventions
 - Non-negotiables for principals, teachers, and students
 - Partnerships with parents and community
- The power of synergy: changing the paradigm of principals working in isolation to that of principals working as a team with a focused leader in a nested learning community

As we design Phase Two of the Austin Blueprint, we are faced with these challenging questions.

1. How can we best use research to determine what has been most effective in the improvement of student achievement? What kinds of data would help us understand what's most effective and why?
2. Are our hypotheses based on the first round of the Blueprint provable based on data? Do we have quantitative proof to back up our qualitative conclusions?

3. How do we compare results of Blueprint intervention against the District's initiatives in other similar schools to judge Blueprint effectiveness? What would have happened in these four schools without the Blueprint initiative?
4. How can research help us understand the fidelity of the implementation and the variability in outcomes based on that fidelity?
5. How do you tie outcome data to the contextual variables of schools in order to understand what is most effective in raising student achievement?
6. Given budgetary limits, how do we determine which of the components are most important to replicate in other under-performing schools?
7. How can we put into place a more powerful research method to enable us to have more confidence in the implications and effectiveness of our initiative?

Assistance in helping us utilize research to inform our policy and practice and to guide our future restructuring efforts is greatly appreciated.

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