



LEADING WITH HEART AND STRATEGY: Transforming School Board Governance Through Emotional Intelligence

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— San Antonio ISD —



— www.saisd.net —



Part 1: Pre-COVID Assets

- Local Theory of Action
- School Performance Framework v 1.0
- Partnership with TEA System of Great Schools
- 17 Charter Partners
- F District to B District in 3 Years



Meet Your Presenters



ALICIA SEBASTIAN

BOARD PRESIDENT



**CHRISTINA
MARTINEZ**

BOARD VICE PRESIDENT





Intended Results

- Learn how SAISD updated its Theory of Action and performance monitoring
- Explore challenges, quick wins, and long discussion along the way
- Reflect on emotionally intelligent leadership in times of crisis
- Provide feedback on a current “Problem of Practice”



Why Emotional Intelligence Matters in Governance

What words or phrases come to mind when you hear the term “emotional intelligence”?

emotional intelligence *noun*

: the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways, as well as to recognize and influence the emotions of others. It involves self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (including empathy), and relationship management, and it helps individuals communicate effectively, build stronger relationships, and achieve their goals.



Why Emotional Intelligence Matters in Governance

BUILDS TRUST

among board, staff, and community.

KEEPS FOCUS

on student outcomes, not adult agendas.

SUPPORTS SAFETY

transparency and communication.

ENABLES BOARD

to navigate conflict with empathy & clarity.



Part 1: COVID Challenges

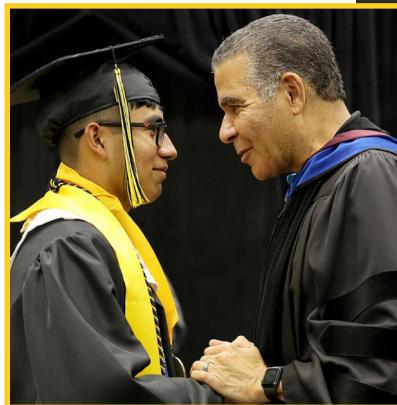
- COVID interruption stalled momentum
- Transition to a new superintendent
- SPF - A false start
- Lack of integration with campus practices and lack of a unified curriculum strategy
- Having to run a national search while also still working on getting students and educators back on campus



Part 2: Enter Jaime Aquino , Ph.D.

HIRED MAY 2022

- Updated Theory of Action and Board Goals
- “*Always Learning*” Strategic Management Plan
- Vision for Thriving Schools



BOARD GOALS



Improve **READING AND WRITING** outcomes for all students



Improve **MATH** outcomes for Black students



Improve **COLLEGE READINESS** for students with disabilities



Improve **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL READINESS** in all students

BOARD GUARDRAILS



Embrace our **COMMUNITY**



Support **EXCELLENT SCHOOLS** in every neighborhood



Create **SAFE ENVIRONMENTS**



Ensure **EQUITABLE FUNDING**

SAISD Theory of Action

If we and our partners commit to strengthening learning and achieving excellence in every classroom and school in SAISD, including a relentless focus on supporting the essential relationship among the student, the teacher, and the curriculum (*the “instructional core”*) and clear and rigorous academic standards for all core subjects; and

If we respect and value the unique and diverse needs of all of our students, families, and communities by providing them the opportunity to select the school that best meets their needs within SAISD, including a partner or neighborhood school; and

If we hold ourselves accountable for results through:

A. Providing supports and strategic talent assignments to District-managed schools, honoring school-driven feedback loops regarding quality of such supports, and providing clearly articulated goals, guardrails, and accountability measures to ensure they can meet expectations of a strong instructional core

B. Enabling our partner-managed schools to operate with fidelity to their school models and partner frameworks, and using partner contracts to hold them accountable for results based on clearly defined goals and accountability measures; and

If we create a set of systems and conditions for us to continually improve our work, by learning, adapting, and innovating from exemplars within and outside the district;

THEN we will ensure that all SAISD students and families will have access to high quality classrooms and schools; all schools and leaders will be accountable for success; we will create a culture of trust and excellence throughout our organization; and we will realize our vision for the **SAISD familia**.





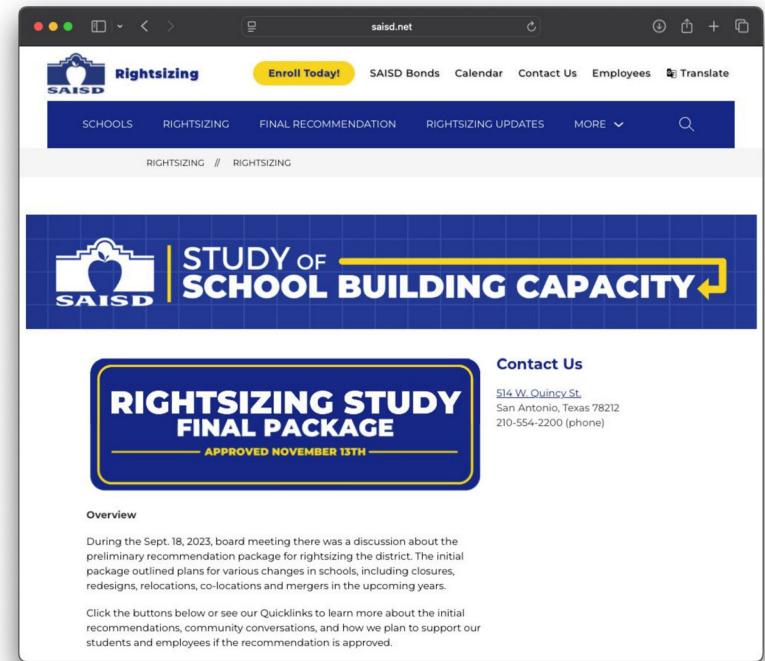
Emotional Intelligence in Leadership Transitions

- Listening and relationship-building with new leadership
- Managing competing priorities
- Balancing targeted improvement with inclusive vision
- Modeling trust during uncertainty



Rightsizing the District: A Test of Empathy and Focus

- **15 school closures due to enrollment decline**
- **Deep community grief and resistance**
- **Commitment to transparent process and respectful listening**
- **Reinvestment plan for affected communities**



Building Emotional Intelligence as a Governing Body

COLLECTIVE TRAINING & REFLECTION

- Participated in AJ Crabill's Governance Training focused on "Students, Not Systems".
- Regular retreats to practice self-awareness, relationship management, and trust-building.

CREATED BOARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

- We have in policy how we set agendas, run meetings, and communicate with staff.

WE ROLE MODEL NORMS FOR HEALTH CONFLICT

- Emphasized curiosity and empathy over defensiveness.



Building Emotional Intelligence as a Governing Body

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN DATA CONVERSATIONS

- Shifted from blame-oriented data reviews to growth-oriented dialogue.
- Used “learning questions” instead of “gotcha questions”.

OPEN AND COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

- Practiced emotionally intelligent communication with the superintendent and community.
- Modeled calm, clear messaging during public meetings and media attention.
- We have worked really hard to rid the district of the “kiss the ring” notion.



Facilities and Infrastructure: HVAC Issues (2024)

- **Districtwide HVAC failures amid extreme cold**
- **Immediate operational response and public accountability**
- **Cross-sector collaboration with the city for emergency repairs**
- **Communication with families under pressure**





Negotiating the Baseball Project

- Partnership negotiations over land use for a downtown stadium
- Protecting district assets while exploring citywide opportunities
- Managing community perception and political pressure
- Ensuring student benefit remains central



Part 3: Updating Policy and Practice 2025

- Finally adopted a districtwide curriculum strategy
- Policy Diet
- Revised School Performance Framework
- Aligned campus improvement process to ensure all students are receiving high-quality tier 1 instruction in every subject, particularly at priority schools





Problem of Practice: An Interactive Discussion

Group Discussion

School Board Members reflect on their your own experiences leading through conflict. How might empathy, listening, and composure improve decision-making and outcomes?

What supports or tools do you need to manage conflict in those situations?



