

COMBATING DISCRIMINATION

Ruth Ann Widner, who is in charge of campus improvement, walks through three policies pertaining to keeping Bowie a more equitable place for all



Ruth Ann Widner
Campus Improvement

Speak up

- Is a strategy that gives participants four easy-to-remember ways to respond to bias or hateful language.
- We've also created Speak Up classroom posters as a cue to students to "interrupt, question, educate, or echo" when they hear hurtful words or observe hurtful actions on campus.

Bowie Equity Council

- Empowers students to develop a campus vision for promoting inclusivity. They serve as liaisons to the district, review campus policies for equity concern.
- Assistant Principal Hector Munoz and Lead Counselor Nicole Hepburn are working to reignite this group in light of Covid-19

SOAR

- Students Organized for Anti-Racism (SOAR) invites students to join a student cohort that meets weekly to discuss issues related to cultural proficiency and inclusivity.
- Participating students use the book *This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on how to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work* to guide their talks.

THE ROAD TO INCLUSIVITY

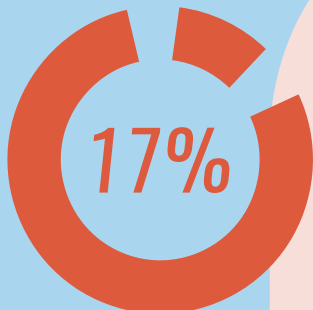
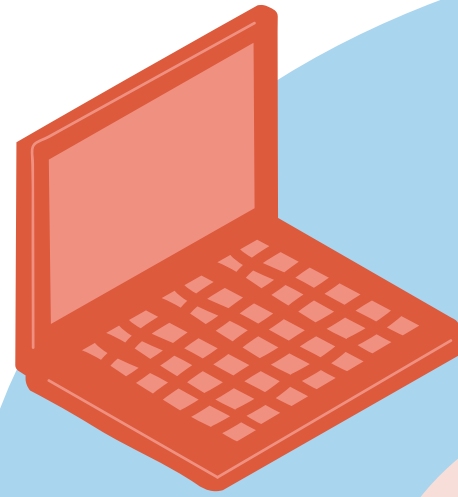
Combating discrimination, Bowie initiatives form to promote community



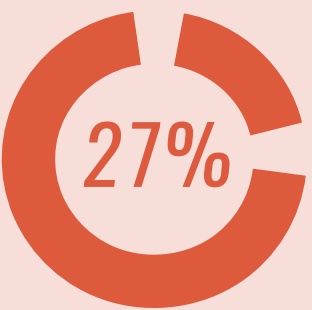
INTERVIEW BY Isabella del Nido

SURVEYING STUDENTS & STAFF

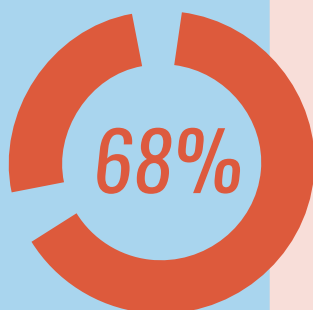
2,123 students & staff were surveyed in 2022 about AISD's climate here are some of the results:



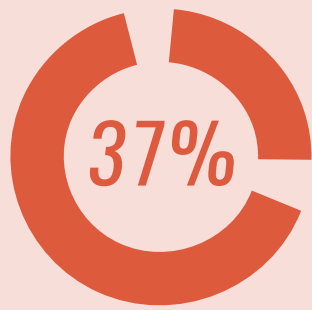
of staff members believe district leaders solve problems



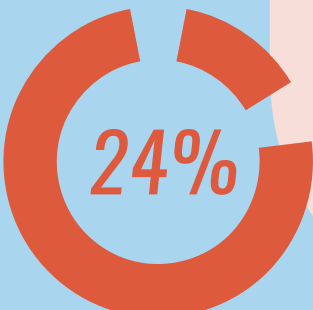
of students feel like they matter to others at Bowie



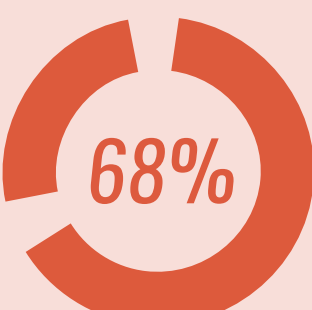
of staff members believe the school helps staff speak out against racism



of students feel like they belong at Bowie



of students think the behaviour of other students affects their learning



of staff members are optimistic that Bowie will improve in the future

SOURCE Panorama Surveys

Isabella del Nido
Editor-in-Chief

In one conversation, a student now has the ability to catalyze change.

Empowered to promote inclusivity, students can use school extracurriculars and resources to amplify their voices. Protecting individual student rights and campus wide policies has become more accessible to any student interested.

SOAR, or Students Organized for Anti-Racism sponsor Masie Martin, who has been a teacher at Bowie for seven years, was in charge of a SOAR group last year. According to Martin, there were students in her group who had faced discrimination at some point in their time at Bowie.

"SOAR groups are a way to facilitate conversations about discrimination, especially about race," Martin said. "These conversations are hard to have in big groups, so SOAR groups typically have around eight-10 student members and two or three faculty sponsors."

Addressing bias, discrimination, equity and identity in an after school organization can give students a space to open up about their personal experiences and work towards a place of understanding, growth and action.

"SOAR groups meet weekly or every other week and have either a book or other resources to help guide the conversation," Martin said. "This gives students a chance to reflect on their own practices as well as what happens at Bowie and talk about how we can make Bowie a more welcoming place for all."

The implementation of SOAR opens the conversation for students to actively fight for issues regarding racism and inequality in and out of Bowie. As part of SOAR's curriculum, all members get access to "This Book Is Anti-Racist" by Tiffany Jewell.

"I've appreciated that there has been more of a push to talk about this stuff with staff and students in the past couple of years," Martin said. "I think we need to keep talking about discrimination, both in general and specifically what it looks like at Bowie. I also think it's important to have a way for students to talk about the difficulties that they

are facing."

Sophomore Bubba Infante has been a part of SOAR for one year. Infante shares how his involvement with the program has helped him.

"Being a part of SOAR has definitely benefited me in the sense that it has put me on a platform to openly speak about racism/ discrimination within our community," Infante said. "With all honesty, I am lucky enough to say that Bowie's anti-discriminatory policies are effective for me."

According to DoSomething.org, 15.8% of students in America reported experiencing race-based bullying or harassment, and in that survey it found a correlation between racial bullying and negative mental and physical health among students.

"I think one way discrimination can affect students' education is their sense of belonging," Martin said. "There is research out there showing that when students feel a sense of community and belonging they are more likely to do well in school; their brains actually process information better. Obviously overt discriminatory behaviors are a problem, but even small microaggressions over time send the message that students aren't welcome and safe."

AISD's "Respect for All" page includes a resource for students and parents to see how all kinds of racism and discrimination are being handled across the district. According to Ruth Widner, who is in charge of campus improvement, the Policies and Research section of this web-page carefully outlines the Austin Independent School District's Board policies related to all types of discrimination.

"I've noticed that anytime I've had problems arise, my teachers have enforced these policies very heavily," Infante said. "SOAR is helping students who don't normally speak up get the chance. We've built a community where it's ok to speak your mind and wonder, while also educating and informing one another."

According to Martin, discrimination often takes the form of students making inappropriate jokes and they believe that as long as they're joking, it doesn't

matter what they say.

"I have experienced being discriminated against unfortunately, it was handled quickly and consequences were brought on the other student and I am overly thankful for how it was handled," Infante said.

Infante details how he was discriminated against.

"A certain type of picture of me had been going around and I didn't know about it until a number of people had already seen it," Infante said. "It affected me the day I found out considering I did have a minor panic attack but afterwards I went to my wonderful AP Ms. Black and she helped me take care of it."

In 2020, Principal Robinson, along with the elementary and middle school principals in AISD expressed their collective commitment to promoting equity on their campuses. They drafted and published an open letter on Bowie's website displaying a pledge to cultural proficiency.

"Having been a staff member here for about 30 years, I can attest that over the last few years Bowie has increased its efforts to systematically address and stem racism and other forms of harassment," Widner said. "The arrival of Mr. Robinson six years ago was the catalyst for this shift."

In the letter, Robinson and the other principals explain that each campus will do its part in opening the conversation on race and provide trusted sources on how parents can educate their children on the world around them.

"He immediately began engaging the staff in professional development on cultural proficiency and challenging the campus leadership team to develop an action plan to improve the overall campus climate," Widner said. "Various unfortunate events in the news convinced many in our school community that this work was unquestionably necessary."

According to Widner, there are many ways Bowie is promoting inclusivity and kindness. This includes SOAR.

through one of these programs would have an individualized learning plan that includes accommodations to help them equitably access the curriculum," Widner said. "All of this is outlined in federal and state law, so Bowie is required to follow the laws just like any other school."

Senior Sami Sagebiel has a 504 related to her dyslexia and dysgraphia. Her disabilities affect her ability to read and write. According to the Yale Center for Dyslexia, while people with dyslexia are slow readers, they often are very fast and creative thinkers with strong reasoning abilities.

"My disability makes it difficult for me to complete quality work in a short amount of time," Sagebiel said. "My 504 lets me turn in assignments a day late with no penalty. This accommodation makes me feel like I have enough time to turn in work I'm proud of and lets me be able to keep up with the other kids."

In order to determine eligibility for 504 services, students, parents, or administrators can initiate a 504 referral if they suspect that they have a disability, then their referral will be reviewed by a campus level 504 coordinator.

"Some of my teachers felt like I didn't need the accommodation, so I would have to message my assistant principal about it," Sagebiel said. "But honestly as long as you stand up for yourself and your rights it's fine."

In addition to Bowie's mission to provide equal learning, a team of over 40 faculty and staff members titled "Bowie's Equity Committee" meet to examine policies and practices throughout the campus.

"Bowie has done a great job accommodating me," Infante said. "Lots of the staff are familiar with who I am and the situations I have been involved with and they have provided me with the best assistance and care."

In addition to making sure every student receives the same quality of education regardless of race. Students with learning disabilities receive guidance through standards put in place by AISD. For example, 504's. "Students receiving services

things about the Equality Council is that they have a lot of opportunities to advocate for student rights and for marginalized communities."

According to Shumate, last year, students on the Bowie Equity Committee got to speak before the school board and talk about issues that really matter to them.

"The man at the district level, who was overseeing it, left last year for a job opportunity at UT," Shumate said. "The vision we had for this program was really great, with the shifting of positions at the district, the consistency of leadership has made it more challenging to keep the program going and that's really unfortunate."

Despite the hardships, the Bowie Equity Committee continues to push for student advocacy. "I think that what's really effective is that it has a specific structure that tells the adults on campus what students really seek

out," Shumate said. "I think that a lot of the structures of our organizations don't necessarily make room for students and so I think the cool thing about Equity Council is that it has that structure built in that specifically seeks out students who get knocked over and so then you give them opportunities to really shine and grow."

Shumate now runs the SOAR program. In reflecting on SOAR's ability to make students passionate about inclusivity, Shumate describes her hopes for the program.

"I think if we can get students who are really passionate about anti-racism and like being a part of the movement that can push equity at our school in the way we do and the way that teachers are trained, if we have a group of students who are willing to put in the time, more than a fit session, we can make change," Shumate said.

The Policies page provides guidance to the campus administrators about how they must respond to reported incidents of racism

Ruth Widner
School Improvement

It was really cool to see students last year speaking straight to the school board about issues that really matter to them.

Whitney Shumate
Bowie Equity Committee

FILING A COMPLAINT

1. Get a complaint form from your counselor or administrator if you feel you are being bullied (including cyberbullying), experiencing sexual harassment or dating violence
2. The complaint form will be reviewed by the principle or designee
3. To ensure confidentiality, the school will only disclose information on a need-to-know basis

SOURCE Austin ISD

504 vs. IEP

- Any disability
- Focused on how a child learns
- Limited rights and recourse if parent is unsatisfied
- No goals or progress monitoring
- Not a special education program
- Overseen by OCR and HSS
- School does not have to seek parental input
- School can change plan at any time without parental approval
- Applies to any school that has public funding

- Free for parents
- Should meet the child's needs
- Requires a disability and evaluation process which is different for each student

- Must have one of the 13 specific disabilities outlined the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Must be created by an IEP team, which includes specific school staff and parents
- Has goals and progress monitoring
- Procedural safeguards for parents
- School is required to include parents
- All public schools must make this available to students
- Annual meeting with overseers

SOURCE A Day in Our Shoes

BY THE NUMBERS:

How Bowie's demographics compare to Texas' average



58%	30%	2%	6%	54%	46%
White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Male	Female
26%	53%	13%	5%	51%	49%

ART BY Isabella del Nido SOURCE Public School Review

