



## ALDINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Pursuing Equity for Two Decades (and Counting)



Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Aldine Independent School District (Aldine) educated an increasingly diverse student population, with more students of color, low-income students and English language learners (ELLs). In 1994, Texas released pilot results from its first-ever state accountability system, which disaggregated data by student subgroup for each district and school in the state. The news hit Aldine hard. Nearly 50 percent of students had failed the new statewide assessment, achievement gaps were as large as 30 points and four schools were ultimately rated “academically unacceptable.” This was “the shock our system needed to wake up,” in the words of former Superintendent Nadine Kujawa.

Over the past 22 years and under the leadership of just three superintendents (all former Aldine teachers), Aldine has made significant progress. From 1994 to 2002, African American student proficiency on the state test increased from 37 percent to 84 percent, and Latino student proficiency increased from 49 percent to 88 percent. On the harder state test from 2003 to 2011, African Americans went from 35 percent to 68 percent proficient and Latinos from 45 percent to 77 percent proficient. These efforts earned Aldine the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2009.

Today, the district faces a tougher challenge—helping students master the state’s new college and career readiness standards and the even more rigorous State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Aldine’s proficiency rates have declined since the STAAR was first administered in 2012.

Can Aldine rise again, as it has so many times in the past? District staff at all levels are methodically analyzing the problem and testing solutions to better prepare students for life after high school.

### Stable leadership and consistent follow-through

Aldine has rolled out and refined several major reforms over two decades, carefully shepherded by “Sonny” M.B. Donaldson, Nadine Kujawa and current Superintendent Wanda Bamberg:

- ◆ A home-grown, detailed, common curriculum with aligned assessments rooted in Texas academic standards gives all teachers clear tools to help students learn;
- ◆ An educator evaluation and support system incorporating student growth connects teachers to supports that improve teaching practice; and
- ◆ Innovations, including a revamped teacher compensation structure and a district-charter partnership, aim to create the conditions for more success in the future.

### Aldine Independent School District *Suburban District* 2014-15



**76 SCHOOLS**

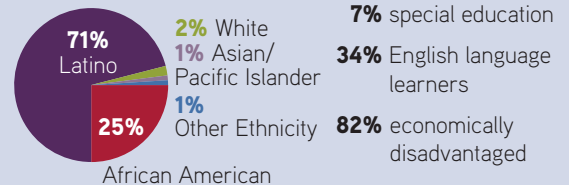
8 prekindergarten 32 elementary 21 intermediate/middle  
7 high 8 other



**4,236 TEACHERS 76 PRINCIPALS**



**69,553 STUDENTS**



- ◆ Texas is a non-union state.
- ◆ Aldine won the [Broad Prize for Urban Education](#) in 2009.
- ◆ Aldine signed a [District-Charter Collaboration Compact](#) with YES Prep Public Schools in 2014.
- ◆ Aldine serves parts of Houston and northern Harris County.

Source: *Aldine Independent School District*

### Aldine’s track record of success speaks for itself

Proficiency point increases on state assessments

	1994	2002	2003	2011
African American	37%	+47	35%	+33
Latino	49%	+39	45%	+32

Source: *Texas Education Agency*

DISTRICT PROFILE

## Putting curriculum and assessments front and center

In 2007, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency jointly developed the [Texas College and Career Readiness Standards](#) (TCCRS) in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies. The following year, the Texas Education Agency integrated the TCCRS into the existing state standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). While Texas has chosen to keep its own standards instead of adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a 2011 [study](#) concluded that the TCCRS matched 92 percent and 75 percent of the CCSS in ELA and mathematics, respectively. In 2011, a state [review](#) of the mathematics TEKS found that students need a [deeper focus](#) on mathematical reasoning and complex problem-solving to be fully prepared for college and careers. Texas schools began implementing [revised mathematics TEKS](#) in 2014–15 for grades K–8 and in 2015–16 for high school.

At Aldine, the curriculum is home-grown and standards-based. Originally developed in 1996 and continuously updated since then, Aldine’s common curriculum—known as the Benchmark Targets—translates the standards into clear and uniform guidelines for instruction in every grade and subject. Aldine breaks down year-long content into six- to nine-week sequences [linking](#) the “written curriculum” (TEKS), the “taught curriculum” (instructional strategies) and the “tested curriculum” (formative and summative assessments). Twice a year, districtwide summative assessments aligned to the Benchmark Targets evaluate student progress in all grades in ELA, mathematics, science and social studies.

*With nearly a quarter of Aldine students transferring schools within the district during the school year, the common curriculum ensures that students continue on the same learning trajectory wherever they go.*

Aldine relies on a robust [infrastructure](#) of critical staff roles and districtwide processes to help teachers deliver rigorous instruction aligned to the TEKS. Central office program directors, who are former teachers with subject-area expertise, refine and integrate the district’s curriculum, assessments and professional development for all teachers. School-based skills specialists, who also are veteran teachers in core subjects, offer peers ongoing support by demonstrating classroom strategies, working with struggling students and helping teachers analyze assessment data.

Program directors and skills specialists come together every summer to update the curriculum’s scope and sequence. Responding to the revised mathematics TEKS, they have also identified gaps where students missed content because of the shift in standards across grades. During the school year, teachers take the lead, partnering with their principal and skills specialist to analyze the TEKS alongside the curriculum and adjust instruction as needed.

*“At Aldine, we face challenges together. We have put enough in place where I feel, as an administrator, that my teachers are working hard to make my students successful under the new standards.”*

Christi Van Wassenhove, Principal, Stehlik Intermediate School, Aldine Independent School District

## Elevating teacher craft through better evaluation

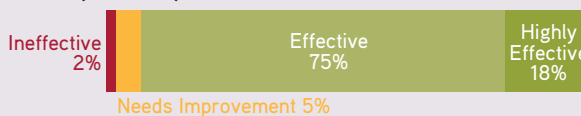
Years before Texas [considered](#) quantitative measures of student growth for educator evaluations, Aldine created its own educator evaluation and support system, [Invest](#), consisting of multiple measures. In 2011, district leaders launched an inclusive process to gather input from teachers and principals for Invest’s [design](#). The outreach paid off. By the time Invest was piloted in 35 schools in 2012–13 and implemented districtwide the following year, stakeholders had coalesced around Invest’s three goals: differentiating teacher performance, increasing teacher effectiveness and reducing teacher attrition.

### Moving toward greater differentiation

#### Professional Development and Appraisal System (2010–11)



#### Invest (2014–15) Classroom observations only; no student growth



Sources: [Texas Education Agency](#), [Aldine Independent School District](#)

What makes Invest special, in the eyes of Aldine staff, is how the system activates a [constellation of supports for ongoing teacher development](#). Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Selina Chapa says, “Invest is not an acronym for a reason. The word itself says what we’re all about—investing the time and resources to grow all of our teachers.” Through Invest, teachers and principals work together to [interpret student data, set annual goals and develop action plans](#) to guide professional development during the year. Principals use [high-quality tools and templates](#) to observe teachers in action, drawing on concrete evidence to provide feedback based on each teacher’s individual goals. And teachers can use in-classroom panoramic cameras to record themselves and reflect on their practice—either on their own or in conversations with their principal.

Teachers have timely access to professional development resources based on their needs. Invest has built-in support tracks for first-year teachers, teachers with two to three years of experience, and experienced teachers. Principals also direct their teachers to targeted supports after regular observations, including district-run workshops, master-scored videos aligned to Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching and online modules in Teachscape.



## A Closer Look at Invest

Invest has three goals: differentiating teacher performance, increasing teacher effectiveness and reducing teacher attrition. Aldine retained Operation Public Education (OPE) at the University of Pennsylvania to develop Invest based on OPE's framework for educator evaluation. Invest relies on two main components: classroom observations aligned to the Danielson Framework and student growth percentiles (SGPs). SGPs use data from statewide assessments in tested grades and subjects and data from districtwide assessments or student learning objectives in non-tested areas. For teachers to be considered highly effective, they must receive highly effective ratings on observations *and* SGPs. As of 2015, the SGPs are not yet incorporated into final Invest ratings of all teachers as the district continues to refine these measures to ensure fairness.

District leaders recognize that teachers might feel reluctant to speak candidly with administrators about their perspectives on Invest. So Aldine is piloting a new teacher role in 2015–16, called Invest Specialist. There is now one teacher in each of the 38 pilot schools who serves as the “first responder” for peers regarding Invest. Specialists also relay comments from teachers to principals and human resources staff to inform ongoing adjustments to the evaluation system. If the pilot is successful, Aldine plans to place an Invest Specialist in every school.

Christi Van Wassenhove, principal at Stehlik Intermediate School, credits Invest with “taking the bias and ambiguity out of evaluation.” The Danielson Group trains assistant superintendents and principals to conduct observations and give teachers high-quality feedback. And all Invest evaluators must complete a rigorous certification process via Teachscape consisting of a 20-hour course and a five-hour exam, followed by rating calibration sessions during the year.

A recent analysis of Invest by [Education Resource Strategies](#) concluded that Aldine is well positioned to leverage new evaluation data to enhance teacher assignment, professional development supports and the retention of high-performing teachers. Ultimately, with more time—and more data—Aldine will be able to study Invest's impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

*“Very few districts have been able to certify their evaluators at the level of reliability that Aldine has achieved.”*

Theodore Hershberg, Director of Operation Public Education, University of Pennsylvania



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## Connecting performance to compensation

In fall 2015, Aldine adopted a variable compensation structure based on Invest observation ratings. Teachers rated highly effective in the Danielson Framework in 2015–16 will receive a one-time bonus in 2017 on top of any base salary increase approved by the school board. Teachers rated ineffective will have their salaries frozen. The district will use the savings from the frozen salaries to offset at least part of the costs of the bonus payments. Sherrie Batro, director of Invest, says this new approach “lets our best teachers know their value to us and how much we really need them.”

For Aldine, compensation reform is the first phase in a long-term plan to create a [three-tier career pathway](#) based on evaluation outcomes and linked to specific financial incentives and Invest supports. The first tier will be for novice teachers and teachers rated needs improvement or ineffective. The second tier will include teachers rated effective and highly effective in Invest's classroom observations and student growth. And the third tier will be reserved for teachers rated highly effective in Invest's two components. In [future years](#), teachers who maintain effective and highly effective ratings will be eligible to receive performance-based pay and those who improve may receive base salary increases.

Pending the school board's approval, a committee of teachers and administrators has proposed a gradual transition: Teachers with more than three years of experience will have a five-year grace period before entering the pathway, while teachers with less experience will be automatically enrolled.

## Innovating for the future

In 2013, Aldine sought out a new partner—YES Prep Public Schools, a Houston-based public charter network. The two joined to launch YES Prep Hoffman in the same building as Aldine's Hoffman Middle School, serving grades 6–8. The partnership is [more than co-location](#). District and charter teachers frequently share instructional materials and observe each other teach. Students co-mingle in joint after-school sports programs and other activities. YES Prep Hoffman students remain enrolled in Aldine and are included in its state accountability results; the district in turn directs state funding for these students to the charter school. Aldine and YES Prep are expanding their collaboration to Eisenhower Senior High School in 2015–16, when they plan to open YES Prep Eisenhower and give all Eisenhower 9th and 10th grade students access to YES Prep's robust iAspire college preparation seminar.

*“It's important for us to see a different way of doing public education. We're learning from YES Prep and they're learning from us.”*

Wanda Bamberg, Superintendent,  
Aldine Independent School District

## Results

During the two decades of Aldine's reforms, Texas administered three increasingly difficult statewide assessments: the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the STAAR. With each new test, Aldine's performance dropped at first and then increased to high levels. The district has made steady progress over the last 20 years.

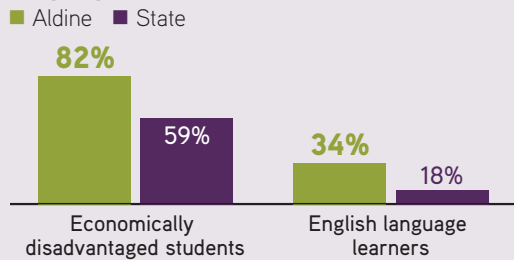
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tougher test from 2003 to 2011, African American students' proficiency increased from 35 percent to 68 percent, and Latino students' proficiency increased from 45 percent to 77 percent.

The STAAR, a more rigorous assessment than the others, has presented a challenge. Since 2012, student proficiency has fallen every year. The district, however, serves a larger share of high-need students than the state. Among ELLs and low-income students, Aldine is performing at a level similar to the state average.

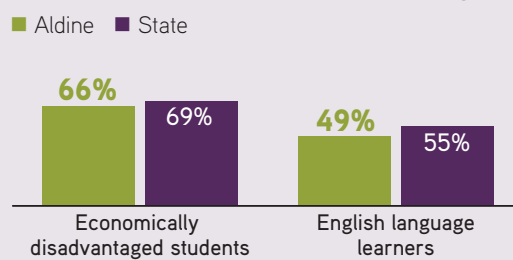
Other bright spots: the SAT/ACT participation rate increased from 55 percent in 2010 to 63 percent in 2014, and the high school graduation rate reached a 15-year high of 82 percent in 2014.

### Aldine has more low-income students and English language learners than the state...

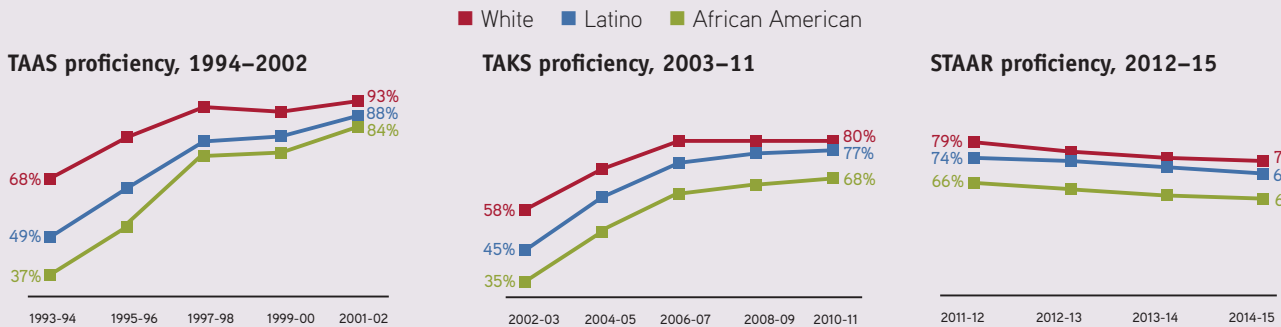


Source: Texas Education Agency

### ...but in 2015 student proficiency on the STAAR was at a level similar to state averages



### Test scores have improved and gaps have closed over two decades, with more work ahead



Sources: Texas Education Agency, ERS

## Conclusion

Aldine has come a long way since the "shock" of 1994. Success has been the result of consistency and a willingness to evolve in response to complex obstacles. District leaders take a long view on reform, committing to building and improving policies over time with extensive stakeholder input. Invest is the most recent example. Teachers have become co-creators, continuously offering feedback and ideas to make the evaluation and support system better.

But Aldine is struggling to improve student performance on the STAAR, and the challenge will only get tougher once the Texas Education Agency starts raising the STAAR passing standards in 2016. As the district has grown in recent years, so too has its population of ELLs and highly mobile low-income students—two groups whose performance has been challenged by the STAAR's higher expectations for problem solving and critical thinking.

Beginning in 2015–16, assistant superintendents (replacing the former role of "area" superintendent) will oversee groups of schools sharing common characteristics, not bounded by geographic feeder patterns, to form professional learning communities. This new structure encourages administrators and principals to innovate and apply specific interventions to increase student achievement. In typical Aldine fashion, staff across the district continue working—and learning—together to get ready for the years ahead.

**Aldine's focus is on delivering targeted supports for schools, teachers and students. "We now have to be more diverse in our strategies to meet the more diverse needs of our students," says Superintendent Bamberg.**



Photos courtesy of Aldine Independent School District