

Austin Community Conversation Summary

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Participant Description: Approximately 30 participants

The State Board of Education (SBOE), under Texas law, is required to adopt a Long-Range Plan for Public Education. The 18-member steering committee, which is made up of state board members, various stakeholder group representatives and representatives from three state agencies, is leading the process. The steering committee will recommend long-term goals for Texas schools and will identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the system.

To help the board gather public input that will shape the new plan and set long-term goals through the year 2030, community conversations are being held around the state. In each community conversation, participants identify the purpose or desired outcome of public education and give feedback on challenges, strengths, and opportunities in four topics: educator preparation, recruitment, and retention; equity and access; family engagement and empowerment; and student engagement and empowerment.

This document provides a snapshot of the data collected during the Austin community conversation and highlights the main concepts captured during small-group conversations. Staff members from the Texas Comprehensive Center at the American Institutes for Research facilitated the community conversations and prepared this summary.

To learn more about the development of the Texas State Board of Education's work on the Long-Range Plan, visit https://tea.texas.gov/SBOE/long-range_plan/.

What is the purpose or desired outcome of public education?

- Apply what they are learning in a real-world setting
- Building a more equitable society
- Create opportunities for everyone; support all students
- Develop career skills, soft skills, social-emotional skills, and inclusiveness
- Do not allow lobbyists to set standards – put public back in public education
- Educated citizens capable of community engagement
- Empowering our youth for the ever-changing challenges of our global world beyond academics
- Equitable access to technology
- Expose kids to different ideas/learning environments/project-based learning
- Expose students to ideas outside of their surroundings, broaden thinking, look at the big picture
- Exposure to sports, fine arts, other races and cultures
- Foundation of American democracy
- Give students self-confidence
- Global competitiveness
- Prepare students for college and/or the workplace with 21st century skills – collaboration, communication, critical thinking, problem solving
- Separate religion from public
- Teach sex education
- Teach students about fiscal responsibility
- Teach students to be multilingual and inclusive of others
- Teaching students to back up their thinking with data
- To prepare a literate population – reading, writing, math, science



Educator Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athletic hiring can take priority over content teacher hiring • Demands of the job – we are losing teachers in first 5 years • Disrespect for the profession – seen as an easy job with a lot of time off • Hard to recruit new teachers when students have seen unhappy teachers • Inconsistent teacher prep programs (6 month, alternative, 4 year) (student teaching, mentors) • Little chance for advancement • Mentor teachers are not trained – they need updated training • Need better skills in classroom management • Need better ways to increase skill set • Pay schedules are based on years, not quality • Recruitment – teacher benefits, pay doesn't match cost of living, healthcare, retirement • Regular education teachers with special education kids need training • Rural school districts are without instructional coaches • Some Districts of Innovation abuse the privilege of hiring teachers without degrees • We need effective coaches, and the time to coach
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District of Innovation allows schools to recruit outside of traditional avenues for teachers • Instructional coaches do embedded professional development • People are still drawn to the profession • Some districts have better training for teachers • T-Tess is an improvement over PDAS for evaluation and feedback • Technology specialists also help support teachers • We have pockets of greatness in the state
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for teacher leaders, other career development paths • Creating higher standards (higher GPA) for people who want to apply to schools of education • More student surveys of teachers • Pay teachers on quality as opposed to years of teaching • Statewide database of teacher vacancies to fulfill vacancies • Strengthen alternative certification programs • Teach college students using the methods we desire for our students to use • We need a curriculum based on thinking and process skills • We should share best practices and pockets of greatness



Equity and Access

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to counselors/nurses• Access to enrichment programs during the summer• Advanced courses pushing out access to basic classes• Depending on property tax has become regressive – it’s causing people to have to leave their communities; property tax is not effective for funding education• Encouraging reading and other educational opportunities, especially for lower income students• Equity of professional development• How to balance needs of very large and very small districts?• Lack of quality bilingual teachers• Lack of school libraries, which is a challenge especially for low-income families• Size of urban environments• Size-based funding – principals could decide how to fund (or not fund) key roles• The costs of Advanced Placement exams can hinder some from taking them• We need more paraprofessionals• We should not have to choose between special education supports or advanced courses• Weight of test scores in labeling
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All kids should be in school (common cultures)• Law says all are welcome• Strength of business community• Technology improvements/integrated into classrooms• Tex Quest K–12 electronic resources from the state; good value for school districts
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address teacher biases/assumptions, especially when working with diverse students• Bringing resources to public location (like the mall)• Business partnerships / corporate investment• Elevation of teaching profession (marketing campaign)• Have programs that benefit students statewide. Identify needs that are common across the state to provide all districts. State could negotiate at a lower cost than individual districts.• Investment in human capital• Money from federal government to bring broadband internet to rural areas

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More training and programs for teachers to identify and encourage students to pursue higher coursework• Prepare more bilingual curriculum to teach• School finance reform• State student loan forgiveness program
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Family Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge the gap between families, K–12, higher education, and workforce • Families get lost in the education system • Family schedules (work, other children, etc.) • How do you create a catalyst to value education? • Lack of access to technology for some parents • Lack of school resources (specifically staff to assist with outreach) • Lack of training for school personnel – including no requirement regarding family engagement as a part of certification and specific training in special education for all teachers • Language barriers • No funding specifically for this purpose • No policy/model in Texas for family/community engagement • Parents don’t know how to finance college • Teachers not seeing parents as partners (and vice versa)
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement individually w/passionate educators • Pre-K and elementary parent engagement • Promotion of volunteerism • Use of technology to reach parents at their own convenience • Usually a desire to do good
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust with communities, especially immigrant populations • Funding specifically for an engagement program (even a pilot) • Harvard study (A Dual Capacity Framework) includes Home Visit Project Model • Meeting students and families where they are; offer community services/partnerships “door-knocks” • Need training and curriculum that recognizes engagement changes based on grade level • Parents/families are equal partners to success in education



Student Engagement and Empowerment	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to out-of-school activities • Access to technology • Change “college ready” to “life ready” • Having to choose a “pathway” at too early an age • Lack of language skills • Lack of parental modeling • Need for teachers to stop teaching the way they have always taught (perfect classrooms) (perfect situations); need to facilitate learning, not lecturing and telling them what to do • Not enough emphasis on career opportunities vs pushing college • SPED has limitations on extracurricular activities • We have students that are ready to learn but courses aren’t available
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees that empower students to make real change happen, even beyond or outside of their campuses • Empowering students in their individualized education plans • Good job of setting kids up with assistance on technology • Real-world equipment in the schools • The ability to specialize in careers in HS • The clubs offered at HS level to expand leadership opportunities • The growth in STEM courses and resources in schools
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to be more involved in how their schools are run (true student government, true voice) • Offer transportation • Offering more options to investigate what they don’t like or possible career paths – internships and job shadowing • Teaching subjects with “real world” implications and uses • To engage students, we need to ask students what they are interested in after HS • Utilize the opportunities and resources that are already in place • Virtual career days • We should develop more vocational opportunities