Retaining Families and Strengthening Schools in Central Austin

Recommendations to the Joint Subcommittees of the Austin City Council, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees and Travis County Commissioner's Court for retaining families in Central Austin and keeping public schools strong

The School and Family Work Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the culmination of a year-long effort by members of the School and Family Work Group, which was created by the Joint Subcommittees of the Austin City Council, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees and Travis County Commissioner's Court (JSC) in January 2013 to "generate policy recommendations aimed at supporting neighborhood schools and retaining families with children in the central city." Pursuant to its charge, the Work Group examined existing reports and materials, gathered insights from subject matter experts within the City of Austin and AISD, and conducted substantial additional research. While the Work Group's charge was specifically targeted to Central Austin, many of its proposed policies may have wider application throughout Austin and Travis County.

This report contains numerous recommendations designed to attract and retain families in Austin and strengthen our public schools. Of these, the Work Group has identified the following thirteen items as top priorities. Details and additional recommendations are contained in the body of the report.

1. *Use CodeNEXT Project to Promote Family-Friendly Housing.* The City of Austin should identify and adopt land use policies through the current revision of the city's Land Development Code, known as CodeNEXT, to promote a diverse range of affordable, family-friendly housing across Austin, especially in the urban core.

2. *Appoint 'Families With Children Commission.'* The JSC should create a Families with Children Commission, modeled on the Sustainable Food Policy Board, to include representatives appointed by the City of Austin, Travis County and AISD. The Commission's charge should include overseeing the integration of family-friendly policy recommendations into the city's Land Development Code revision process as noted above, reviewing current and proposed planning and development policies to assess their impact on families with children, and making recommendations to appropriate decision-making bodies as warranted.

3. *Create 'Homes & Schools Temporary Rental Assistance Program' to Increase Student Stability.* The City of Austin should create a "Homes and Schools Temporary Rental Assistance Program" to target housing counseling resources and emergency rental housing assistance funding to low-income families with children in neighborhoods with high rates of student mobility in public schools.

4. *Develop Long-Range Affordable Housing Plan and Expand Housing Planning Effort.* The City of Austin should develop a twenty-year vision statement and plan for closing the affordable housing gap in Austin, specifically including families with children. The plan should identify school attendance zones with

declining enrollments and seek to target programs to create more family-sized housing in those zones as appropriate.

5. ***Explore Partnerships for Family-Friendly Developments***. The City of Austin should create and help fund a model family-friendly development in a densely populated urban area. In addition, the City of Austin and AISD should explore opportunities to partner in creating family-friendly housing on surplus or underutilized government property at or near AISD schools in under-enrolled attendance zones or in areas suffering from high rates of student mobility.

6. ***Enhance Safe Routes to Schools, Parks and Libraries***. By 2015, the City of Austin should adopt a citywide plan to provide safe pedestrian and cycling routes to schools, parks, and libraries, in coordination with AISD and Travis County, and target funding for the plan in the next transportation bond package.

7. ***Identify and Promote Signature Academic Programs***. Using a robust community engagement process, AISD should identify, create and promote signature academic programs for under-enrolled schools to attract neighborhood students and other families with children to those campuses.

8. ***Assess Why Families Leave AISD***. AISD should conduct an annual survey of families who leave the district for other schools or home schooling to determine their reasons for leaving and analyze results to identify any specific improvements that would help retain families.

9. ***Invest in School Facilities***. AISD should prioritize older and deteriorating school buildings in future bond packages to ensure all campuses provide safe, equitable, and high quality facilities for 21st Century learning.

10. ***Evaluate and Update AISD Maintenance Procedures and Bond Expenditure Tracking***. AISD should develop clear reporting, tracking and accountability procedures for all maintenance requests and communicate these procedures to all school staff and families annually. AISD should also create an online bond expenditure tracking system modeled on the City of Austin's new online capital projects portal, CIVIC.

11. ***Equip Campus Advisory Councils to Lead Campus-Level Communications***. AISD should equip Campus Advisory Councils to lead campus-level communications and community outreach, and work to improve transparency and access at all levels of AISD.

12. ***Strengthen School Translation Services***. AISD should adopt a formal administrative and board policy that establishes English-language translation as a priority need and expands services to support non-English speaking families.

13. ***Create Strong Community Marketing Campaign for Public Schools***. The JSC should partner to create a strong multi-faceted campaign that underscores the importance of a strong public school system to our entire community and highlights the strengths of AISD schools and programs. Communicating this message is everyone's job—AISD staff and families, PTAs, city and county leaders, local nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, real estate agents, faith leaders—and all must be equipped to share it.

Priority Recommendation and Entity Responsibility

	City of Austin	Austin ISD	Travis County	Other Groups	(e.g.)
Priority Recommendation					
1. CodeNEXT to promote family-friendly housing	X	X			
2. Appoint Families with Children Commission	X		X		
3. Create Home & Schools Rental Program	X	X	X	X	Local NGOs
4. Develop long-range affordable a housing plan	X	X			
5. Explore partnerships for family-friendly developments	X	X		X	RECA, Developers,
6. Enhance safe route to schools etc.	X	X	X	X	CAMPO, Project Connect
7. Identify and promote signature academic programs		X			
8. Assess why families leave AISD		X		X	Univ. of Texas
9. Invest in school facilities		X			
10. Evaluate and update AISD maintenance procedures, etc.		X		X	Univ. of Texas
11. Equip CACs to lead campus-level communications		X			
12. Strengthen school translation services		X		X	
13. Create strong community marketing for public schools	X	X	X	X	

INTRODUCTION

Why Schools and Families Matter to Austin

The School and Family Work Group was tasked with identifying policies to attract and retain families and strengthen public schools in Austin's central city. But why is this so important? What compelling public interest is served by keeping our city family-friendly? In fact, a large body of research shows that schools and families play an irreplaceable role in maintaining a strong community in the central city and beyond. Their presence – or absence—may have significant impacts on jobs, the environment, our local economy, civic engagement and our future as a city.

Consider the impacts of schools and families on just a few key issues:

• *Sustainable job growth.* To maintain its competitive edge in attracting new jobs, Austin must ensure that prospective companies and their employees can find affordable housing near good schools in *all* parts of town. Families and schools provide a continued source for a well-educated workforce,[1] which a Brookings Institute study found was the single most important factor for over 70 percent of business leaders in deciding where to locate.[2] Similarly, the presence of good schools plays a key role in attracting new jobs; one reason the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce proudly touts the area's highly rated public schools on its website. [3]

• *Strong local economy.* Families with children provide a strong consumer base for economic growth, supplying an ongoing market for a wide variety of goods and services. As every parent knows, children are expensive to raise, and a 2012 Cornell University study found that families with children are the biggest spenders locally, with 77 percent of all child-related expenditures going toward the local economy. [4] Moreover, every high school graduate also provides ongoing dividends: a 2002 U.S. Census Bureau report found that high school graduates made roughly $4500 more per year than high school dropouts.[5] Multiply that spendable income by the 85,000 students currently enrolled in AISD and you'll see an additional $387 million over the next twelve years.

• *Lower environmental impacts.* Families who live outside the city and farther from jobs, schools and other vital resources place additional stress on the area's transportation infrastructure, increasing fossil fuel emissions and incurring higher

1 City of Austin, "Families with Children Task Force Report,' 2008, p 4.

2 Jeff Leverich, "Public Education: Building the Economy and Strong Communities," 2008 Wisconsin Education Association Council p. 3.

3 http://www.austinchamber.com/site-selection/greater-austin-profile/education.php

4 Mildred Warner and Rebecca Baran-Rees, *The Economic Importance of Families with Children*, Cornell University, March (2012). http://s3.amazonaws.com/mildredwarner.org/attachments/000/000/175/original/7520b55f4bdb242b75aff5a8f40016f2

5 U.S. Census Bureau, "The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work Life Earnings," 2002. P.2. http://usgovinfo.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=usgovinfo&cdn=newsissues&tm=22&f=10&tt=2&bt=9&bts=9&zu=http%3A//www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf

transportation costs. This is one reason the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan specifically calls for a compact and connected city that includes families with children in the urban core. The fewer miles families must travel to affordable homes, jobs, and quality schools help reduce our carbon footprint.

• *Robust property values.* Research finds what common sense already tells us: good public schools are a key factor in maintaining strong property values, and school quality is an important factor for many prospective homebuyers.[6] Maintaining our schools helps maintain the value of the biggest investment most Austinites will ever make.

• *Lower costs for taxpayers down the road.* Research shows that for every $1 invested in high quality pre-K, taxpayers save over $7 in future costs by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services.[7] In fact, a 2013 study found the U.S. could save $18.5 billion annually in crime costs alone if the high school male graduation rate increased by only 5 percentage points, and noted that the average cost to educate a child per year is less than half the average cost of a year in prison. [8] Clearly, the smarter investment is the one we make upfront.

• *Increased community engagement.* Some impacts can't be measured in dollars and cents, but may be just as important. Research has found that school closures result in measurable declines in community participation.[9] One reason cited is that school buildings often serve as the focal point for civic activities including voting, community meetings, athletics and other events that foster a sense of belonging.[10] After a neighborhood elementary school in Georgia closed, area residents noted that many formerly active neighbors and young parents moved away, community gatherings dropped off, and the sense of neighborhood renewal was diminished. As one resident said, "They took away the neighborhood school. It changed us. It changed the neighborhood."[11] Ensuring that families with children remain in the urban core and the

6 William T. Bogart and Brian A. Cromwell, "How Much Is a Neighborhood School Worth?" Journal of Urban Economics 47 (2000): 280–305. www-agecon.ag.ohio-state.edu/class/aede680/irwin/pdf/53.pdf
7 Arthur, J.Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Barry A. B. White, Suh-Ruu Ou, and Dylan L. Robertson, "Age 26 cost-benefit analysis of the Child-Parent Center Early Education Program," Child Development, 82,1(2011): 379 404. See also: Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40, (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.
8 Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings, 2013, Alliance for Excellent Education. http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/saving-futures-saving-dollars-the-impact-of-education-on-crime-reduction-and-earnings-2/
9 David Post and Amy Stambach, "District Consolidation and Rural School Closure: E Pluribus Unum?" Journal of Research in Rural Education, 15, 2,(1999): 106-117.
10 Linda Driscoll, et. al, "M.A.S.S. Small and Rural School District Task Force Report: The Effectiveness, Value, and Importance of Small School Districts," Amherst, MA: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' Small and Rural School District Task Force (2008).
11 Bill Torphy, "How School Closure Impacted a Community," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, April, 11 2010. www.ajc.com/news/how-school-closure-impacted-449907.html

city as a whole is critical to maintaining the strong civic engagement a healthy city requires. Historically, the most active voting precincts have been those in Austin's central neighborhoods. If those areas continue to lose families, Austin also loses a core group of voters who have largely supported the school, city and county bond packages to fund critical community needs.

   • *A vibrant city for all stages of life.* People who think deeply about cities for a living know that families with children play a vital role. A 2008 survey of urban planners found that 97 percent of respondents agreed families with children are important to community growth, sustainability and diversity, and 90 percent agreed that cities that keep residents from youth through old age are more vibrant.[12] Planners also note that the same features that serve children are also important elements for a community's senior population: walkability, public transit, affordable housing, parks, conveniently located services and opportunities for civic engagement. In fact, there was a recent AARP survey that shows 84 percent of respondents over 50 wish to age in place[13], further showing that family-friendly features offer double benefits.

Austin's families and public schools form the heart of our community. They are the institutions chiefly responsible for raising the next generation, laying the groundwork for a more secure future for us all. The mechanic who will keep our car safe, the doctor we will look to for a critical diagnosis, the financial analyst who will plan for our retirement, the software engineer with the next big idea - all these future professionals and business leaders are growing up in Austin today. We need to do right by them so they can do right by us tomorrow.

If we fail to maintain our schools and families in *every* Austin zip code, we can expect the harsh divides between wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, safety and crime, to escalate, potentially harming our future in ways we may not fully comprehend until it is too late.

Austin's public schools and families represent the best hope for a future that is healthy, wealthy and wise for every member of our community. We all have a stake in keeping them strong.

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12 Evelyn Israel and Mildred Warner, "Planning for Family Friendly Communities," PAS Memo. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association (2008). http://www.planning.org/pas/memo/open/nov2008/index.htm.
13 Andrew Kochera, Audrey Straight and Thomas Guterbock, "Beyond 50.05, A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging." Washington, D.C.: AARP (2005) http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/beyond_50_com-munities.pdf.

CHALLENGES

Multiple Factors Affect Austin's Schools and Families

With rapid growth, rising housing costs, and continued budget cuts for public education, many families are increasingly worried about whether they still have a place in today's Austin. Writing on this subject last year, the Austin Chronicle noted that "families are practically becoming an endangered species in Austin's central neighborhoods" and cited the example of Sanchez Elementary school, which lost over one hundred students when two large affordable apartment complexes in its attendance area were rezoned to make way for luxury housing.[14] Similarly, City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson states that "with only a few neighborhood exceptions, the urban core is also becoming almost devoid of married-with-children households" and that "[w]ithout a sizable share of middle class families to stabilize the urban core, working class families suffer because the rung above them on the socio-economic ladder has been removed, making it more difficult for them to achieve upward social mobility." Robinson further notes that such declines will have a "significant" impact on the city's school districts with "the greatest brunt" felt by AISD, [15] Austin's largest public school district, educating over 85,000 students daily.

Before discussing possible solutions, it is important to understand some of the basic factors driving these changes:

Rapid Population Growth

Austin is experiencing an unprecedented population explosion. Currently, an average of 60,000 individuals migrate to Austin each year, according to City of Austin's demographer Ryan Robinson. In 2013, Austin grew at an annualized rate of 2.25 percent, while Travis County expanded by three percent. These rates are expected to rise, setting Austin on a path to exceed a population of one million residents by 2025. Such population growth creates enormous pressures on the fabric of Austin's neighborhoods and on the supply of housing citywide.

Loss of Affordable Housing

A corollary of this rapid population growth has been increasing property costs and loss of affordable housing, particularly in Central Austin. In the last decade, the average cost of a home[16] in Austin rose nearly $70,000 from approximately $191,000 in 2000 to over $260,000 by 2012.[17] The pressure on Central Austin has been even more intense, with

14 Amy Smith, "Through the Roof", Austin Chronicle, March 23, 2012. http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2012-03-23/then-theres-this-through-the-roof/

15 Ryan Robinson, City of Austin, Demographer , Department of Planning, "To Ten Demographic Trends in Austin, Texas; Austin Families with Children Households, Share of Total Households Over Time," http://austintexas.gov/page/top-ten-demographic-trends-austin-texas Accessed November 2013.

16 Residential data include single-family, townhouses and condominiums in the Multiple Listing Service only.

17 Texas A&M University, Real Estate Center, "MLS Housing Activity', Austin, Annual Trends. http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/hs/hs140.asp. Accessed December 1, 2013.

property values in that area more than doubling in the last seven years alone. The result has been a significant increase in property tax rates, which has placed increased economic pressure on residents and their families. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage growth in single-family home values from 2005 through 2012 citywide; however, it should be noted that the same escalating property taxes also impact families in apartment rentals, as landlords simply pass tax increases along in the form of increased rents.

<u>Shrinking Percentage of Families with Children</u>
Although the number of households with children has been growing along with Austin's overall population, households with children now constitute a smaller percentage of the city as a whole, declining from 38.2 percent in 1970 to 25.5 percent in 2007.[18] Driven in large part by the steep increases in real estate prices in Austin and the development of new housing stock that is targeted towards childless families, the decrease of families with children has been even starker in the urban core, falling from 32 percent of the total population in 1970 to just 14 percent in 2000.[19] The loss of families with children from the urban core is considered a primary reason why many Central Austin neighborhoods saw a drop in overall population between 2000 and 2010, as one- and two-person households replaced larger family households.[20]

18 Ryan Robinson, City of Austin, Demographer, Department of Planning, "Top Ten Demographic Trends in Austin, Texas; Austin Families with Children Households, Share of Total Households Over Time." Accessed November 2013.
http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/share-families-w-children.pdf
19 Ryan Robinson, City of Austin Demographer, Presentation to the School and Family Work Group, April 17, 2013.
20 Marty Toohey, "Where have urban Austin's children gone?" Austin American-Statesman (Apr. 24, 2011).
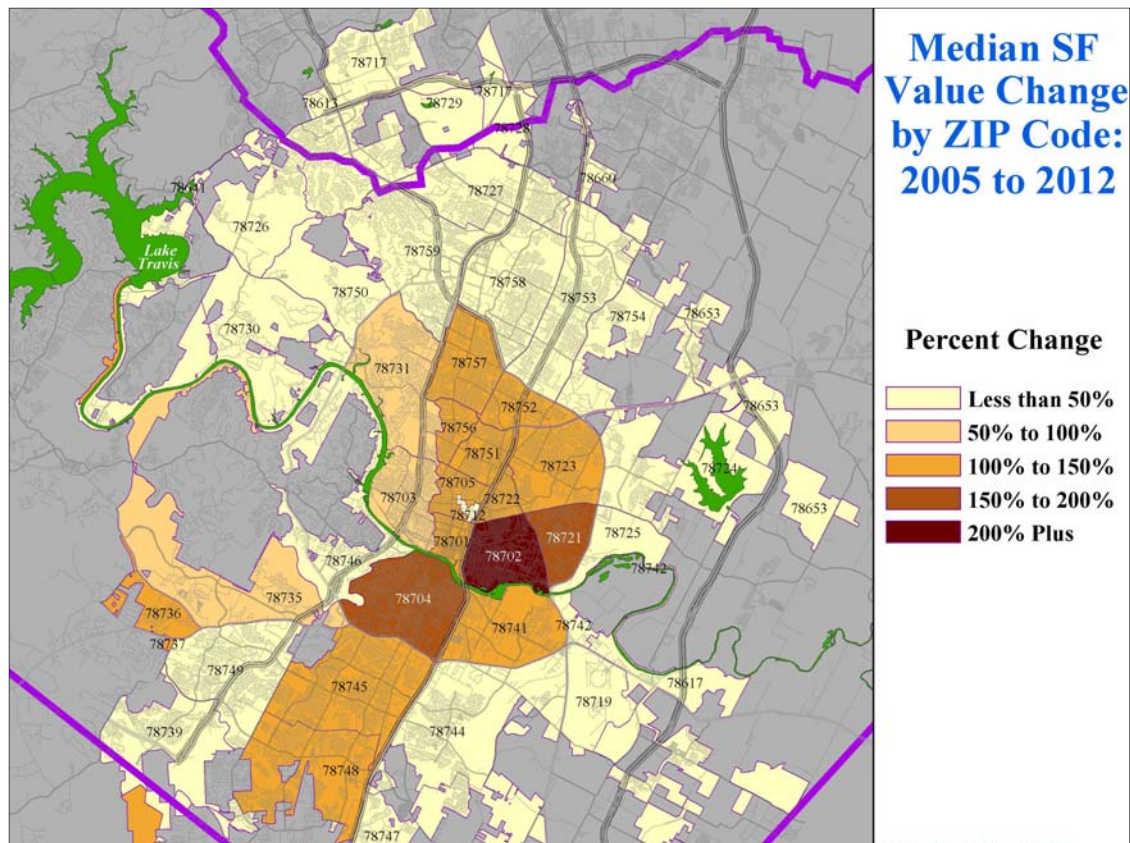
Figure 1: Median Single-Family Home Value by Zip Code, 2005-2012 (Source: Ryan Robinson, City of Austin).

Declining AISD Enrollment Difficult to Track

After years of steady growth, AISD's total enrollment for the current 2013-14 school year shows a drop of roughly 1200 students overall (1.4% of AISD student population), a relatively small decline but the first such drop in more than a decade.[21] Recent media coverage may have reinforced a growing perception that the decline is the result of families leaving the district in search of alternate schooling options, particularly charters.[22] AISD can observe the numbers of students who move to other Texas public schools, including public charter schools, but for students who do not return to the public system, there is no way to know if they are leaving for private charter schools, other private institutions or simply leaving the state.

However, the available data does provide a rough glimpse of departing students. Last year, approximately 3000 students left AISD for other Texas school districts; of that

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21 Melissa B. Taboda, "Austin school district student enrollment declines," Austin American-Statesman (Sept. 27, 2013).
http://www.mystatesman.com/news/news/local-education/austin-school-district-student-enrollment-declines/nZ9N9/
22 Ibid.

figure, nearly 2,000 left for adjacent public school districts. Approximately 1800 students left for private schools, private charters or moved out of state or country (as noted above, the data does not provide a further breakdown); and another 1400 students left to attend public charter schools.[23] While these numbers may appear large, it important to note that AISD does gain new students each year from all of those same sources; therefore, it does not indicate a major 'net' loss of enrolled students. Figures 2 and 3 show where the AISD students that left elementary and middle schools in 2011 and 2012 and did not re-enroll in the respective following years are now attending.

Figure 2: Educational enrollments of former AISD elementary & middle school students. This chart shows the percentage of AISD elementary and middle school student that left after the 2011-2012 school year and where they attended school in the 2012-2013 year. (Source: TEA Enrollment Tracking System as prepared by AISD Office of Student Services).
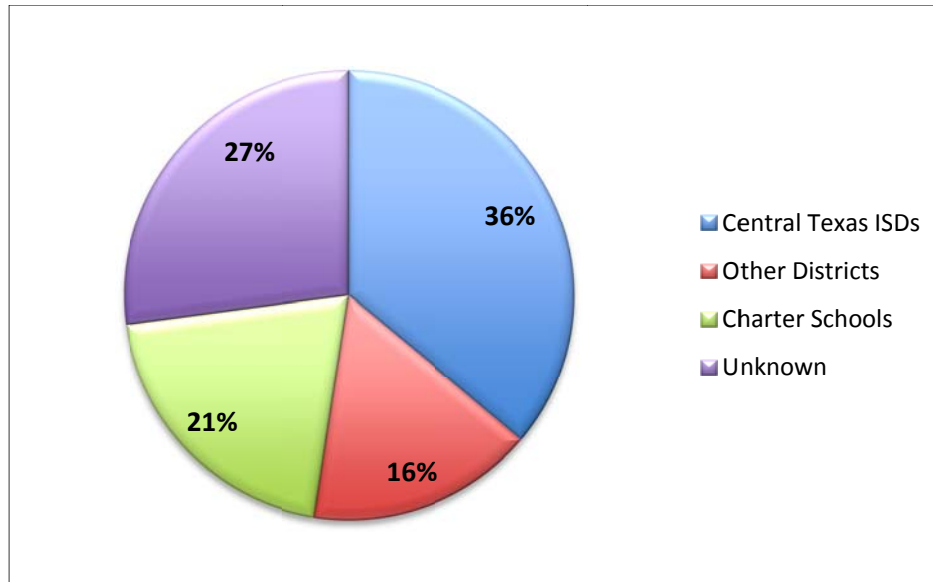
23 AISD Enrollment Figures, 2012.
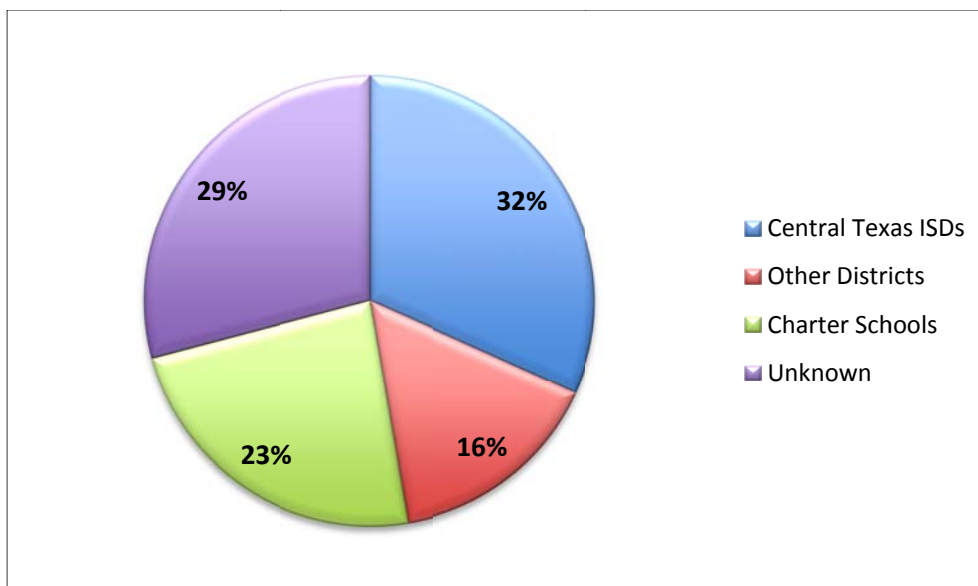
Figure 3: Educational enrollments of former AISD elementary & middle school students. This chart shows the percentage of AISD elementary and middle school student that left after the 2012-2013 school year and where they are currently attending school in 2013-2014 (Source: TEA Enrollment Tracking System as prepared by AISD Office of Student Services).

It is also worth noting that public charter schools currently account for the smallest segment of students leaving AISD. Further, even if all 1400 students cited above were assumed to have left for private charters (rather than private schools and other states), the combined total would still be less than the number of students leaving for other Texas public school districts. Of course, charter schools are expanding in Texas, that figure may ultimately rise, but it is far from the majority at this time.

Of course, families may leave AISD for a variety of reasons, including the loss of affordable housing, a change in employment, the desire to pursue a different school option, or in the case of death, divorce or pregnancy. Unfortunately, AISD lacks the resources to track the reasons for individual students and, given ongoing cuts to public education at the state level, there is no funding to support a more fine-grained look at this time.

Lower Cost Districts Gain Largest Share of Departing AISD Students
What is clear from this data is that the largest loss of student population in AISD is to other Texas public school districts, all of which do have lower costs of living than Austin, now the most expensive city in Texas.[24] While we could find no data to explicitly tie

24 Elina Bravv, Megan Bolton, Linda Couch and Sheila Crowley. Out of Reach 2012: America's Forgotten Housing Crisis. National Low Income Housing Coalition, Washington, D.C., 2012.P. 194.

student losses to Austin's rising costs of living, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that, for many families, the move to other districts is likely prompted by the loss of affordable family housing and the increased costs of utilities and other services in Austin.

State Finance System Hurts AISD Students
It is a sad irony that the increased property taxes that appear to be driving many families from Austin do not result in increased funding for Austin's own public schools. Under Texas' current school finance system (now the subject of multiple lawsuits), AISD is considered a "property wealthy" district – despite the fact that more than 64 percent of its current students are from low-income families. The Texas system, known as "recapture," has required AISD to pay the state more than $1.5 billion since 2002, all of which comes from tax dollars generated in Austin. For fiscal year 2014 alone, AISD is expected to send a projected $135.6 million to the state for distribution to "property poor" school districts. AISD is the single largest payer of recapture in the state—yet actions by the 2011 Texas Legislature cut AISD's own budget by a total of $60.7 million over the 2012-13 biennium.

Enrollment is Inconsistent across Attendance Zones
To further complicate matters, AISD has experienced a shifting balance of student populations within the district, creating budgetary and planning pressures that, if unaddressed, could undermine Austin's goal of maintaining a vibrant family-friendly city.[25] For the past five years, AISD experienced an overall average enrollment increase of 1.25 percent (or 1000 students per year). Yet during the same period, enrollment levels across the district have been highly inconsistent. Several school attendance zones have experienced rapid growth with enrollment exceeding 150 percent of school capacity, while other attendance zones have suffered from declining enrollment, with enrollments falling below 75 percent of school capacity.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the percentage of student capacity for AISD elementary middle and high schools, while Table 1 provides a listing of the AISD schools that are currently below full capacity.

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[25] Two key reasons that families leave urban areas are lack of affordability and lack of space. For more info, see: Timothy Egan (2005). "Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children." The New York Times. March 24, 2005.
http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/24/national/24childless.html?_r=0
Joel Kotkin and Ali Modarres, "The Childless City," The City Journal, Summer (2013), Vol 23., No. 3.
 http://www.city-journal.org/2013/23_3_childless-cities.html
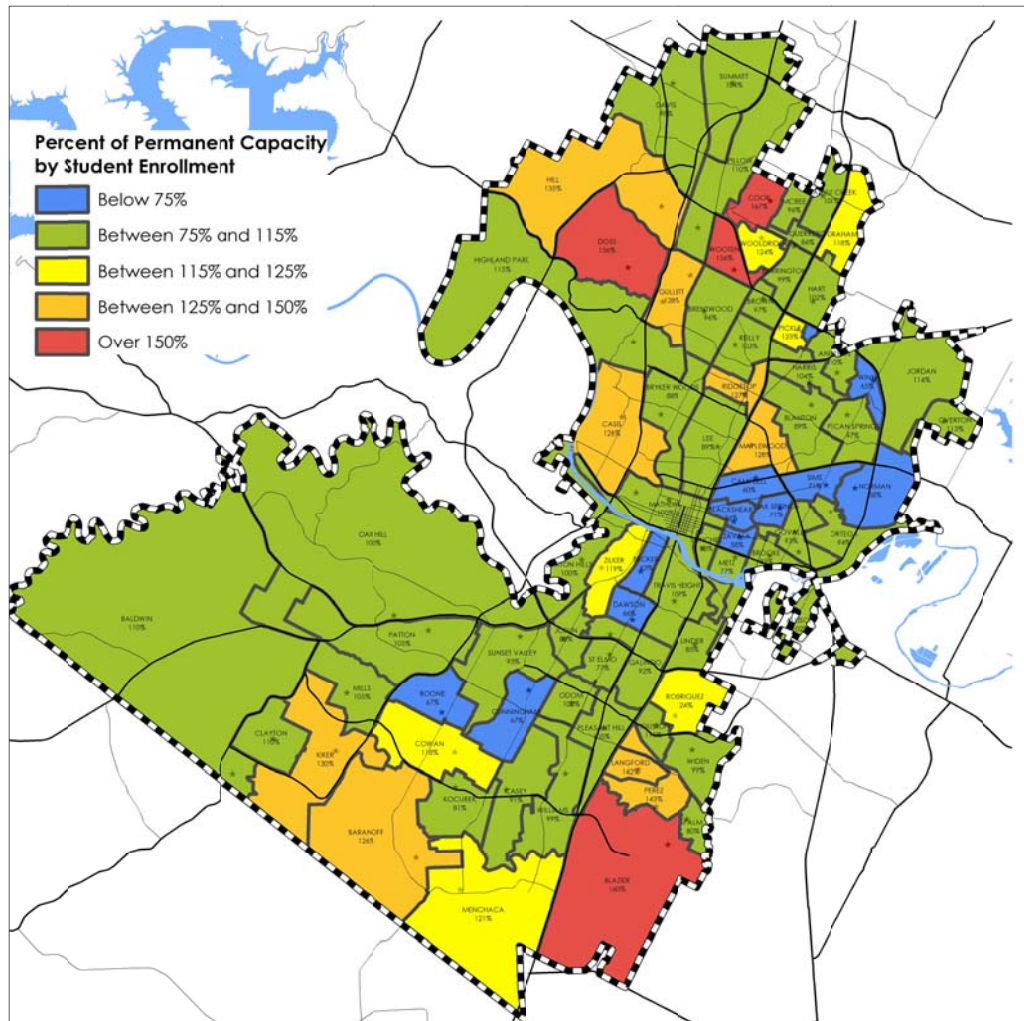
Figure 4: Austin Independent School District Permanent Capacity by 2013-14 Student Enrollment in Elementary Schools (Source: AISD).
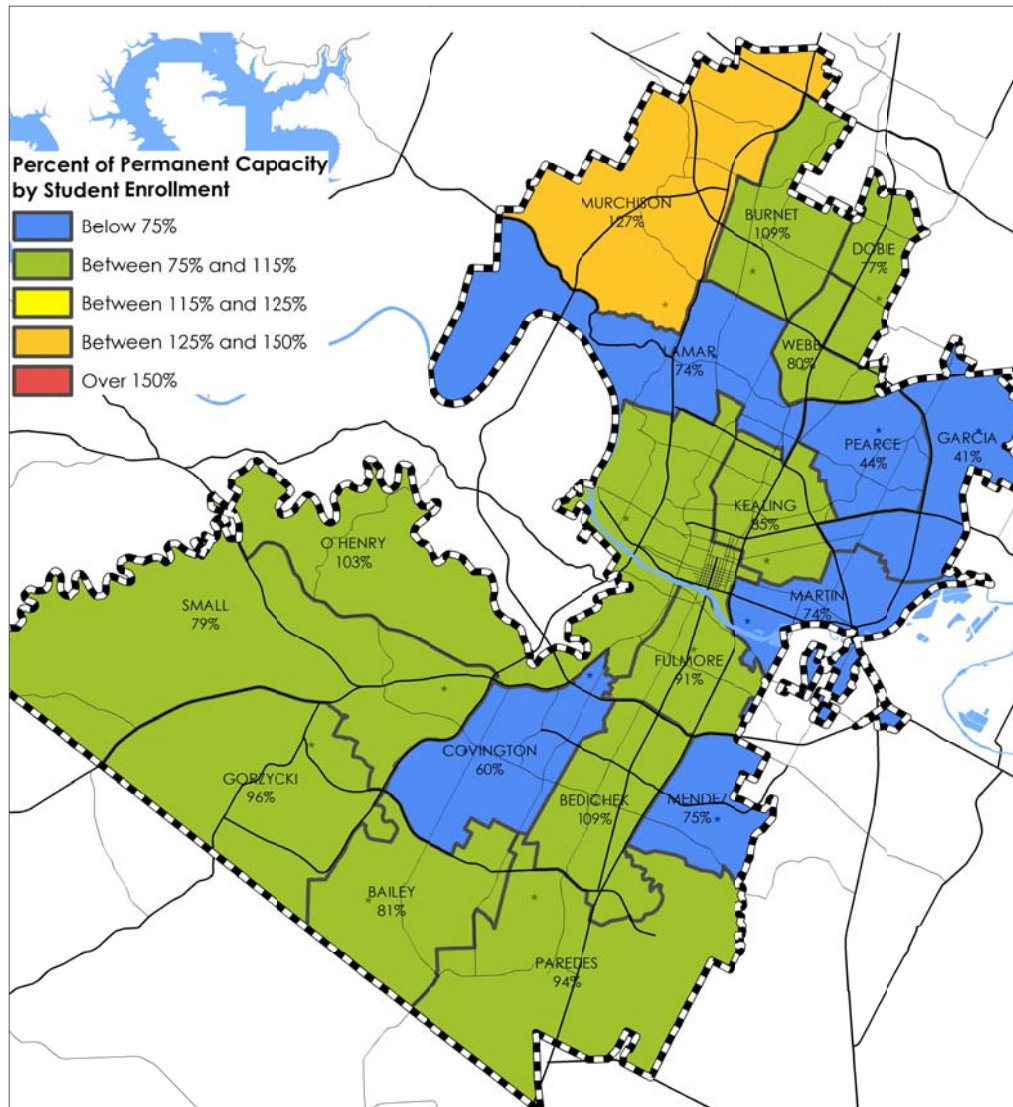
Figure 5: Austin Independent School District Permanent Capacity by 2013-14 Student Enrollment in Middle Schools (Source: AISD).
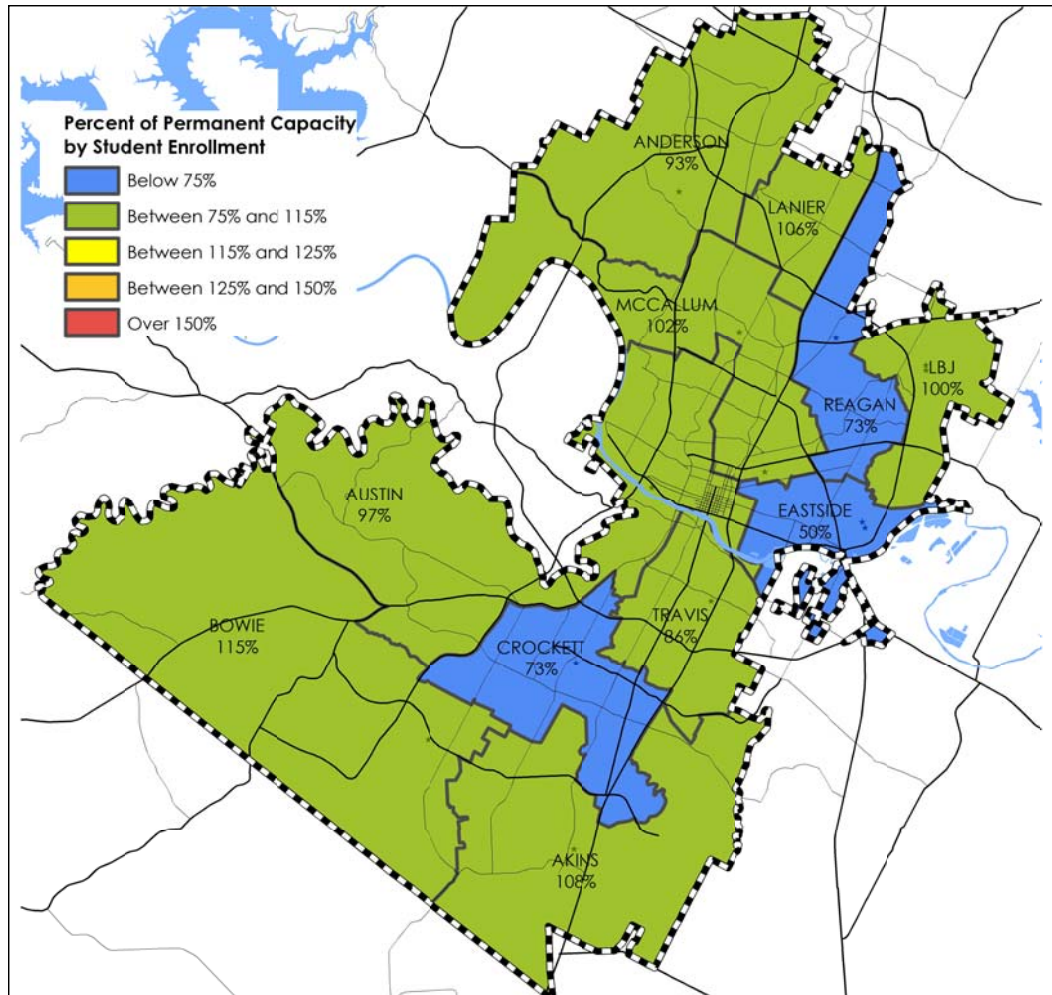
Figure 6: Austin Independent School District Permanent Capacity by 2013-14 Student Enrollment in High Schools (Source: AISD).

Table 1: AISD Schools Below Permanent Capacity

Elementary Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
Blackshear	598	218	36%
Zavala	580	335	58%
Norman	486	284	58%
Campbell	524	313	60%
Becker	524	330	63%
Winn	524	339	65%
Dawson	524	345	66%
Boone	752	504	67%
Cunningham	627	423	67%
Sims	355	251	71%
Oak Springs	411	293	71%
Middle Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
Garcia	1215	496	41%
Pearce	1078	470	44%
Covington	1125	673	60%
Martin	804	591	74%
Lamar	1008	745	74%
High Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
EMHSJC/International	1548	771	50%
Garza	321	214	67%
Crockett	2163	1575	73%
Reagan	1588	1164	73%

For a complete list of all AISD school capacities, see Appendix F

As these figures illustrate, schools in the outlying areas of North and South Austin are largely experiencing growth in student enrollment, particularly at the elementary school level, while many campuses located in the urban core show stable or declining enrollment. Central East Austin is currently home to the largest concentration of under-enrolled schools.

At the same time, some centrally located schools remain full by virtue of AISD's transfer policy, which allows parents to transfer children out of their assigned attendance zone into another AISD school, space permitting. Campuses perceived as offering more enriched and challenging educational experiences often have waiting lists for families hoping to transfer.

In considering the preceding enrollment figures, several caveats are warranted.
First, some schools that currently show low enrollment in Figures 2 and 3 are now on a trajectory for full capacity operation as a result of new academic programs that have been successful in drawing students to those campuses. Examples of successful academic draws include Lamar Middle School's recently opened Fine Arts Academy and the dual language program at Becker Elementary.

Second, AISD has historically experienced a noticeable drop in enrollment at the middle school level, with a number of families later returning to AISD for high school. While the Work Group was unable to find data to explain this phenomenon, anecdotal evidence points to a widespread belief that middle school is the weakest link in the AISD system. Heightened parental anxiety may also coincide with a child's transition from elementary to middle school, resulting in a natural wish to find the safest harbor possible for their young adolescent. Some observers have also noted that AISD may have overestimated the number of middle schools required in East Austin, an area that currently experiences the lowest middle school enrollment.

Finally, a number of low-income middle and high schools have seen enrollment declines due to state and national testing regimes that allow or, in extreme cases, require students to transfer out of schools labeled low-performing. All of these factors – and more – may affect a school's enrollment.

Families Move to Surrounding Districts at Higher Rates
Meanwhile, families with children have been moving to surrounding school districts in much large numbers than to AISD, with Hutto, Manor, Hays, Leander, and Dripping Springs now in the lead. Figure 5 shows the current number of households with children in AISD, compared to surrounding school districts.
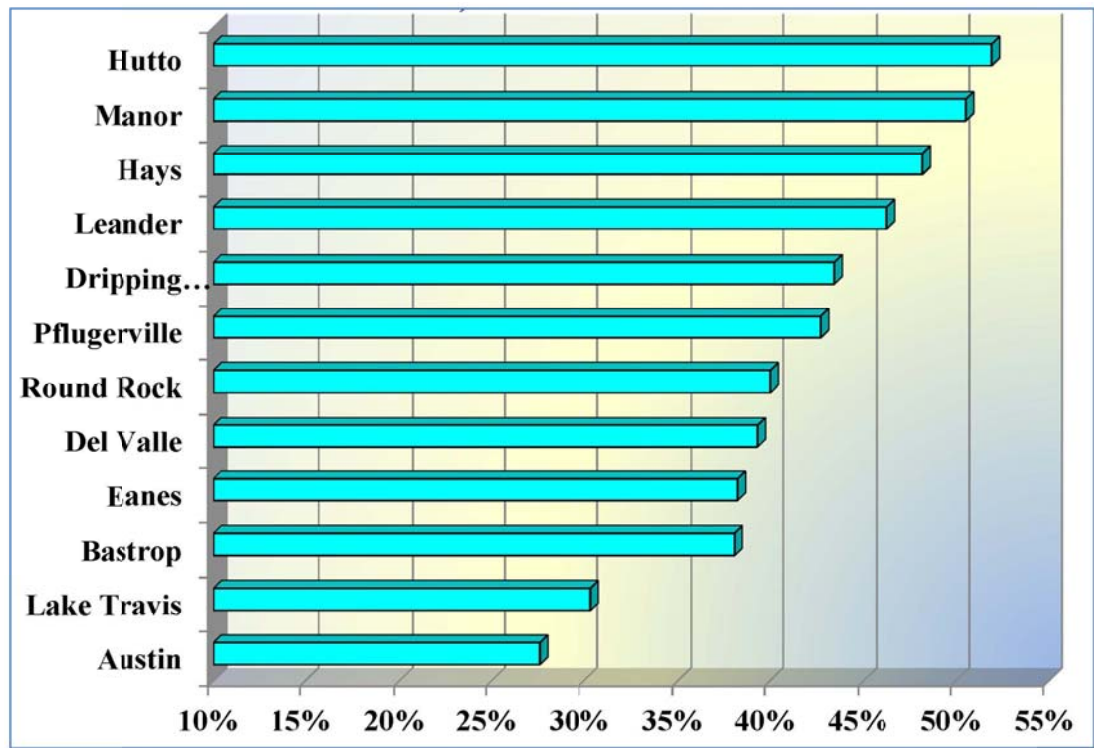
Figure 7: Households with Children, Percentage of Total Households, Central Texas
Independent School Districts, 2011 (Source: City of Austin Demographer,
based on 2010 U.S. Census Data).

Aging School Facilities

Finally, uneven growth in the district places enormous financial burdens on AISD, requiring it to invest millions of dollars in building new schools, which, in turn, detracts from the district's ability to invest in the district's older school facilities in the urban core through maintenance and upgrades. Without investments in these older facilities, it becomes more challenging for the district to provide the safe, well-equipped facilities needed to attract and retain families with children in its central city schools.

COMMUNITY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

In June 2008, the Families and Children Task Force produced a final report for the City of Austin.[26] That Task Force comprised a diverse group of volunteers who crafted recommendations regarding policies, practices, and projects the City could adopt to keep families in Austin's central core. That Task Force recognized that the exodus of families from the City is a result of many factors. Its final report worked to address these issues by providing recommendations that promoted and integrated family-friendly housing, child care, and other amenities throughout the city for families of all income levels. However, many of its recommendations have yet to be implemented.

The Schools and Families Work Group's Subcommittee on Community Policy reviewed elements of the 2008 Families and Children Task Force Final Report, updated its recommendations and prioritized them based on short- and long-term timelines for implementation. The subcommittee focused on five topics of the report: Vision and Planning; Child Care; Housing; Parks, Recreation and Open Space; and Transportation.

Several of the recommendations contained in the 2008 report are already being implemented as part of the City's comprehensive planning process. For example, the City's Imagine Austin Plan adopted a vision statement that identifies the need to retain families in the central city, which was a key recommendation of the 2008 Task Force. We applaud these efforts; however, we firmly recommend the continued enactment of key elements of the 2008 report, as part of the City's efforts to harmonize its Land Development Code with the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, an ongoing project known as CodeNEXT. Such activities should include the implementation of policies that encourage the inclusion of key family amenities such as child care services, playgrounds and the expansion of cultural resources that attract families to the urban core. Additionally, the CodeNEXT project should encourage and promote policies to increase diversity in housing sizes and prices so that families with children may access a range of housing options and remain in Central Austin.

Recommendations

Land Development Code
1. **Identify and adopt land use policies through the CodeNEXT project—the City of Austin's revision of the Land Development Code—to further the creation of a diverse range of affordable, family-friendly housing across**

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26 City of Austin Families with Children Task Force, Report Recommendations (June 24, 2008), available at http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/housing/downloads/factf_report_08.pdf.

Austin, especially in the urban core. The following recommendations should be implemented through this initiative:

    a. <u>Family-friendly designs standards</u>. Create a set of family-friendly design standards for developments across the city, in a range of housing types. The design standards should include consideration of the number of bedrooms, access to outdoor play areas (especially areas allowing for close parent supervision), child-friendly common spaces, unit design, safety and security, storage for family items such as strollers, among other criteria. We recommend that Austin's standards be modeled on the best practices developed by the cities of Vancouver, Canada[27] and Portland, Oregon.[28] The family-friendly standards should apply to both affordable and market rate units.

    b. <u>Spatial mapping tools.</u> Create mapping tools to establish spatial relationships among schools and family amenities including public parks and open spaces, private parks, recreation areas, sidewalks, child care services, public and private schools, and other family amenities. These maps should be used to help guide planning and development processes for Travis County, City of Austin and AISD.

2. **Create Families With Children Commission.** The JSC should create the Commission, modeled after the Sustainable Food Policy Board, with representatives appointed by the City of Austin, Travis County and AISD. Among its first charges would be overseeing the integration of family-friendly policy recommendations into the Land Development Code revision process. Commissioners would also review planning and development policies for their impact on families with children and submit recommendations to appropriate decision-making bodies as warranted.

Child Care

1. **Develop a strategic plan for child care services**. The City of Austin, AISD and Travis County should work together to improve the affordability, availability, and accessibility of child care. We recommend that the City, AISD and the County perform a comprehensive review of existing child care services and funding sources services and provide dedicated funding for such services where needed.

Housing

1. **Create a Homes & Schools Temporary Rental Assistance Program.** The City of Austin, Travis County and AISD should adopt a permanent "Homes and

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27 City of Vancouver, High-density housing for families with children guidelines," 23 March 1992.

28 City of Portland, Family-Compatible Housing Guidelines for the North Pearl District, in the North Pearl District Plan, (Dec. 5, 2008), available at http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/268304.

Schools temporary rental assistance program" to target housing counseling resources and emergency rental housing assistance funding to low-income families with children in neighborhoods with high rates of student mobility in public schools.

2. **Develop Affordable Housing Vision and Expand Housing Planning Efforts.** The City of Austin should develop a twenty-year vision statement for closing the affordable housing gap in Austin, specifically including families with children. The plan should identify school attendance zones with declining enrollments and seek to target programs to create more family-sized housing in those zones as appropriate.

3. **Explore Partnerships to Increase Family-Friendly Developments.** The City of Austin should create and help fund a model family-friendly development in a densely populated urban area to showcase how good design can attract families with children to denser areas of the city. The City of Austin and AISD should also explore opportunities to partner on creating family-friendly housing on surplus or underutilized government property at or near AISD schools in under-enrolled attendance zones or areas suffering from high rates of student mobility.

4. **Support Family Resource Centers.** AISD campuses with Family Resource Centers (FRCs) have shown declines in student mobility. Consequently, existing FRCs should be maintained with sufficient resources. FRCs should be developed at additional campuses, prioritizing those with high student mobility rates and/or majority low-income.

5. **Sustain the JSC's Integrated Case Management Pilot.** The integrated case management system that was implemented in the Family Resource Centers through the JSC's pilot project is valuable for identifying needs and coordinating services for families and children, and for collecting data on student mobility. This system will require ongoing resources for maintenance and effective use.

6. **Target Government Housing Dollars.** The City of Austin's annual and five-year consolidated housing plans should include specific targets for the creation of affordable housing for low-income families with children, including creation of affordable opportunities for families with children in the urban core.

7. **Align Housing Investments.** The City of Austin's housing investments should align with the needs of families with children; thus the City should seek to ensure affordable units with two or more bedrooms created in developments receiving any type of public subsidy be prioritized for families with children (under 18) and/or persons with disabilities with live-in caretakers. The City should explore legal, non-discriminatory methods for how to achieve such prioritization.

8. **Require that a portion of density bonus program units be made available for families with children.** The City of Austin should modify existing density bonus programs and tailor future density bonus programs so that the number of affordable units required is based on the square footage of the development (or density space) instead of the number of units in the development (or density units) and require that the bedroom composition of the affordable units reflect the bedroom composition of the entire development. For affordable units with two or more bedrooms created under density bonus programs, require that the units are rented or sold only to families with children and persons with disabilities with live-in caretakers.

9. **Encourage rehabilitation and preservation of currently affordable housing.** The City of Austin and Travis County should create programs to promote—through incentives or other innovative approaches—the rehabilitation of aging rental properties while maintaining those properties as affordable housing; these programs should be targeted toward complexes that cater to families and children.

10. **Implement a Tenant Relocation Policy.** The City of Austin should develop a policy under which tenants with school-aged children in properties that are being vacated for redevelopment or renovation would be allowed to remain in their units through the school year or, at minimum, the semester.

11. **Housing Resource Website and Marketing.** It is very difficult for a family (or anyone) trying to find affordable housing in Austin to learn about existing resources. The City of Austin should work with nonprofit and for-profit developers to develop or enhance a centralized, easy-to access "one-stop" website portal listing currently available affordable housing units and units coming online.

12. **Educational Impact Statement.** The City of Austin, Travis County and Austin ISD should re-evaluate the Educational Impact Statement Process to determine if reporting should be strengthened or broadened in light of increased development and/or population growth.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

1. **Increase accessibility of public parks.**
   a. <u>Set New Goals for Green Space Access.</u> The City Council should adopt the recommendations of the Urban Parks Work Group[29] to fulfill the City's goal that every resident in the city will live within a quarter-mile

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29 City of Austin Urban Parks Work Group, Report Recommendations (Oct. 6, 2011), available at
http://centralaustincdc.org/parks/urban-parks-Work Group-final-report.pdf.

(for the urban core) or half-mile of a park or public green space. Include at least $25 million in bonds in the next bond referendum for the acquisition and development of urban parks, and partner with other Texas cities to ask the Texas Legislature to grant home-rule cities the authority to create by referendum special citywide parks districts with funding authority.

b. Enhance Parks Planning Process to Consider Children. All City of Austin planning efforts pertaining to parks and open spaces should take into consideration the special needs of children of all ages and include family-friendly amenities.

c. Dedicate Parkland in Large Developments. For large residential developments (including all large residential developments in a Transit Oriented-Development District and in a city density corridor), PARD should require parkland to be dedicated instead of allowing for an in-lieu-of fee. However, in some situations it may be appropriate to allow up to 50 percent of the parkland dedication requirement to be met by a payment of an in-lieu-of fee. If the land is undevelopable as traditional parkland, PARD should consider other innovative recreational amenities that will appeal to families with children.

d. Incorporate Play Features in Public Spaces. The City of Austin should continue to include innovative, child friendly features and play spaces in all large public spaces (both outdoor and indoor spaces), building on the model project being developed at the new downtown library site. The City of Austin should provide for a playscape or other outdoor, child-friendly features at all city libraries.

e. Provide Bike and Pedestrian Paths. The City of Austin should implement the vision from the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan and the Bicycle, Sidewalk, and pending Urban Trails Master Plans of providing connectivity of green space and bike and pedestrian paths across the city.

f. Provide Adequate Funding for Maintenance. The City of Austin should provide adequate funding for PARD to be able to properly operate and maintain its existing and new facilities.

g. Extend City of Austin Pool Hours. The City of Austin should provide funding to allow PARD to extend pool hours during the day and for an extended period of the year and to address current inequities in pool access by geographic area of the city.

2. **Expand cultural and family-related events.**

a. Expand Afterschool and Summer Programs. The City of Austin and AISD should enter into additional collaborations and shared-use agreements with each other, with nonprofits, and with civic groups to create additional summer and afterschool indoor recreational activities at underutilized campuses for children of all ages and all abilities.

b. Create Pedestrian Zones. The City Council should continue to promote the ideas brought forth by *Viva Street!* and other special events by closing certain streets in the downtown area on weekends to promote car-free family areas, and to facilitate the ability of neighborhoods to close selected streets on the weekends to create family play zones.

c. Enliven Public Spaces. The City of Austin should create additional public gathering spaces in downtown and throughout the city and incorporate child-friendly and family-friendly features into existing public spaces.

d. Use Cultural Arts to Attract Families Downtown. The City of Austin, in partnership with other public and private entities, should seek opportunities to use the cultural arts to attract families with children and others to downtown spaces, including investments in the city's alley network and adoption of the recommendations in the Austin Downtown Commission's Work Group on activating downtown alleys.

e. Expand Support for Library System. The City of Austin should continue to expand its budgetary support of the central library and the branch libraries. City Council should also explore expanding the Austin History Center to include a museum with programming for children, adults, and families.

f. Support Neighborhood-Based Cultural Activities. In collaboration with local businesses, cultural organizations and institutions, AISD, and other partners, the City of Austin should support neighborhood-based cultural activities and the development of cultural and heritage community/neighborhood districts.

g. Create Life-Long Engagement in Cultural Arts. The City's libraries and relevant departments should collaborate with AISD, local businesses, and cultural organizations in developing programs that would enrich life-long active engagement in the cultural arts.

h. Introduce Downtown Family Nights. In partnership with local businesses, the City should initiate a monthly downtown "family night", perhaps during a trial period during the summer. This initiative might include electively closing streets to promote safe walking and create areas for play; encouraging restaurants to offer children's menu options;

encouraging museums and clubs to provide child-oriented entertainment; and linking with other family-friendly events, such as "Movies in Republic Square."

Transportation

1. **Coordinate with AISD and Travis County to create safe routes to schools, parks, and libraries plan by 2015.** This should include the following actions:
   a. Encourage the use of appropriate signage to remind drivers to stop at crosswalks.
   b. Increase enforcement for safe walking routes through city including but not limited to increased fines and red light cameras to ensure motorist compliance.
   c. Encourage car-free drop off areas at each elementary, middle, and high school, where practical.
   d. Educate at least 50 percent of Principals and CAC members about the Plan and involve them in development of the plan and its implementation.

2. **Target bond funding for bicycle/pedestrian improvements to support access to parks, libraries and schools.** The City of Austin should focus on implementing the Sidewalk and Bicycle Master Plans and supporting the Urban Trails Master Plan to encourage active transportation routes to schools. Bond funding for active transportation projects should be prioritized.

3. **Improve access to Capital Metro for families.** The JSC should contact Capital Metro with the goal of establishing a pilot program to engage school campuses in its Try Transit program, and to identify additional cost effective measures to better serve schools and families.

4. **The City of Austin should direct the Austin Transportation Department to develop a pilot project to retrofit 10 neighborhood streets across the city into shared streets, also known as living streets or homes zones.** Through their design, shared streets place an emphasis on pedestrian scale and traffic calming, permitting children to play safety in front of their homes. The City of Austin should also direct the Transportation Department to build collaborations on this effort across all departments and with AISD's Director of Transportation as well as other government entities including Capital Metro.[30]

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30 The shared street concept, which originated as "woonerfs" in the Netherlands, has been adopted by cities throughout the world. NACTO's new design guidelines include a section on shared streets. The City of San Francisco, for example, also has its own design guidelines for shared streets. Chicago is in the process of designing its first shared street. Santa Monica finished its first shared street transformation last year in a residential neighborhood where residents were concerned about crime and quality of life, in an effort to bring about a stronger sense of neighborhood and to promote walking and cycling. Aukland, Australia is putting in place the shared street concept throughout the city. Great Britain has funded the retrofitting of dozens of shared streets under its "Home Zone" program.

5. **Redesign the City of Austin's Pedestrian Program to more closely resemble the city's Bicycle Program**. The city's bicycle program has been able to cut across city silos and dramatically expand the city's cycling facilities through strong leadership and integration of planners and engineers. The Pedestrian Program is currently focused primarily on repairing and adding sidewalks to comply with the Americans Disabilities Act. In addition to addressing the critical gaps in sidewalk accessibility, the Program should identify other opportunities to increase pedestrian-oriented environments. Similar to the role of the Bicycle Program manager, a Pedestrian Program manager could serve as "walkability" advocate, to cut through city bureaucracy, proactively seek out opportunities to improve walkability in the city, and build collaborations across departments. A pedestrian program manager could also coordinate with AISD Director of Transportation to improve student safety in school areas.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

The Schools and Family Work Group formed the Public Schools Subcommittee to develop recommendations designed to attract and retain families in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), Austin's largest public school system serving over 85,000 students daily. While the subcommittee's charge focused primarily on the central city, subcommittee members believe these recommendations will benefit all public schools throughout Austin, including those outside the AISD system.

The subcommittee identified four chief elements essential to creating and maintaining an excellent public school system. These are: (1) strengthen campuses and vertical teams with rigorous and diverse academic options; (2) maintain high quality school facilities; (3) improve district and campus-level communications; and (4) increase community engagement. The need for each of these elements is discussed below, followed by specific recommendations in each category.

Strengthen Campuses and Vertical Teams with Rigorous and Diverse Academic Options

While AISD may take justifiable pride in several of its outstanding academic programs, it must do more to expand academic rigor and educational quality in *every* school and to provide a richer array of signature programs and specialized academic programming. This is especially true at the middle school level where AISD has historically lost a high number of families due to concerns about quality of its middle schools. Further, AISD's current middle and high school magnet programs are oversubscribed and many other families find them an undesirable match for their students for a variety of reasons. To attract and retain families, AISD would benefit from increasing the diversity and rigor of its academic options and more aggressively marketing the many outstanding programs it already offers to Austin students.

Maintain High Quality School Facilities

Research shows that strong schools and rich academic offerings will attract families with children to a neighborhood.[31] But academic offerings alone will not draw families to a school that is in obviously poor repair, lacks essential features such as computer labs, or has unsafe equipment for required activities such as physical education. To attract and retain families, the physical facilities of our campuses must be safe, in good repair and offer sufficient space and equipment for effective learning.

Many of AISD's older schools have deteriorated to the point where they may no longer seem attractive, viable options for families. While wonderful teaching and learning still occurs, it is hard for many families, especially those new to AISD, to look past aging

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31 David Varady and Jeffrey A. Raffel, Selling Cities: Attracting Homebuyers Through Schools and Housing Programs, Albany: State University of New York Press (1995).

facilities or the heavy use of portable buildings. To continue to attract and retain families, the state of these facilities must be addressed and made a priority in future bond packages.

Improve District and Campus-Level Communications

Ensuring good communication in any large organization is a daunting task, but for public schools, it is especially challenging. Schools must address everything from nut-and-bolts scheduling (do we have enough translators for back-to-school night?) to big-picture puzzlers (what's the best way to keep the community engaged?). Whether it's a teacher's handwritten note in a student backpack or a high-profile bond power point for prospective voters, much depends on the ability to share information clearly, quickly and well.

Communication is one of AISD's biggest ongoing challenges and is arguably the single most important element for the district to get right. For that reason, improving communication appears as a common theme in this section of our report. The action items presented here are designed to increase clarity, transparency and engagement and to build a shared community vision for Austin's public schools.

Communication must also be a two-way street. When a campus meeting ends in protests or irate letters flood the local editorial pages, too often it is because the public feels shut out of the district's decision-making process. Looking ahead, AISD must build authentic two-way communication with families and the general public before major decisions are made.

Increase Community Engagement

Finally, any successful effort to maintain strong public schools must engage the wider community. All residents of Austin benefit from the presence of strong public schools, but too often, those who do not have children currently enrolled fail to understand the importance of schools to the overall health of our city and to their own lives. Studies show that good public schools are key to maintaining home values, protecting the most important investment most of us will ever make. Research also shows that if a school closes for *any* reason—including poor maintenance, budget cuts or other factors—civic participation in the surrounding area suffers a measurable decline and residents are more likely to move away.

Recommendations

To attract and retain families in AISD schools, the Work Group recommends focusing on four major areas.[32] We especially emphasize the increased importance of engaging families and communities, as this is now a metric on which schools will be evaluated under a 2013 amendment to Texas' school accountability law.

1.) Strengthen Campuses and Vertical Teams with Rigorous and Diverse Academic Programs

   a) Identify under-enrolled schools and use a community engagement process to create signature academic programs or other programs, including a marketing campaign, to attract neighborhood students and others. *See Appendix A for examples of individual AISD campuses that have successfully rebuilt enrollment through innovative programs. See Appendix B for successful initiatives in other districts.*

   b) Establish a formal administrative and board policy to encourage and support innovation at the campus level, including an annual Request For Proposals (RFP) process, to take advantage of the wealth of campus-level knowledge and to facilitate improvement and innovation district-wide, with the recognition that low-income campuses may require assistance from the district or community partners. Both the City and County should assist AISD in publicizing the annual call for RFPs. *See Appendix C for background.*

   c) Create a "Campus Innovations" page on the district website to share information about successful campus-based programs in AISD, as well as programs that have succeeded in other districts. Request each campus CAC to review and update its information for the website page annually.

   d) Build strong vertical team transitions by <u>requiring all middle schools to engage in at least two specific activities per semester</u> involving its feeder elementary schools and all high schools to engage in at least one specific activity per semester with its feeder middle schools. *See Appendix D for background and suggested activities.*

   e) Conduct an annual survey of families who leave the district to identify reasons for leaving and analyze results to identify any specific improvements that would help retain families.

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32 A number of these recommendations were first developed by AISD's Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools (CCNS) and appear in greater detail in that group's final report, available online at
http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/ccns/report.phtml

2.) Maintain High Quality School Facilities

    a) Prioritize deteriorating school buildings in future bonds to ensure all campuses provide safe, sufficient facilities for learning.

    b) Evaluate district maintenance policies and processes to ensure a maintenance system that is clear to all affected parties, including school staff and families, and that provides clear reporting, tracking and accountability procedures for all maintenance requests.

3.) Improve District and Campus-level Communications

    a) AISD should equip Campus Advisory Councils to lead campus-level communications and immediate community outreach by taking —but not limited to—the following steps:

        i. Provide an annual directive from board and administration to all principals and Campus Advisory Councils (CAC) emphasizing the CACs' responsibility to provide ongoing campus-level communication, including immediate community outreach.

        ii. Create a one-page toolkit for CACs clearly outlining responsibilities and providing steps for member recruitment and communications, to be included with annual message from board and administration.

        iii. Provide annual professional development in public communications for all principals and assistant principals.

        iv. Develop a template for an annual State of the Campus report for each campus to complete and assist campuses in sharing it with all families and community partners. Report should clearly identify any factors (quantitative criteria, e.g. significant under- or over-enrollment or failure to meet mandated standardized test scores) that may trigger changes such as boundary adjustments, repurposing, state or federal intervention or closure. The report should also identify successful campus programs or achievements (qualitative criteria) that may offset or inform other factors. *For proposed criteria, see Appendix D.*

        v. Create a community engagement/organizing program for AISD UpClose and partner program graduates with specific campuses to support CACs needing to boost membership and participation.

        vi. Enlist CACs to publicize AISD Board meetings and work sessions and relevant board decisions to their respective school communities.

    b) Improve Transparency and Access at AISD.

        i. Provide direct email access to board members via individual assigned district email addresses for each board member.

        ii. Post AISD board agendas five days in advance.

        iii. Use plain language and avoid jargon and/or acronyms in all district communications.

     iv.   Require the following information to be posted on the district website and in a prominent central location on each campus:

c) How to initiate or seek approval for proposed campus projects or innovations;

d) Who to contact about a complaint or concern involving a district employee;

e) How to appeal a decision by a campus or district employee;

f) What is the role of the District Ombudsman, including types of problems the Ombudsman does and does not handle?

     i.   Adopt a formal administrative and board policy that establishes translation as a priority need and expand services to support non-English speaking families.

         a.   Solidify cost estimate to provide translation services for monthly CAC meetings at district campuses with this need (a rough current estimate is $80,000 per year).

         b.   Use existing district map of translation needs to identify which languages are required and focus on areas of greatest need. Map should be updated annually.

     ii.   Develop a program to recruit and train volunteer "campus language partners" to provide interpretation at individual schools for parent-teacher conferences, required special education meetings or other daily needs. (Note: volunteers may not be called translators or linguists, as those are professional terms for personnel who are hired on a contract basis).

     iii.   Work with local businesses and nonprofits to encourage them to identify potential volunteer "campus language partners" and promote employee participation as many already do for tutor/mentor programs.

     iv.   Consider additional compensation for campus-level employees who are already providing *de facto* translation services in addition to their regular duties.

     v.   For campuses with large numbers of immigrant families, provide specialized immigrant parent orientations by Parent Support Specialists or other appropriate staff to introduce school staff, PTA, CAC and other campus contacts that may answer questions or provide assistance.

4.) Increase Community Engagement

a) Create a marketing campaign highlighting the strengths of AISD schools and programs and underscoring the importance of a strong public school system to our entire community. Communicating this message is everyone's job - AISD staff and families, PTAs, city and county leaders, local nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, real estate agents, faith leaders – and all must be equipped to share it.

b) Create a one-page document for use by all school and community partners explaining the importance of maintaining strong public schools.

c) Create a specific marketing campaign targeting Austin families that highlights the strengths of AISD schools and the variety of available programs.

d) Identify and enlist all possible community partners, with special focus on real estate community and local Chambers of Commerce.

e) Promote district successes by publicizing outstanding current programs and clearly showing how struggling schools are being supported.

f) Communicate the need for facility upgrades for older campuses well in advance of the next school bond election. The quality of school facilities is a key factor in maintaining property values and determining where families choose to live, as well as student academic success and teacher retention.

CONCLUSION

An ample body of research clearly demonstrates the vital role that families and schools play in the life of a city, affecting such key areas as job growth, the environment, civic engagement and the local economy. For these reasons, retaining families and strong public schools in *every* neighborhood is critical to Austin's continued economic growth, sustainability and overall vibrancy. Unfortunately, recent demographic trends show the percentage of Austin families with children is declining, particularly in the urban core, and these losses are already being felt by AISD, our city's largest public school system.

The policy recommendations contained in this report are intended to stem this decline. Some proposals are large in scope, while others are quite specific, and they encompass many different aspects of our civic life. While we understand that not every recommendation will likely be adopted, we strongly urge the members of the JSC to consider the serious consequences of continued losses and act quickly to address those issues within their control. We also emphasize that this report is not intended to be inclusive; in fact, we hope it may spark additional ideas among those who read it.

Our schools and families are the heart of our community, and every Austin resident has a stake in keeping them strong. Their continued presence ensures a more secure future for us all. Austin cannot afford their loss.

About the Work Group

The Schools and Families Work Group was created on January 18, 2013, by a vote of the members of the Joint Subcommittees of the City of Austin, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees and Travis County Commissioners Court[33] (JSC) in order to generate policy recommendations "aimed at supporting neighborhood schools and retaining families with children in Central Austin."[34]   The Work Group was also specifically tasked with revisiting "past recommendation and unmet goals" including those identified in the following reports and plans:

- City of Austin Families and Children Task Force;
- AISD Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools;
- City of Austin Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan; and
- City of Austin/ AISD matrix of partnership opportunities.

Each voting member of the JSC nominated representatives to serve on the Work Group, which comprised a diverse set of community members, subject matter experts and support staff from the City of Austin, AISD, and Travis County.

On February 13, the first meeting was held at City Hall. In March, discussions regarding inclusion of other school districts with the work group membership (i.e. Del Valle, Manor), goals, objectives, timelines for milestones, and input for future meeting topics were gathered. In April, by unanimous approval, the group selected Vickie Black and Maureen Metteauer as co-chairs and Susan Moffat as vice-chair.

For purposes of its charge, the Work Group defined Central Austin by the City's boundaries: North (183) South (SH 71/ Ben White Boulevard) East (Martin Luther King Jr. /Airport Boulevard) and West (Capital of Texas Highway), though members explicitly recognized that many recommendations under development could benefit schools and neighborhoods throughout the city and county.

The Work Group met monthly and engaged in ongoing research and email discussions to develop the policy recommendations contained in this report. Members conducted interviews with key subject matter experts, including formal presentations from City of Austin Demographer Ryan Robinson; Garner Stoll, Assistant Director of COA Planning and Development Review, and Beth Wilson, Assistant Director of Planning Services at Austin Independent School District. Pursuant to its charge, Work Group members Susan Moffat, Heather Way and Cathy Echols briefed the group on the recommendations of the AISD Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools (2008) and the City of Austin's Families and Children Taskforce (2008), on which they had served, respectively. In addition to these presentations, individual committee members conducted and presented additional research and information from a variety of sources including economics reports, academic papers and periodicals.

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33 Austin City Council, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees, Travis County Commissioners Court Joint Subcommittees, Minutes of the January 18, 2013, agenda item 2.

34 *Ibid.*

The group further created two subcommittees—Community Policy and Public Schools—designed to focus intensively on two core elements of its charge: identifying policy changes to help retain families in Austin's central core and strengthening public schools in those areas. Each subcommittee developed a set of recommendations that were debated and approved by the full Work Group for inclusion in this report. From these recommendations, the full group also identified thirteen top priorities, which are highlighted in the Executive Summary.

The subcommittees addressed joint coordination of policies and use of facilities in various recommendations, but the work group did not specifically carve out recommendations targeted at joint use and resource sharing among the City, County and Austin ISD. Between June and September), the subcommittees met during our regularly scheduled meeting times, as well as through e-mail. The work group reviewed and revised draft recommendations in October and November; the work group approved all recommendations at its last meeting in December 2013.

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APPENDIX A

Examples of Successful Campus-based Initiatives in AISD

BECKER ELEMENTARY AND RIDGETOP ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: TWO-WAY DUAL LANGUAGE

In 2006, then Superintendent Pat Forgione proposed closing several schools, including Becker Elementary and Ridgetop Elementary, due to low enrollment. In an effort to revitalize these struggling campuses, community members suggested AISD explore a two-way dual language program as a means to draw families back to their neighborhood schools. From this initial seed, AISD administration went on to develop the district's successful two-way dual language program.

In 2010-11, Becker and Ridgetop became two of the first four pilot schools for the two-way dual language program. Since its implementation, both Becker and Ridgetop have reported significant enrollment increases as a result of the program, as well as increased family engagement. All dual language spots for native English speakers are currently filled for the 2013-14 year, and overall enrollment has increased so much that both campuses are now on the district's list to be monitored for possible closure to transfers. This successful program is now in place on nine AISD campuses, and is so popular that a lottery has had to be employed to select students.

BECKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: TUITION-BASED PRE-K

Also in 2006, members of the Becker community observed a desire for tuition-based pre-K among neighborhood families and recommended AISD explore this as another way to more fully use the Becker facility. As a result, AISD now allows families to pay for any available spots in its Becker pre-K program after the needs of qualifying students are met. This provides a more diverse income mix in the pre-K program and has re-engaged many neighborhood families in their local elementary school. All tuition-based pre-K slots at Becker are now filled for the 2013-14 school year. After the success of the Becker pilot, AISD expanded the pre-K program to more than 20 elementary schools across the district. Many of the programs are so popular that the schools have had to utilize a lottery system to select applicants.

WEBB MIDDLE SCHOOLS: FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

In 2007, Webb Middle School was threatened with closure for three consecutive years of low state standardized test scores. Staff and community members worked together to develop a plan to improve student academic success and keep the school open.
One of the school's major challenges was an extremely high student mobility rate (rates of 15-20percent are considered high; Webb was at 35percent). Even in the best schools, students can't learn if they can't stay in class.

There are multiple reasons for high mobility, but a key factor is family instability: job loss, evictions, health crises or family problems may all cause kids to move. The goal was to help stabilize Webb's families in crisis so that their children could remain in school.

Starting in fall 2007, community members Allen and Julie Weeks joined with Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services and other community partners to open and staff the Webb Family Resource Center. Volunteers from a nearby church helped remodel a portable building for the center, and families began to receive support and services.   Families were assessed in five key areas - housing, employment/finances, access to healthcare, education and social connections – with the goal of achieving long-term stabilization.

Within a year of starting the center, Webb had regained its Academically Acceptable rating from the state. Within two years, Webb's mobility rate dropped from 35percent to 29percent and teachers reported a noticeably improved atmosphere for learning. The school also garnered national attention when America's Promise Alliance, founded by Colin Powell, named the area one of the "100 Best Communities for Children," largely due to the groundbreaking efforts at Webb.

In 2009, AISD asked Austin Voices for Education and Youth, where Mr. Weeks serves as executive director, to replicate this model in more schools. Family Resource Centers are now in place in Burnet and Dobie Middle Schools, and Austin Voices also provides support for additional centers at Reagan and LBJ High School. Each center has a bilingual licensed social worker, a director and other part-time and volunteer staff. Each also organizes a network of local community partners that meet monthly to increase and coordinate support for the campus.

Today, these Family Resource Centers serve over 1,000 families annually through an ongoing partnership with AISD. By providing effective efficient services to meet the needs of at-risk students and families, Family Resource Centers help students to be stable, supported and successful in school and life.

LAMAR MIDDLE SCHOOL: FINE ARTS ACADEMY
Concerned about falling enrollment and poor test scores at Lamar Middle School, in 2009, a group of parents, faculty and community members began an effort to attract and retain students by creating a Fine Arts Academy at the middle school. After years of pushing, prodding and planning, the Lamar Fine Arts Academy finally opened its doors in 2012-13.
During its first year of operation, the Lamar Fine Arts Academy substantially increased student enrollment from the Lamar attendance zone, and enrollment growth is expected to continue as the Academy begins accepting transfer students in 2013-14. Standardized

test scores also increased during the program's first year, allowing the school to regain its Academically Acceptable rating.

The new program has also begun to strengthen the school's vertical team, according to parents. Lamar's first end-of-year fine arts show featured a dance by vertical team second-graders, choreographed by a McCallum HS dance teacher, and performed on the stage at Lamar. After the show, the mother of one of the young performers reported: "My daughter can't wait to get to Lamar now!" As this experience illustrates, it's never too early to begin positive interactions with a child's future middle school or high school. Lamar has wisely built such opportunities into its program.

McCALLUM HIGH SCHOOL: FINE ARTS ACADEMY

In the early 1990s, McCallum High School suffered from severely declining enrollment and fears grew that the campus might be closed. A visionary group of faculty, parents and community members, including partners from the University of Texas Fine Arts Departments, conceived of a Fine Arts Academy as a way to revitalize the campus.

Today, the nationally recognized McCallum Fine Arts Academy offers a rigorous four-year curriculum with areas of concentration in dance, music, theater or visual arts. The program currently enrolls approximately 500 students, representing every neighborhood in Austin.

Under McCallum's inclusive open-door policy, all students in the school share the same academic and advisory classes and all Fine Arts classes, and approximately 1500 of McCallum's 1700-plus students are currently enrolled in at least one Fine Arts class. Overall enrollment is so robust that the school is now frozen to transfers.

APPENDIX B

Examples of Successful Initiatives in Other Districts and Cities

ATLANTA, GEORGIA:

Centennial Place School, part of the Atlanta Public School system, was built in a very distressed neighborhood on the site of an old elementary school in conjunction with a redevelopment project involving public housing. The school focuses on science and technology with strong connections to Georgia Tech, year-round curriculum and longer school hours. The school has been very successful at attracting families from a wide range of income levels and has driven private-market development of family-friendly housing in the neighborhood.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA:

In Philadelphia, the Penn Alexander School was created as a partnership between the Philadelphia School District, the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Federal of Teachers, and the West Philadelphia community. The school has been successful in attracting middle-income families to the school, and enrolls a very diverse mix of students. Real estate agents use the school to market the surrounding neighborhood to parents looking to buy homes, and the school has resulted in a moderate housing boom as families are attracted to buy in the neighborhood.

HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE:

Responding to declining school enrollment, the Hamilton County school district serving Chattanooga and surrounding areas created two magnet schools in low-income neighborhoods and converted two older neighborhood schools near downtown into magnets. The diverse schools have been very attractive to families. At least half the students are from the neighborhood, and parents who work in the area also receive preference.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS:

The Chicago School District has been working to stop the flight of middle-class families by offering prekindergarten classes, high-technology buildings, magnet programs, and Advanced Placement classes. The district has found that offering expanded preschool offerings in schools with declining enrollment has been one of the strongest magnets for attracting neighborhood families to the district's elementary schools.

VANCOUVER, CANADA:

While most downtowns have lost families with children, the number of children living in downtown Vancouver has doubled within just five years, between 1996 and 2001. By 2001, 5,680 children were living in Vancouver's 2.3 square mile downtown. In 2004, the city opened a new elementary school in an inner-city neighborhood for the first time in

30 years. The growth in families with children is the direct result of city planning efforts and the dedication of city officials that the city would not become a city of the childless rich. The key city policy to fulfilling this vision is a requirement that 20 percent of units in developments must be for low-income residents and 25 percent must be family-sized units. The family-size units are typically town homes surrounding residential towers. Parks and playscapes are integral to the developments. Extensive development guidelines include other requirements to support the needs of families in dense developments.

APPENDIX C

Annual RFP for Campus-Level Initiatives

Each school is unique, and often the most effective recommendations for school improvements come from those who know the campus best. In fact, many of AISD's most successful current programs began as grassroots initiatives brought forward by knowledgeable campus families, staff or community volunteers.

But those who have engaged in such initiatives often report significant frustration, delay or confusion in navigating the AISD system. "It almost seemed as if the district was thwarting us at every turn," a key participant at one school recalled. Families, faculty and community members need to know that their ideas are valued and that there is a clearly defined process to bring proposals forward for consideration.

For these reasons, we recommend that AISD create an annual Request for Proposals (RFP) process, to take advantage of the wealth of campus-level knowledge and to facilitate improvement and innovation district-wide. Both the City and County should assist AISD in publicizing the annual call for RFPs.

APPENDIX D

Suggested Activities to Strengthen Vertical Teams

AISD has historically lost the greatest number of students during the transition from elementary to middle school. While it is true that AISD's middle schools have long been perceived as the district's weakest link academically, it is also true that this transition coincides with what is likely a parent's time of greatest anxiety. The idea of sending their small sweet elementary school child off to a much larger school full of unknown older students can strike fear into the most laid-back parental heart. For some, middle school is the first time that sex, drugs, alcohol or other worrisome behaviors begin to seem like real possibilities. Many adults also remember their own middle schools years as a time of embarrassment at best, torment at worst. The natural wish is to place your child on a nice safe desert island until the storm of puberty passes.

While AISD cannot assuage every parental fear, it can structure activities in every vertical team to demystify the transition by helping parents and students become accustomed to the secondary schools in their vertical team well before that transition occurs. Students and parents who have spent time cheering on their high school's football team or attending a music recital at their middle school will naturally experience less fear than those who have never set foot on these campuses. As the experience of Lamar Middle School illustrates (Appendix A), elementary students in the school's vertical team now actively look forward to becoming Lamar Scotties, thanks to a thoughtful effort to include elementary students in just one school program.

The following list offers some suggested activities designed to strengthen vertical teams, though it is by no means intended to be inclusive. Given the current number of students leaving AISD at the middle school transition, we recommend that middle schools engage in at least two activities per semester with their feeder elementary schools. However, high school transitions are also important and, for that reason, we recommend that high schools engage in at least one activity per semester with their feeder middle schools.

- Invite feeder elementary and/or middle school to a special night at a school athletic event or performance and send selected student ambassadors to visit feeder schools the week before the event to promote it.
- Offer free or discounted tickets to feeder schools for selected school events or performances.
- Designate a selected athletic event or performance as "Jane Doe Elementary Night" or "John Doe Middle School Night."
- Invite selected elementary or middle schools students to participate in a school event by walking onto the field with athletes before the game or singing a song onstage before the main performance.

- Recognize the elementary or middle school as honored guests at half-time or intermission.
- Invite feeder middle school or elementary school band to perform a piece at a high school athletic event or other school function.
- Coordinate a presentation from a school club, such as drama or robotics, to a local feeder elementary.
- Ensure that invitations to all major school performances or events are communicated routinely to all feeder schools.
- Explore mentorships within vertical team for faculty, administrators, staff and students, including efforts to align curriculum.

APPENDIX E

Threshold criteria for annual State of the Campus Report.

Each annual State of the Campus Report should clearly identify any threshold criteria that may trigger major campus changes, as well qualitative criteria to be considered where the district has discretion.

a) *Threshold Criteria are factors that may trigger repurposing, boundary changes, state or federal intervention including closure, or other major changes (CCNS pp. 20-23):*
   (1) *Campus enrollment is at 85 percent of capacity or drops five percent over the course of two years OR*
   (2) *Campus enrollment is at 105percent or gains 5percent enrollment over the course of two years OR*
   (3) *Campus fails to make AYP or reach required state accountability standards.*

b) *Qualitative Criteria include special campus factors or other considerations that may offset or inform decisions based on threshold criteria in which the district has discretion, such as rising or falling enrollment (CCNS pp. 20-23). Qualitative criteria shall be considered by the board and staff in proposing any major campus change and shall be included in any public decision-making process. Qualitative criteria may include, but are not limited to:*

   (1) Student success including academic performance and state/federal accountability status
   (2) Number of high needs students
   (3) Specialized programs or curriculum, including after-school programs
   (4) Core capacity of facilities such as cafeteria, library, gymnasium
   (5) Transportation options to other schools if boundaries are redrawn
   (6) Current utilization of campus during school hours
   (7) Feasibility of adding or subtracting portable buildings
   (8) Relevant demographics trends, including planned residential projects or projected student population growth
   (9) Identified neighborhood, city or regional planning goals
   (10)   *Historic value of building*
   (11)   Potential environmental impacts of proposed change
   (12)   Whether campus provides, or could provide, services such as day care, library, police substation or other community benefits
   (13)   Recent renovations, alterations, and expansions to campus
   (14)   Value to community and/or to AISD's portfolio of offerings.

c) *Establish a defined decision-making process for campuses that have reached one or more of the threshold criteria defined in 11(a) above. (CCNS pp. 23-29) Process shall include:*

(1) Notification and Outreach
(2) Community Meeting #1: Assess the Situation
(3) Additional Outreach and Data-gathering
(4) Community Meeting #2: Develop Recommendations and Action Plans
(5) Implementation of Action Plan
(6) Briefing to the Board of Trustees
(7) Reassessment (Return to Step 1)

Note: For under-enrolled schools with active community participation, we recommend a five-year minimum timeframe to rebuild.

APPENDIX F

AISD Permanent School Capacity 2013-2014

Elementary Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment	Elementary Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
Blackshear	598	218	36%	Oak Hill	773	777	100%
Zavala	580	335	58%	Walnut Creek	655	662	101%
Norman	486	284	58%	Odom	542	552	102%
Campbell	524	313	60%	Hart	711	724	102%
Becker	524	330	63%	Allison	486	497	102%
Winn	524	339	65%	Reilly	318	326	103%
Dawson	524	345	66%	Summitt	752	780	104%
Boone	752	504	67%	Harris*	673	702	104%
Cunningham	627	423	67%	Mills	794	830	105%
Sims	355	251	71%	Patton*	920	967	105%
Oak Springs	411	293	71%	Pleasant Hill	524	552	105%
St. Elmo	411	316	77%	Travis Heights	486	531	109%
Metz	542	419	77%	Pillow	522	574	110%
Palm	673	537	80%	Clayton	836	920	110%
Joslin	374	300	80%	Andrews*	636	700	110%
Kocurek	673	546	81%	Baldwin	669	739	110%
Uphaus PK	367	298	81%	Overton	617	700	113%
Brooke	430	364	85%	Jordan	655	748	114%
Linder*	588	498	85%	Houston	692	794	115%
Webb Primary	243	206	85%	Highland Park	585	672	115%
Guerrero-Thompson	748	641	86%	Graham	598	704	118%
Bryker Woods*	439	387	88%	Cowan	669	792	118%
Blanton	636	563	89%	Zilker	460	548	119%
Lee	418	371	89%	Menchaca	606	732	121%
Pease	293	261	89%	Pickle	617	762	123%
Sanchez	580	523	90%	Rodriguez	711	878	124%
Dobie PK Cntr	337	306	91%	Wooldridge*	673	835	124%
Casey	711	649	91%	Baranoff	794	999	126%
Galindo	711	657	92%	Casis	669	844	126%
Govalle	598	554	93%	Ridgetop	224	286	127%
Sunset Valley	561	522	93%	Maplewood	355	454	128%
Ortega	374	351	94%	Gullett	418	537	128%
Brentwood	585	562	96%	Kiker	752	979	130%
McBee	580	559	96%	Read Pre-K	352	464	132%
Brown	468	455	97%	Hill	627	844	135%
Pecan Springs	505	492	97%	Langford	542	770	142%
Davis	731	717	98%	Perez	598	855	143%
Barrington	556	548	99%	Wooten	468	728	156%
Williams	561	554	99%	Doss	543	849	156%
Widen	673	669	99%	Blazier	598	960	160%
Barton Hills*	418	418	100%	Cook	561	935	167%
Mathews	397	399	100%		22,086	18,277	83%

* Permanent capacity has been adjusted to account for portable classrooms that function as permanent space and that cannot be replaced with permanent construction due to site limitations.

** Room counts and permanent capacity subject to verification by the 2013 Space Utilization Survey.

Middle Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
Garcia	1,215	496	41%
Pearce	1,078	470	44%
Covington	1,125	673	60%
Martin	804	591	74%
Lamar	1,008	745	74%
Mendez	1,215	913	75%
Dobie	902	693	77%
Small	1,239	973	79%
Webb	804	644	80%
Bailey	1,176	955	81%
Kealing	1,333	1,132	85%
Fulmore	1,078	982	91%
Paredes	1,156	1,089	94%
Gorzycki	1,323	1,266	96%
O. Henry	945	978	103%
Bedichek	941	1,022	109%
Burnet	1,039	1,132	109%
Murchison	1,113	1,419	127%
	19,493	16,173	83%

High Schools	2013-14 Permanent Capacity**	2013-14 Student Enrollment (1st 6 Weeks)	Percent of Permanent Capacity by Student Enrollment
EMHSJC / International	1,548	771	50%
Garza	321	214	67%
Crockett	2,163	1,575	73%
Reagan	1,588	1,164	73%
Travis (w/ Premier)	1,862	1,602	86%
Anderson	2,373	2,196	93%
Austin	2,205	2,139	97%
LBJ/LASA	1,842	1,843	100%
McCallum	1,596	1,622	102%
Lanier (w/ Premier)	1,627	1,720	106%
Akins	2,394	2,592	108%
Bowie	2,535	2,908	115%
	22,054	20,346	92%

* Permanent capacity has been adjusted to account for portable classrooms that function as permanent space and that cannot be replaced with permanent construction due to site limitations.

** Room counts and permanent capacity subject to verification by the 2013 Space Utilization Survey.

APPENDIX G

Additional Reading

http://ui.uncc.edu/story/charlotte-mecklenburg-neighborhood-schools

http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/cps-alternatives-suburbs-magnet-selective-enrollment-lowincome/Content?oid=11046489

http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/15/national/15PRES.html

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