Amplifying Student Voice

Building Student-Led Councils That Drive Meaningful Change

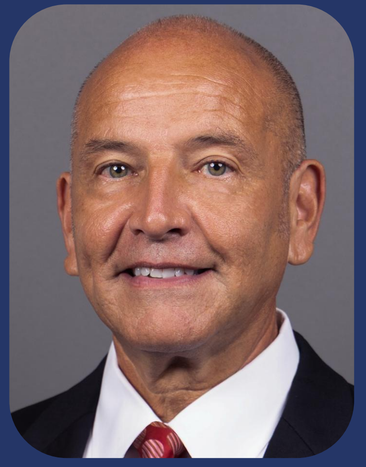
Christina Martinez | Vice President, Board of Trustees
Ed Garza | Trustee, Board of Trustees
Angie Martinez | Senior, Brackenridge High School
Mia Cruz | Young Women's Leadership Academy Alumnus

Meet the Presenters



Christina Martinez

- Vice President, SAISD Board
- Chief of Staff, UP Partnership



Ed Garza

- SAISD Trustee
- President, Urban Champions Academy
- Founder, Jefferson-YWLA Education Leadership Congress (JYELC)



Angie Martinez

- Senior, Brackenridge High School
- Member, Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee



Mia Cruz

- Young Women’s Leadership Academy (YWLA) Alumnus
- JYELC 2.0 Alumnus
- Member, Blue Ribbon Task Force
- Freshman, Trinity University

Agenda

1. Why student voice matters, and understanding today's students
2. Our journey and framework
3. Two models: Student Advisory Committee and JYELC 2.0
4. Students at the decision-making table
5. Student voice in action: JYELC 2026
6. Lessons learned

Intended Results

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1. **Explain why student voice improves belonging, leadership, decision-making, and trust**

2. **Describe two SAISD models for student voice: the Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee and JYELC 2.0**

3. **Trace how student recommendations become district action**

4. **Apply lessons on recruiting diverse student perspectives and moving from listening to partnering**



Students Experience Our Schools Differently Than Adults

Student voice improves school improvement, belonging, leadership, decision-making, and trust.



Student Voice In Their Own Words

Angie Martinez

Share a moment you realized your voice could make a difference?

Mia Cruz

How did JYELC shaped you as a leader?

Our Journey: Building a Culture of Student Voice

2000

Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee established

2009

JYELC founded

2023

JYELC reimagined as a student-led council

2024-2025

Students develop formal recommendations

2026

Students join the Blue Ribbon Task Force

2026–2027

Students lead an enrollment and attendance campaign

Student Voice Asks Adults To Get Comfortable With Discomfort

1

Listen when feedback is uncomfortable

Hear the hard parts without rushing to explain or defend.

2

Respond to critique without defensiveness

Thank students for candor, then ask what they need.

3

Share power, not just space

Give students real influence over agendas and decisions.

4

Act on what students tell us

Close the loop and report back on what changed.

Understanding Today's Students

Student Voice Starts with Understanding How Students Communicate

Gen Z & Gen Alpha Tend To:

- Communicate digitally and collaboratively
- Prefer visual and interactive experiences
- Expect timely feedback and responsiveness
- Value authenticity and transparency
- Seek opportunities to influence issues that matter to them

From Voice To Impact



MODEL #1

Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee

Christina Martinez | Vice President, Board of Trustees

Angie Martinez | Senior, Brackenridge High School

Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee

Students apply and are selected to represent their campuses.

Representation spans schools, grade levels, experiences, and perspectives.

Campus feedback

Students carry it up

District discussion

Students join the table

Action

Changes return to campuses

Recommendations

Students propose solutions



Superintendent's Student Advisory Committee



What We Heard from Students:

Students apply and are selected to represent their campuses.

Representation spans schools, grade levels, experiences, and perspectives.

College Readiness should begin earlier

Multiple Pathways

Multiple Futures

Communication Matters





Board Goal 4

We will increase by 25% the percentage of all students who meet the "to be determined" SAISD Standard for Social Emotional Readiness from the August 2024 baseline, to baseline +25% in August 2027.

Mental Health: Student Voice Became District Action

Students shared a need for greater mental health supports and safe spaces.

DISTRICT RESPONSE

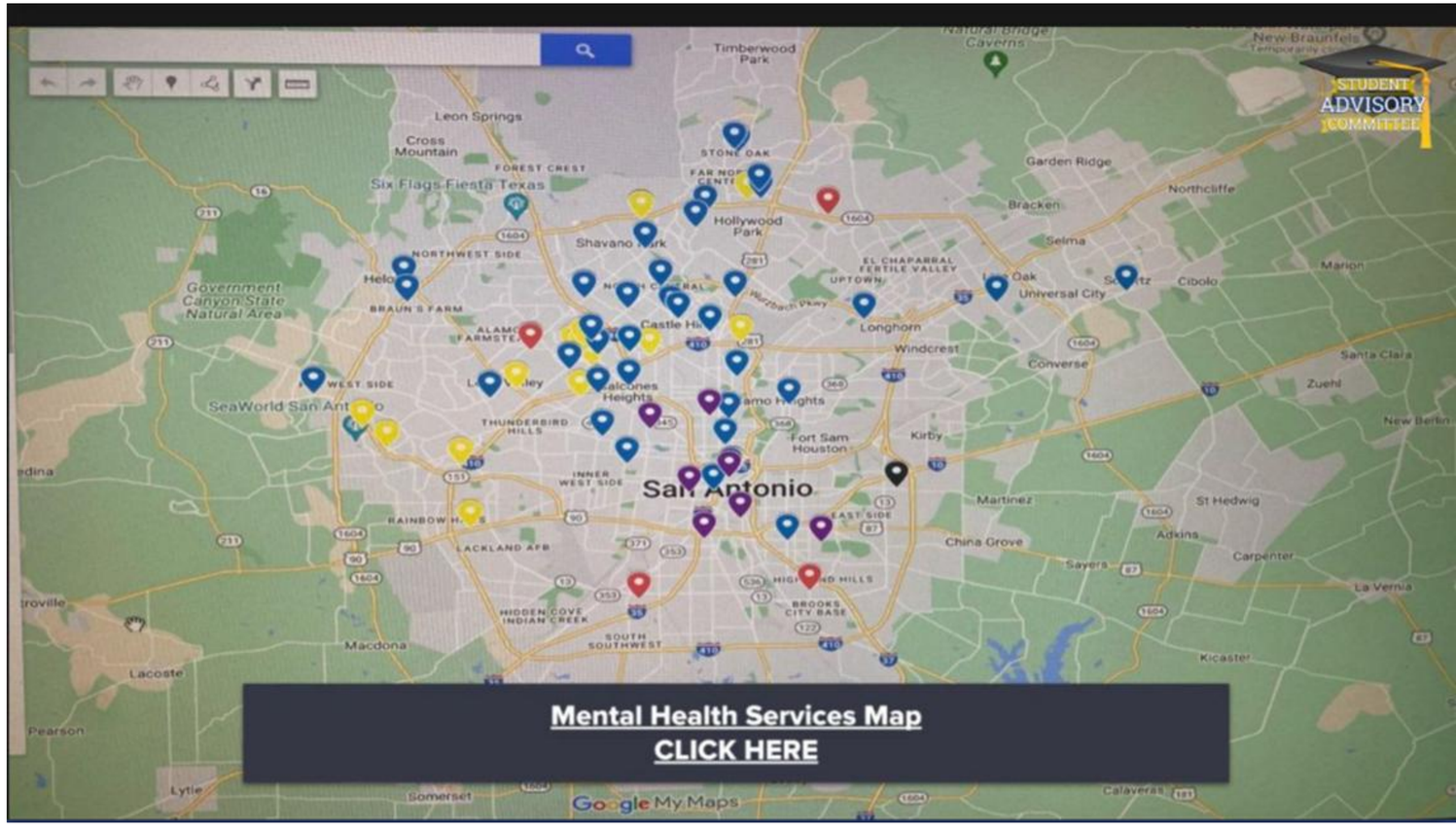
2M+

More than $2 million investment

ACROSS SAISD

14

Peace Rooms opening



MODEL #2

Jefferson-YWLA Education Leadership Congress 2.0

"From community updates to student-led action"

Ed Garza | Trustee, Board of Trustees

Mia Cruz | Young Women's Leadership Academy Alumnus

Single Member District 7: Founding the Council

Established 2009

JYELC was created to strengthen communication between SAISD and the community.

Building Trust & Engagement

Regular updates fostered trust and encouraged families and staff to engage in student success conversations.

Understanding Community Needs

Provided a direct way for SAISD Leadership to hear concerns from campuses and respond quickly.

Evolution Towards Student Voice

Expanded overtime to include student perspectives, shaping future district planning.



Transition to JYELC 2.0 – Student-led

Reimagining Student Leadership

JYELC 2.0 redefined student leadership to emphasize authentic student voices in district decisions.

Engaged Recruitment Approach

Visited campuses to encourage students, resulting in strong applicant interest.

Diverse Student Representation

Students from various campuses and backgrounds were selected to enrich the council's perspectives.

Empowered Student Chairs

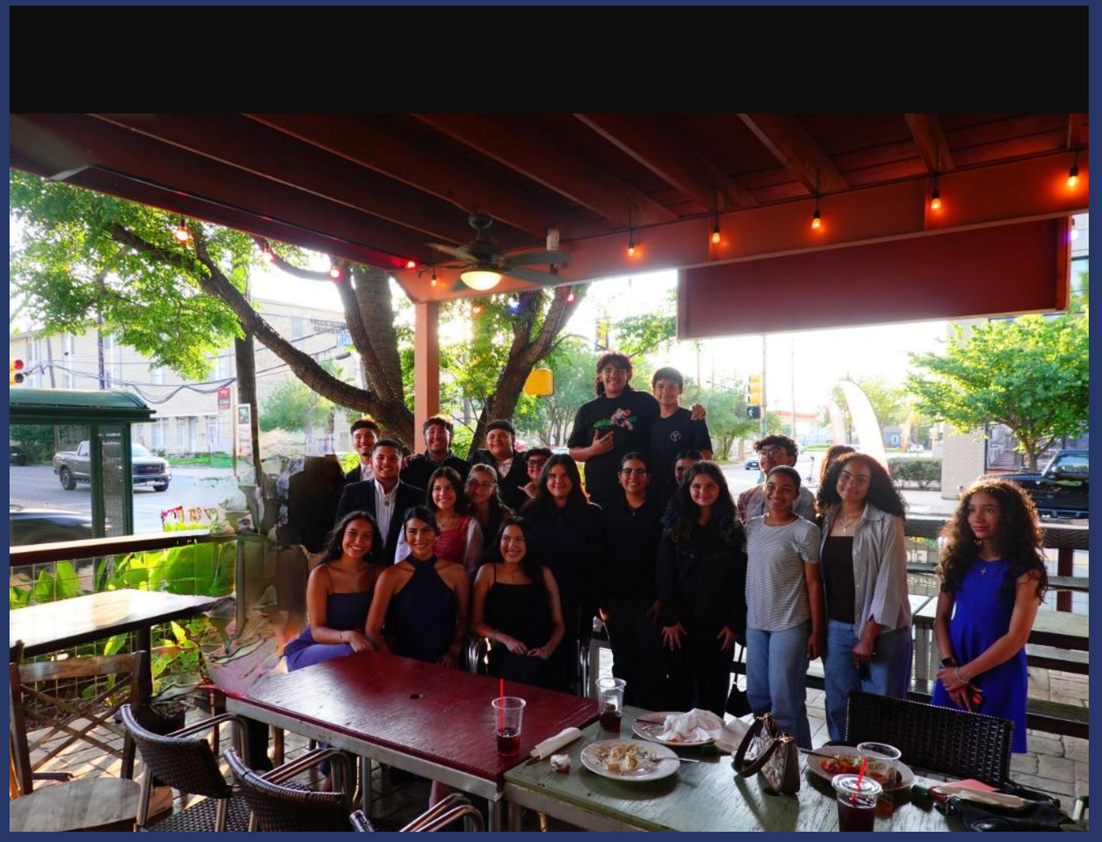
Four student chairs lead agenda-setting and guide discussions on key issues affecting students.



JYELC 2.0 End-of-Year Reception



Senior Chairs & Junior Co-Chairs



Student Congress Group Photo

Jefferson-YWLA Education Leadership Congress 2.0

Student-led

Student-driven

Student-empowered



What Makes JYELC Different?

Traditional student council	JYELC 2.0
Event planning	Leadership development
School activities	District discussions
Student participation	Student leadership
Campus focus	Community impact

Students recruited across the Jefferson-Young Women's Leadership Academy feeder pattern for diverse perspectives.



Students Tackle Real-world Issues

AI and future readiness

Responsible AI use, technology access, college and career preparation, digital citizenship

Mental health leadership

Wellness tools, peer support strategies, student wellness ambassadors

School funding and extracurricular activities

Ways to increase funding for extracurricular activities at your school
Provided feedback on the district-wide student budget survey

Students At The Decision-making Table

1. Student Advisory Committee
2. JYELC 2.0
3. Blue Ribbon Task Force
4. District Committees
5. Strategic planning

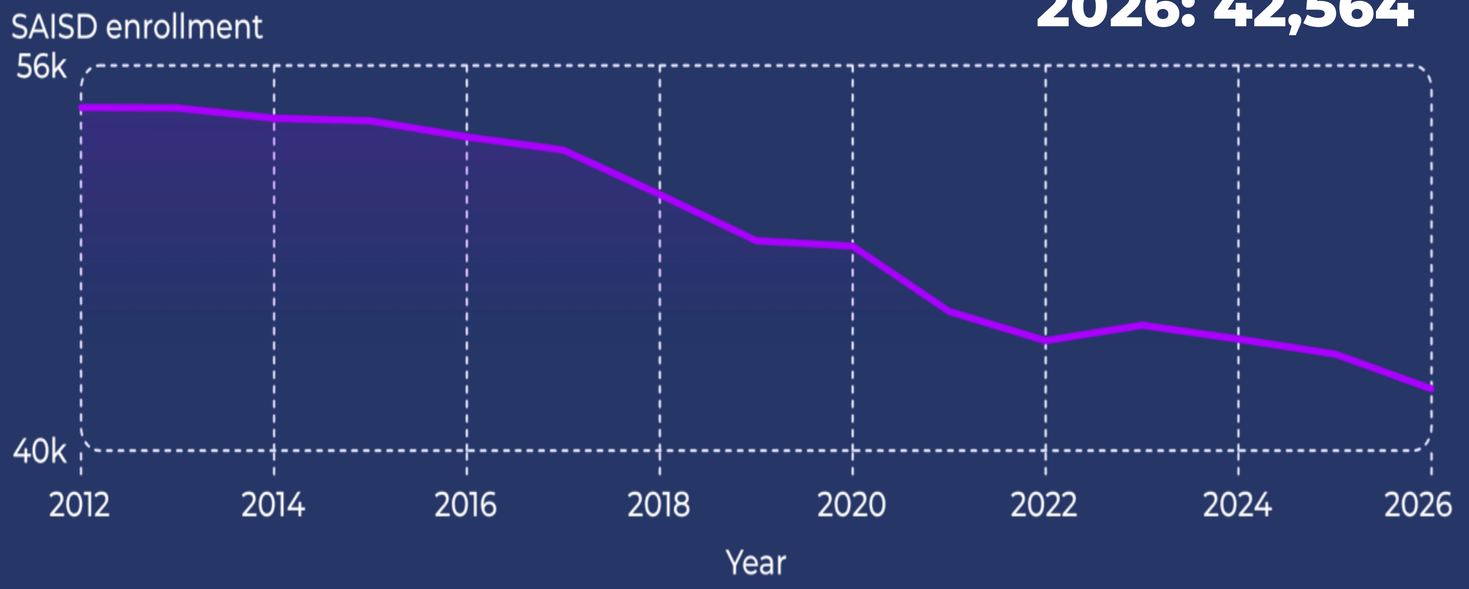
Blue Ribbon Task Force

2026 Blue Ribbon Task Force advises Board and district leadership so families choose SAISD.

Students included in campus visits, community conversations, and facility planning.

Decline In SAISD Enrollment

2012: 54,260
2026: 42,564



Pre-COVID (2012–2020) vs. after 2021

Students are helping tackle this challenge.

Source: SAISD enrollment data.

2026-2027 Current Attendance Rates

Campus	Attendance (YTD/Day 42)
Jefferson High School	89.1%
Young Women's Leadership Academy	97.7%
Longfellow Middle School	92.9%
Fenwick Academy	93.7%
Woodlawn Academy	93.1%
Arnold Elementary School	95.2%
Baskin Elementary School	94.0%
Madison Elementary School	91.7%
Maverick Elementary School	94.6%
Woodlawn Hills Elementary School	92.5%

Student Voice in Action: JYELC 2026 Leadership Congress

Students Are:

- Exploring enrollment and attendance challenges
- Learning about district data and trends
- Developing campaign messaging
- Collaborating with district leaders
- Serving as ambassadors for SAISD

Why It Matters

Students are not simply discussing district priorities.

Students are helping lead solutions.

Six Lessons From Our Journey

Students want real responsibility

Adults must be willing to listen

Student voice requires action

Representation matters

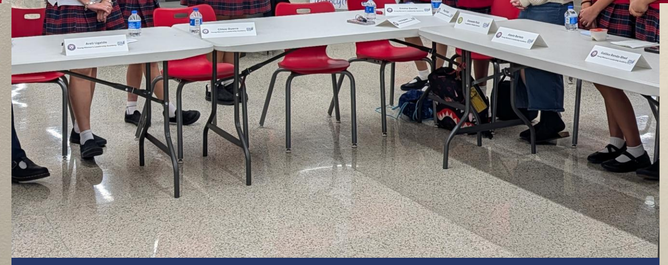
Leadership development is the outcome

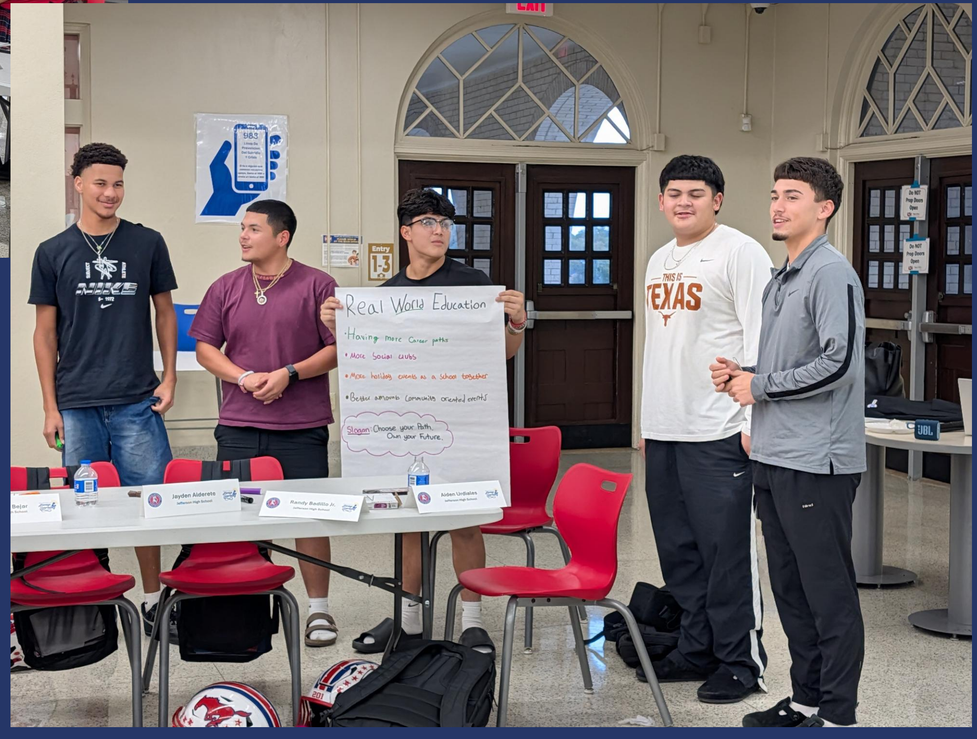
Recruitment matters

Don't just recruit student leaders, recruit student perspectives.


CARING
CARING
OPEN MINDED
THE MUSTANG WAY


Landin Keller
Jeffersonian High School
Ivan Figueroa
Jeffersonian High School




Real World Education
Having more Career paths
More Social events
More holiday events as a school together
Bexar ISD
Jayden Alderete
Jeffersonian High School
Aiden Urdiales
Jeffersonian High School
THIS IS TEXAS

Looking Ahead: Closing Student Reflections



Angie

What is one thing district leaders could do tomorrow to include student voice?



Mia

Why should districts invest in authentic student leadership?

What becomes possible when students are genuinely invited to lead?

Student voice is more than a program.

It's a partnership.


Q
A