

SPECIAL EDITION REPORT

10th ANNIVERSARY

AUSTIN
aspires



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PHOTOGRAPHY: HANNAH ROSHOLT
DESIGN + LAYOUT: ELIZABETH LEYK
CONTENT: AUSTIN ASPIRES TEAM



A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



DEAR AUSTIN ASPIRES COMMUNITY,

As we mark a decade of service, I reflect with deep gratitude on the remarkable journey we've shared. Maya Angelou's words guide us: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." This ethos has fueled our evolution while keeping our mission and vision unwavering.

I extend heartfelt thanks to our volunteer board members, past and present, for shaping Austin Aspires into a pillar of our community. To our committed donors and community partners, your collaboration fuels our mission in ways words cannot fully capture. And to our dedicated volunteers, your selflessness, despite busy schedules, embodies the spirit of community service.

As we navigate the transformative past year, we embark on the development of strategic initiatives for the next decade. This milestone wouldn't be possible without the collective investment and support we've received. Your belief in our work has propelled us forward.

Austin, we are profoundly grateful for the privilege of being a part of your community. Your support has been our cornerstone. Together, let's ensure Austin Aspires not only exists but thrives in the years ahead. Thank you for a decade of collaboration, community and connections.

Jayne Gibson
Executive Director



A C O M M U N I T Y I N I T I A T I V E

Austin Aspires is the result of the grassroots efforts of Vision2020. Established in 2014 to use the research based StriveTogether model to leverage community resources to address locally identified needs in education, Austin Aspires was a one-staff member team at that time. All operations were fully funded through the generosity of three local donors – Hormel Foods Charitable Trust, The Hormel Foundation and Mayo Clinic Health System.

Solid planning at that time allowed us to grow into the organization we are today – 9 full-time staff and 12 part-time staff. The initial three local donors have demonstrated incredible commitment to our organization through generous giving to us today; however, these plus other local donors make up about 25% of our total operating budget. Each year,

Aspires successfully brings in an additional \$500,000 from grants and donors outside of our community to invest in children and families in our community.

This growth is commendable, yet the opportunity to continue to do more exists. We will celebrate our first decade while looking forward to the possibilities yet to come in the decades ahead.



"Austin Public Schools and Austin Aspires are inspiring change by collectively bringing our community's resources together and empowering our students, staff, and families/caregivers. We are committed to making evidence-based decisions, investing in sustainable solutions, and acting collaboratively. Together, we are stronger and building a brighter future for all our stakeholders."

*Dr. Joey Page, Superintendent,
Austin Public Schools*



OUR 5 KEY OBJECTIVES



KINDERGARTEN READINESS

All learners will be ready for kindergarten.



CHALLENGED TO ACHIEVE

All learners will be challenged to achieve their academic potential.



PARENTS + MENTORS

Our community will support and enhance parents and mentors in their role as the primary influencer of our learners.



PREPARE FOR POST-SECONDARY OR CAREER

Our community will provide equal access to opportunities which encourage our learners to explore areas of personal interest and prepare for post-secondary education or career.



WHOLISTIC WELLNESS

Our community will address social, emotional, mental and physical barriers to success for all learners.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Austin Aspires is a local coalition that brings together schools, community organizations, government agencies, businesses, and philanthropic foundations. As a collective group, we hold ourselves accountable to measure improvement on a core set of outcomes determined to ensure each learner in Austin receives a world class educational experience. Working together, we will create a community where all children thrive. Collectively, we will work towards deeper parent engagement, increased social emotional learning and ensuring each scholar is career and college ready at the time of graduation.



INDIVIDUAL
IMPACT:



COORDINATED
IMPACT:



COLLECTIVE
IMPACT:



"Austin Aspires is a shining example of what can be accomplished when a community comes together and works toward equal access to excellent education for all. The welcoming atmosphere of Austin Aspires brings together all aspects of our caring community to help to make a difference in the lives of our students and their families. Thank you for an amazing 10 years!"

Bonnie Rietz, Acting Chair of The Hormel Foundation Board



OUR community



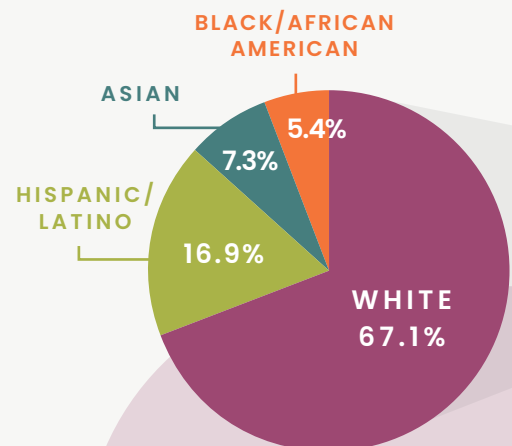
POPULATION: 26,174
PERSON UNDER 18: 26.5%
MEDIAN INCOME: \$61,667
UNEMPLOYMENT: 2.3%
POVERTY: 15.6%

OUR SCHOOLS (DISTRICT WIDE)

TOTAL ENROLLMENT: 5,120
FREE/REDUCED PRICE MEALS: 67.1%
ENGLISH LEARNER: 21.9%
SPECIAL EDUCATION: 19.2%
LANGUAGES SPOKEN: 45+
NON-WHITE STUDENTS: 56.9%



CITY DEMOGRAPHICS



STRIVETOGETHER

As part of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, Austin Aspires has access to resources and tools designed to help communities implement StriveTogether’s nationally recognized cradle to career collective impact approach, known as the Theory of Action. Austin Aspires now also has a connection with communities across the state and country to share knowledge and learn from successes, failures and insights as each community works to align resources around improving education outcomes.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “the time is always right to do the right thing.” The Strive-

Together coalition, including Austin Aspires, was awarded the Schwab Foundation’s 2024 Social Innovation Award in Collective Social Innovation for doing the right thing.

As a member of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network, Austin Aspires must meet a set of quality benchmarks that indicate it has engaged a cross-sector group around a common education vision. Austin Aspires also demonstrated its ability to support the creation of a sustainable infrastructure to drive change and is committed to being accountable for improving an identified set of academic outcomes. This is a continuous improvement journey, one in which we have seen progress and have additional growth to go.





educational excellence from cradle to career

STRUCTURE

Austin Aspires continues to be led by a dedicated Board of Directors, who play a crucial role in setting policies, monitoring operations, and serving as public figures representing our organization. The board's commitment to our mission has been unwavering, and their guidance has been instrumental in driving our success.

LEADERSHIP TABLE

In addition to our Board of Directors, we have a dynamic Leadership Table in place. The Leadership Table is responsible for setting objectives, championing the collective impact model, and providing valuable feedback to Austin Aspires' staff. This diverse group of individuals has been pivotal in shaping our strategic direction and ensuring that our programs and initiatives align with our mission.

ACTION TEAMS

Action Team members play a pivotal role in our organization. Their primary responsibility involves establishing essential measures and indicators, all grounded in data-driven insights. Through careful analysis and informed decision-making, these dedicated individuals create actionable plans for each of the five core areas of focus. This strategic approach empowers our team to make informed and effective decisions, ensuring that we continue to make a meaningful impact on our community and beyond.



EMPOWERING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE ACCESS

**THIS YEAR HAS BEEN MARKED BY DEDICATION, COLLABORATION,
AND RESOUNDING SUCCESS IN OUR MISSION TO EMPOWER EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE ACCESS FOR ALL.**

In 2023, Austin Aspires proudly received the prestigious 2023 Commissioner's Circle of Excellence Award from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. This recognition serves as a testament to the exceptional efforts of Austin Aspires and, in particular, our diligent Early Childhood Navigators. We are deeply honored to be acknowledged for our unwavering commitment to our community's children.

Austin Aspires joined hands with Growing Up Healthy in Northfield and Faribault, sharing a common aim through a grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Our mission is clear: to enhance early education and childcare access, with a specific focus on children from low-income families and children of color.

Mower County faces a shortage of infant child care spots in licensed child care homes or centers while operating with unused openings in other age groups. This issue of securing infant child care disproportionately affects individuals of color within our community. Austin Aspires has been working tirelessly to eliminate this barrier, ensuring that high-quality childcare is accessible to all in Mower County. *(continued)*



*Early Childhood Navigator
Makayla holds the 2023
Commissioner's Circle
of Excellence Award*



"Makayla, the early childhood navigator was able to match us with the perfect provider for our family in just a few hours. What an amazing resource!"

Kristi, Mower County resident and parent

Mower County resident and parent Kristi shared, "I had to find a new childcare provider for my daughter on very short notice. I had never had her in daycare, and I was very nervous and didn't know where to start looking for a provider. Makayla, the early childhood navigator was able to match us with the perfect provider for our family in just a few hours. What an amazing resource!"

In addition to our efforts in traditional childcare centers, Austin Aspires has been diligently working with in-home daycare providers to ensure their safety and reduce the bureaucratic hurdles associated with becoming licensed providers in Mower County. This includes active engagement at our state capital and collaboration with local social services.

Our commitment extends to easing the administrative burden on child care centers. We firmly

believe that childcare providers should be able to dedicate their time to nurturing and educating children rather than being bogged down by paperwork.

We recognize that the world would come to a standstill without the dedication and hard work of childcare workers. Their role is indispensable, and we are committed to ensuring they receive the support and recognition they deserve. This is why in 2023 we hosted the first in-home Childcare appreciation brunch. This event honored the dedication and years of service provided by our childcare providers in Mower County.

We have also initiated collaborations with local colleges to remove the barriers that student parents face in finding and paying for childcare. This initiative aims to enable students with children to pursue their education without the added burden of childcare-related challenges.

As we look ahead to the new year, our commitment to early childhood education and childcare access remains steadfast. We express our sincere gratitude to our partners, collaborators, childcare providers, educators, and all those who have supported our mission. Your dedication has been instrumental in the positive changes we have achieved this year.

Together, we will continue to build a brighter future for our children and ensure that early education and childcare are accessible to all who need it. Thank you for your continued support and belief in the importance of early childhood education.





BOYS OF TOMORROW

The BOT Club, tailored for boys in grades 3 to 7, continues to prove its transformative value as a summer program. It prepares participants for a 5k fun run and provides a nurturing environment for personal growth, discussions, and field trips.

During the six-week Boys of Tomorrow journey, participants undergo profound personal development. They emerge as resilient young men with enhanced skills and self-awareness. Engaging in diverse activities fosters lasting friendships and camaraderie.

Parent Kristi shared “My son loved the friendships he formed in BOT club. He says

it’s fun and it gets people moving”.

Throughout the six weeks, participants experience unique learning opportunities, including personal exploration, mental well-being, and teamwork. They discover their strengths and collaborate on building moving robots, promoting creativity and teamwork.

The program equips young men with essential life skills, such as communication, self-motivation, and self-care practices, nurturing both physical abilities and emotional intelligence.

Beyond the classroom, participants enjoy weekly field trips to attractions like the

"The empowerment by strong male role models just clicked with him.

The variety of subjects and lots of activity kept him interested."

Julie, parent of an 11-year old participant

Waterparks of Minnesota, The Hormel Institute, Niagara Caves, and engage in activities like rock climbing and kayaking, creating cherished memories.

"His friend was in it, and he just LOVED it." shared Julie, a parent to an 11-year-old participant. "He never articulated why he loved it, but I assume the empowerment by strong male role models just clicked with him. The variety of subjects and lots of activity kept him interested."

The Boys of Tomorrow program thrives due to generous community support. We appreciate Mediacap Pharmacy & Shoe Sensation and private donors for enabling us to offer this program free of charge, empowering young men from diverse backgrounds.

Reflecting on this year's success, we look forward to expanding the program in the coming year, welcoming back returning participants and newcomers.

The stories of B.O.T participants inspire us to reach further within our community. Through this program, we empower young men with essential life skills and foster a sense of belonging and self-worth.

The Boys of Tomorrow program stands as a beacon of hope and transformation. We are excited about the future as we work to unlock the potential of our youth, building a more resilient and compassionate generation.





F O S T E R I N G C O N N E C T I O N S , E M P O W E R I N G F U T U R E S

Austin Aspires is delighted to share the progress and achievements of our Mentorship Program. Our primary objective is to cultivate meaningful connections between experienced adults and young minds, nurturing an environment where they can learn, grow, and flourish together. This initiative stems from our commitment to addressing the needs of our community's youth.

In our pilot launch, we undertook an ambitious initiative, striving to pair twenty enthusiastic 5th-grade students from IJ Holton with dedicated adult mentors. Presently, our mentorship program

is diligently engaged in the matchmaking process, dedicated to ensuring the most suitable pairings for these young students. This extraordinary opportunity has come to fruition through the strong collaboration between Mower County Health and Human Services, Austin Public Schools, Nexxus Gerard, Riverland Community College, the United Way, the Welcome Center of Austin, and a host of dedicated community members.

Austin Aspires initiated this program in response to the findings of the Minnesota student survey, which highlighted a prevailing issue: the lack

of connectedness experienced by students to an adult in their life, aside from parents or caregivers.

Research highlights the transformative potential of mentorship. Mentored youth are less likely to engage in substance abuse, truancy, or confrontations. They express increased enthusiasm for schoolwork, exhibit improved academic performance, and foster stronger relationships with parents and peers.

The Mentorship Committee recognized that 5th graders required support as they transitioned from primary school to intermediate settings. Our program is strategically designed to empower these students, enabling them to develop agency and self-efficacy under the guidance of positive adult relationships.

It is imperative to understand that mentors do not replace parents, guardians, or teachers, nor do they assume the role of disciplinarians or decision-makers. Instead, mentors become a vital part of a supportive network of caring adults for the young person. They play a role in encouraging positive choices, promoting healthy self-esteem, supporting academic achievements, and introducing new ideas.

In 2023, the Mentorship Program has taken its first steps in fulfilling our mission. We have witnessed the power of these connections and are committed to expanding our efforts in the

coming years. The impact of mentorship resonates far beyond the individuals involved; it ripples throughout our community, making it stronger and more connected.

In the year ahead, we look forward to expanding the reach and depth of our mentorship program, empowering more young minds, and building a brighter future for our community.



NURTURING LEARNING FROM CRADLE TO CAREER

As we remain dedicated to our mission of providing comprehensive support to students from the earliest stages of their education through college acceptance Aspire Tutoring (formerly known as ACE tutoring) has seen continued growth year after year.

Our Aspire Tutors continue to be an integral part of our mission, offering valuable support in subjects such as english/language arts, reading, math, science, social studies, and a variety of elective topics. Beyond just academic support, these tutors also focus on instilling healthy study habits and addressing missing assignments.

Chad, parent of a student said “I can’t say enough good things about the Austin Aspires

program and the dedicated staff! Our daughter had struggled with reading for years and we just couldn’t get her to the point where she was reading at her grade level. We had tried summer school, outside tutors, and different learnings at home over the years but nothing got her over that hump. Once our daughter started Austin Aspires we started seeing improvement after just one month. Her confidence and attitude towards reading completely changed!”

The Austin Aspires staff is committed to ensuring that each student is connected with a tutor who best aligns with their grade, subject needs, and availability. Chad shares, “The Austin Aspires group not only took into account





"Once our daughter started Austin Aspires we started seeing improvement after just one month. Her confidence and attitude towards reading completely changed!"

Chad, parent of a tutoring student

the teaching piece. They also worked with us to ensure our daughter felt comfortable and was not embarrassed by having other students see her getting reading assistance which was a major concern for our daughter. The team made accommodations for private rooms at the YMCA or quiet areas at the library which made our daughter much more comfortable and willing to get this assistance."

Our tutors are equipped to work with students of all ages, and we are pleased to announce that in the past year, we have extended our reach to even the youngest learners, including Pre-K students, to provide them with a strong educational foundation. Our belief in guiding students from the cradle to their chosen career path lies at the core of Austin Aspires' mission. Our tutoring services are designed to carry students through their educational journey, providing assistance at every stage, from elementary school to college acceptance.

In the past year alone, Austin Aspires provided an astounding 1,155 hours of tutoring to 142 students. The tireless dedication and hard work

of our tutors have played a pivotal role in our students' educational journey.


The impact of our tutors is evident in the data. We are proud to report that the percentage of students achieving an ACT composite score of 18 or higher has surged to an impressive 53.3%. This achievement can be directly attributed to the unwavering commitment and support of our tutors.

As we look forward to the year ahead, Austin Aspires remains committed to our mission of nurturing young minds, from their earliest educational experiences to their journey towards college and beyond. We are grateful for the support of our tutors, students, parents, schools, and the community, as your collective dedication has made these accomplishments possible.

Together, we will continue to pave the way for students, ensuring they receive the support, guidance, and opportunities they need to succeed. Thank you for your ongoing support and belief in the power of education.

ASPIRING LEADERS OF TOMORROW





The primary goal of the Aspiring Leaders of Tomorrow (A.L.O.T) program is to provide comprehensive support to students in grades 5-12, fostering their personal and academic growth by connecting them with dedicated community navigators based within their schools.

The A.L.O.T program is designed to support learners of all backgrounds and abilities. Our community navigators, stationed within each participating school, serve as a guiding light for students, offering a wide range of assistance. This includes:

ACADEMIC SUPPORT: Navigators regularly review students' grades, attendance, and assignments, identifying areas where improvement is needed. They also provide tutoring services, ensuring students receive the educational support necessary to excel.

SCHOLARSHIP ASSISTANCE: A.L.O.T navigators actively assist students in fulfilling their volunteer hour requirements for the prestigious Hormel Foundation Austin Assurance scholarship, creating pathways for a brighter academic future.

POST-SECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES: Our program focuses on helping students explore diverse post-secondary options, including higher education, military service, and workforce entry. Navigators are committed to guiding students toward the path that best suits their aspirations.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: A.L.O.T facilitates opportunities for students to engage in college visits and job shadowing experiences, broadening their horizons and igniting their career ambitions.

RESOURCE CONNECTION: Navigators stand ready to connect students and their families to essential resources, ensuring that any challenges outside the classroom can be effectively addressed. *(continued)*



Mary, an 11th-grade student, shared the heart of A.L.O.T's impact: "You listen and don't lecture me. Students just want someone who will listen and acknowledge their feelings without them being judged or getting in trouble." Mary's words summarize the value of compassionate mentorship and support, which is at the heart of our program.

Over the past year, the A.L.O.T program made a significant impact on the lives of 88 students within the Austin community. One notable achievement was the percentage of seniors enrolled in Austin high schools who academically qualified for the Hormel Foundation Austin Assurance Scholarship. Of the 295 graduates 257 qualified academically for this life changing opportunity.

This success is a testament to the unwavering commitment and hard work of our dedicated navigators, school staff and community

members, who tirelessly work to empower our students, helping them overcome obstacles and reach their full potential.

In the coming year, we remain committed to expanding our reach, fostering even more connections, and equipping our young leaders with the tools they need to succeed. The A.L.O.T program is dedicated to making a lasting impact on the lives of our students and our community.



DONOR PARTNERS



EDUCATION PARTNERS



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Albert Lea Community Education | Gentleman's Fade | SEMCAC |
| Austin Area Chamber of Commerce | Head Start | ServeMinnesota |
| Austin Area Commission for the Arts | Hometown Food Security Project | SHiP |
| Austin Area Foundation | Hormel Foods | Shoe Sensation |
| Austin First United Methodist Church | Hormel Institute | SMART Transit |
| Austin Morning Lions Club | Mayo Clinic Health System | StriveTogether |
| Austin Noon Kiwanis | Mower County | Sweet Reads |
| Austin Police Department | Mower County Home Daycare Providers | The City of Austin |
| Austin Positive Action Coalition | Mower County Sheriff's Department | United Way of Mower County |
| Austin Public Library | Mower Refreshed | United Way of Mower County Backpack Program |
| Austin Rotary Club | Parenting Resource Center | Waterparks of Minnesota |
| CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen) | Readers' Cafe | Welcome Center |
| Crime Victims Resource Center | Riverland Community College | Workforce Development Inc. |
| Family Connections | Second Act Thrift Store | YMCA at Austin Community Recreation Center |
| | | Yoga Studio of Austin |



301 North Main Street, Suite 104
Austin, MN 55912

"The journey of learning starts early, shaping the path for tomorrow's leaders and thinkers. Austin Aspires creates a foundation for a promising future and potentially encourages future caregivers and medical innovators."

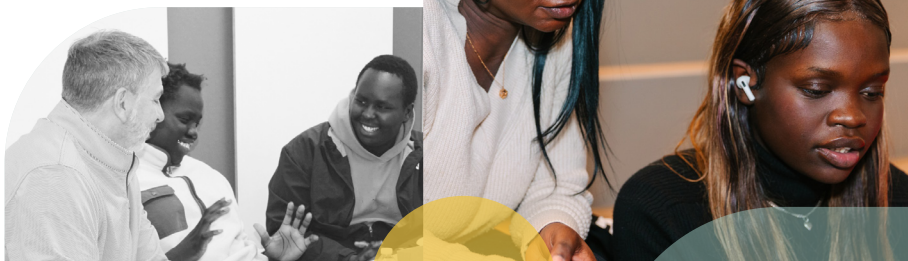
Sarah Scherger, M.D., chair, Department of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Mayo Clinic Health System



LEARN MORE!

For more information about our work in the Austin community, our data and programs, visit:

austinaspires.org
or scan here



GET involved!

THE YOUTH OF AUSTIN NEED YOU!

The success of our work depends on the commitment of our community to our youth.

WAYS YOU CAN ENGAGE IN OUR SHARED WORK:

- BECOME A TUTOR OR MENTOR
- JOIN AN ACTION TEAM OR EARLY CHILDHOOD ACTION NETWORK
- FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
- FUND AN AUSTIN ASPIRES INITIATIVE
- VOLUNTEER FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS
- CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

