



Austin Elementary
San Angelo ISD

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Overview and Background

Austin Elementary, built in 1929, has a long history in our community. The campus is one of 17 district elementary schools in San Angelo ISD and currently serves 350 students in Early Childhood Special Education through Fifth grade. With 82% of our students qualifying for free and reduced lunches, we work to provide an environment that meets students where they are, establishes high expectations, and develops the whole child. While the neighborhood has changed and our enrollment has declined by 20% over the last ten years, we have a consistent and dedicated staff that is always working to grow professionally to help students progress in their academic and social emotional well-being.

In 2018-2019, We began the work of transforming Austin into a learning organization. We gathered input from parents, students, and staff about their hopes and dreams. A team of staff then used this information to map the most common words and draft a new mission and vision for the campus. Our vision became Empower to Learn. Empower to Lead. We clung to the definition of Empower as “(verb) Make (Someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights.” This perfectly captured the hopes and dreams of all stakeholders and has been the catalyst for our work to build a school where students are prepared to impact their community positively.

Focus

With a district focus on the visioning document, we began crafting our Community Based Accountability System (CBAS) to honor the hopes and dreams of our community. The pillars of our CBAS led us to create our campus goals and think about what we want for students. Our district has adopted a Learner Profile that sets the standard for developing students who can be creators, critical thinkers, communicators, and collaborators. These tools have directly impacted our journey to design new learning standards that address the development of the whole child.

Work

With the understanding that to empower students, we must clearly define expectations and improve campus culture. We have to provide an environment that makes each child and family feel cherished, secure, and connected both to staff and one another. A committee got to work establishing a behavior handbook and developing our guidelines for success. Be safe. Be kind. Be ready to learn. This language has provided a standard and empowered our students to have a common vocabulary. You often hear comments from students in the hallway like, “Thank you. That was kind.” or “Be careful. That’s not safe.” This common language has been a strong foundation for our campus culture. We have also implemented Brag Boards to celebrate the successes of our students in following our guidelines for success. Our kids love tracking the board to see when they will accomplish their next goal.

Part of our process to improve culture was becoming a Capturing Kids’ Hearts campus. The staff has implemented the practices of social contracts, greeting at the door, sharing good things to start the day, and sharing affirmations with students and other staff members. These practices have dramatically affected how students feel about coming to school and have given them a strong sense of belonging. Each Friday, we celebrate by reading our P.A.W.S. (Positively Awesome & Wonderful Staff/Students) shoutouts on the intercom. These affirmations can be given to staff and students by anyone simply by scanning the QR codes posted in the hallways. Students use their devices to submit an affirmation to be shared with the campus. With our years of experience in Capturing Kids’ Hearts, we have now begun to empower the students to lead. We love seeing the leadership in our students as they develop these skills and the impact that it is having on their homes and our community.

Continuing the work on campus culture meant building a strong Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for social-emotional learning. Our counselor has led this work by teaching monthly Tier 1 character lessons and then hosting Tier 2 lunch bunch sessions to further develop the skills of students nominated by their teachers. Our character focus is on: empathy, self-direct, teamwork, responsibility, respect, kindness, courage, perseverance, and integrity. These are the life skills that our students will need to lead and learn.

The focus of our academic work is on having high expectations and providing clarity for students on how to reach their learning goals. Our CBAS goal for student achievement is that we will empower students to use their own voice to invest in their learning by designing enriching lessons to ensure students reach their highest potential. The majority of our students come from underresourced homes and enter school with no prior daycare or school experience. Therefore, we must provide quality Tier 1 instruction and have a strong system for intervention to see our students grow. Teachers work in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to clearly define high-leverage standards and

ensure alignment of instruction. By beginning with the assessment and designing engaging activities, we can ensure that our instruction is what students need. Teachers bring work samples each week to PLC meetings so that data can be analyzed and a plan developed to ensure mastery of skills. Small group instruction with teachers provides our students with the Tier 2 support they need. Our reading and math interventionists build time into the day to pull our Tier 3 students for even more support.

We began sharing Learning Targets with our students to empower them to take ownership of their learning. The following school year, we added Success Criteria so that students would be able to know when they've mastered a skill. Our third-fifth grade students are tracking their progress using a student scoreboard. This scoreboard allows them to see their assessment data and set goals for their continued growth. They spend time reflecting on their process and talking about strategies they can use to reach their goals. Our ELAR teachers have created learning checks with open-ended questions that require students to state a claim and then provide evidence and reasoning for their response. Students also have access to rubrics to help them guide their learning.

Empowering our teachers through professional learning and classroom visit feedback has made for a strong community of staff learning and growth. One of our campus goals is to secure and retain staff that supports one another and is receptive to professional learning in order to promote student growth and empowerment. Our instructional coach offers feedback in coaching sessions and is truly innovative in the way that she works to differentiate professional learning for staff.

After working to build a strong campus culture and academic focus, we began to build long-lasting relationships with community organizations to empower students to be active and well-rounded members of their community. We applied for grants from our local schools' foundation and hosted a family literacy night and an art show. Both events required us to reach out to the community for their assistance. We were joined by members from community organizations for literacy night book tastings and partnered with local artists who mentored our students as they created pieces for the art show.

In our desire to empower students and value their individuality and choice, we have created campus jobs. Students can apply for one of our 11 campus jobs each 9-weeks. We interview students and hire approximately 40 students for these leadership positions. Students work as sub greeters, STEM playground set up, breakfast delivery crew, library helpers, project sunshine committee, librarians for our outside community library, and many other jobs. This process of applying, interviewing, and serving is one way we develop the skill of looking outward and seeing those in our community.

Our first student council members campaigned and were elected this school year. Since being elected, they have taken charge of our Helping Hands project. They created posters and visited classrooms to help grade levels collect items for a local charity. Now they are planning our first-ever Bulldog Market because they want to help our crafty students have a place to sell their goods. When asked what the purpose of the event would be they decided it would be two-fold: teach some business skills and have kids donate a portion of their profits to help others. At the last meeting, a student said, "Could we just find a way to celebrate our teachers more?" By encouraging students to ask questions that will positively impact their community, we are developing students who are active and well-rounded members of their community.

We couldn't have accomplished any of this without the families in our school community. We have focused on building strong relationships and making them feel valued. Our Grand Event (hosted around grandparents' day) was attended by over 300 adults. These important people in our students' lives stepped into our classrooms to spend time reading with students. Our annual Color Run is another way that we build strong family partnerships. With parent volunteers and help from our high school drum line, we are able to put on quite a celebration before beginning Spring Break.

Results

All of the work is done in order to achieve the hopes and dreams of our community. When looking at our data, we have seen a dramatic increase in the results of our Panorama survey with families. On this Fall's survey, 79% of our families rated the "school fit" for their child as favorable. That's an increase of 16% from our Spring survey. 86% of families favorably responded to our school climate in the survey. That is 21% above our district average and a 19% increase from last year. We believe these increased results in our positive culture are driving the academic success of our students. Our clear vision and goals, along with the dedication of our staff to continued growth, is truly helping us accomplish our vision. Empower to Learn. Empower to Lead.