

A Case Study in Scaling Innovation: Aldine Independent School District and Acceleration Days

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Aldine ISD's Office of Transformation (OOT) was built to operate separately from the rest of the central office, a design that protected Acceleration Days (ADs), their Bold Idea initiative, early on. To make ADs easier to scale, OOT narrowed the format from the original plans for social-emotional learning and project-based learning to a focus on extra instruction targeting key state standards. This case follows how competing priorities led to months of negotiation to fold Acceleration Days into the district's high-quality instructional materials (HQIMs) and pacing guides and ultimately cleared the way for elementary-wide adoption in 2026-27.

Background & Bold Idea

Aldine Independent School District (AISD) is located northwest of Houston, Texas, serving 56,000 students across 80 schools. Ninety-eight percent of AISD's students are students of color, and 87% are economically disadvantaged. Prior to 2020, only 19% of the district's students were reading at grade level.

AISD wanted to build on lessons from an earlier extended learning time pilot at its elementary schools. They sought to adapt select days each month to include dedicated blocks of personalized learning time ("Acceleration Days") that could be used for extended Tier 2 intervention, enrichment projects, and extra recess. This is a school-level change effort: at each participating elementary school, every teacher in every grade is adopting the model. The district started with five schools, with the goal of eventually spreading to all elementary schools.

Case Summary

Since 2019, AISD has had an Office of Transformation (OOT) charged with piloting and scaling programs to dramatically improve student achievement. Based on lessons learned from two earlier pilots, OOT developed Acceleration Days: once a month, schools pause the district’s pacing guide so students can engage in Tier 2 interventions and enrichment activities.

AISD scaled Acceleration Days to five schools in 2025–26, with plans to implement aspects of the program in all elementary schools during the 2026–27 school year. The original vision of the Bold Idea included social-emotional learning (SEL) and project-based learning (PBL) elements, but over time, emphasis shifted away from these elements and toward extra instruction targeting high-priority state standards, what one leader called “power standards.” Personalized “playlists”—where students can select from a number of activities their teacher has selected based on individual learning needs—also remain in development.

The program has earned substantial support from students, teachers, and principals in participating schools. The OOT’s progress reflects sustained effort and careful political management: the office negotiated over several months to merge the Acceleration Days program into the district’s HQIMs and pacing guides. This cleared the path for key components to be adopted in all elementary schools in 2026–27, though enrichment activities will not be included.

This case study draws on 45 interviews with central office leaders, principals, teachers, and external coaches (conducted between June 2023 and June 2026), six site observations, and implementation data supplied by AISD and external coaches.

How Did Acceleration Days Evolve from 2020 to 2026?

Acceleration Days evolved out of the implementation of another model, the Additional Days School Year (ADSY). This Texas public school initiative provides funding to add up to 30 extra instructional days to elementary and select middle schools. Acceleration Days is a modified version of ADSY that fits into the normal school year. In this case study, we combine our discussion of both Acceleration Days and ADSY because the implementation of both programs was similar (both had a day per month devoted to Tier 2 instruction and enrichment activities).

2019-20

OOT Opens

AISD opened the Office of Transformation (OOT) to manage a portfolio of schools and pilot initiatives that, once proven workable, could scale to the rest of the district. Acceleration Days would eventually emerge from this pipeline.

2020-22

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Challenges

Coming out of the pandemic, AISD faced very low student achievement and, amid teacher shortages, hired a large proportion of teachers on emergency credentials. To address both challenges, the district adopted HQIMs for literacy and math.

2022-24

Early OOT Pilots

AISD received Phase I grant funding during the 2023-24 school year, and the OOT piloted two parallel models. ADSY ran in two schools, adding roughly 30 extra days focused on SEL and well-being alongside PBL. A second, concurrent pilot tested a “blended learning” approach in two other schools, pairing SEL with extra math instruction during a dedicated intervention period. Even at this early, small-scale stage, ADSY revealed that key district systems, including calendars, transportation, nutrition services, and the pacing guide, would need to flex to accommodate the model, giving the OOT their first experience with navigating this kind of cross-departmental work.

2024-25

Acceleration Days Formal Launch

As resources shifted, so did the pilots. Drawing on lessons from both ADSY and blended learning, the OOT began shaping what staff described as “ADSY on steroids,” capturing the intensity of the original model’s SEL and enrichment focus without extending the school year itself. This hybrid became Acceleration Days. The rationale behind Acceleration Days shifted over this period, but it resonated with principals and teachers throughout. The mechanics shifted as well: teachers provided feedback that they were missing out on instructional time, which pushed the model toward a tighter focus on “power” standards.

Four schools began implementing Acceleration Days on a monthly basis—they combined SEL and PBL (drawing from ADSY), individualized “playlist” elements (drawing from blended learning), and dedicated professional learning community (PLC) time for teachers. Three schools continued with ADSY separately. The participating schools shifted somewhat from the prior year, largely a function of principal capacity and school closures.

2025-26

Expansion and District-wide Signaling

Acceleration Days expanded to five schools (four of them new to the model), with less emphasis on SEL and PBL and a sharper focus on extra instruction that targeted power standards. The model’s momentum reached beyond its own participating schools: Inspired by Acceleration Days, the district’s Chief Academic Officer directed all schools to build “Data Response Days” or “Pausing Points” into their calendars, while remaining in alignment with HQIMs. Behind the scenes, the OOT continued working with Teaching & Learning to relax the pacing guide and create room within HQIMs for this kind of flexibility.

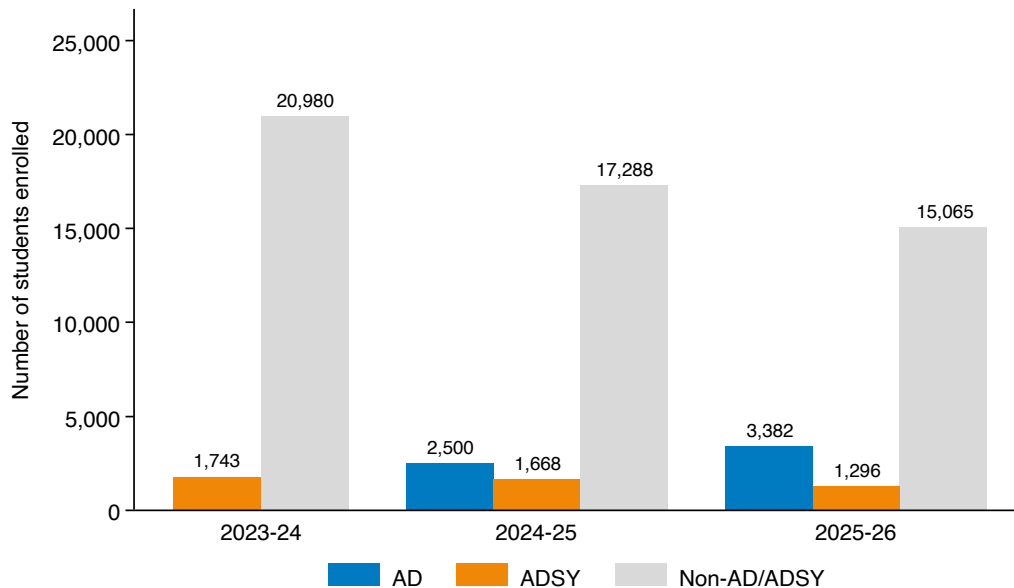
Ongoing work

As AISD moves toward districtwide implementation in 2026-27, the OOT’s ongoing work on ADs includes using additional data sources to refine how focus skills are identified and accelerating mastery determinations to minimize time spent on non-essential skills. OOT is also working within the central office to strengthen cross-department collaboration to support scaling to new campuses and codifying lessons learned into a comprehensive playbook to guide future implementation without repeating early missteps.

Acceleration Days: In-Depth Assessment of Scaling Progress

To assess AISD's progress in scaling Acceleration Days, we looked across the same four dimensions of scale referenced in the main report (see the Appendix in the [main report](#) for more details): spread, depth, sustainability, and shift in ownership.

Figure 1: Student enrollment in schools participating in Acceleration Days and Additional Days School Year (ADSY), by school year



AD: Schools implementing Acceleration Days

ADSY: Schools implementing Additional Days School Year model

The specific schools participating in AD changed from 2024-25 to 2025-26; one ADSY school closed at the end of the 2024-25 school year.

Spread: Medium-High. AISD's enrollment data shows that ADSY and Acceleration Days have been implemented in seven schools per school year (two ADSY schools and five Acceleration Days schools). Because a different set of schools participated each year, the total number of participating schools remained lower than originally planned. Within participating schools, program uptake was strong, but the vast majority of district elementary students are not enrolled in participating schools (see Figure 1). Looking forward, AISD is now planning to implement a version of Acceleration Days in all elementary schools during the 2026-27 school year.

Depth: Medium. Acceleration Days do not require deep changes to teachers' daily practice. However, in interviews and observations, nearly all teachers in participating schools report having made some adjustments to their Tier 2 instruction on designated days, and that these changes have not yet carried over into their daily Tier 1 instruction. The exception was two schools that had been implementing ADSY already for several years. Principals in these schools report that staff have shifted their daily practice in alignment with the initiative.

Ownership: Medium. School-level ownership was high across both ADSY and

Acceleration Days: principals, teachers, and students alike reported high satisfaction and strong interest in continued participation. As one coach reflected, “The intervention time [in the HQIM] is very short... I usually just saw my students who needed the most help... But now there’s [an Acceleration Day] where you have a longer time, and you can reach everybody.”

Ownership at the central office level was more varied. Some principal supervisors endorsed the initiatives, while others showed little interest. During the 2025–26 school year, several Teaching & Learning (T&L) administrators continued to favor the district’s existing pacing guide and HQIMs. But by the end of the school year, T&L leaders had agreed to implement Acceleration Days in all elementary schools.

Sustainability: Medium. AISD’s OOT relied heavily on external TA providers, supported in part through grant funds to support school-level participation in ADSY and Acceleration Days. These providers developed lessons, coached teachers on instructional strategies, and provided accountability and administrative support. As grant funds expire and Acceleration Days expand to all elementary schools, these services will need to be absorbed by district staff (primarily T&L coaches, and it remains unclear whether this transition will succeed. In earlier years, the OOT successfully aligned policies to accommodate ADSY across several schools, including amending school calendars, transportation, and nutrition services. The office also developed a playbook for how the OOT works with other departments to shift policy in support of new practices.

What Helped and Hindered Piloting and Scaling Acceleration Days

What Helped

- **The Office of Transformation’s capacity:** The OOT’s core purpose is to pilot programs within its own portfolio of schools before scaling them districtwide. This gave Acceleration Days room to develop and iterate inside a kind of protected bubble, largely insulated from the pressures that might have constrained a districtwide rollout from day one. Relatedly, the OOT leveraged their political skill and positional standing needed to compromise with Teaching & Learning leaders, even amid real resistance to Acceleration Days. The office also drew on a broad array of data to continually fine-tune the model—they refined what the Bold Idea actually was, not just how far it reached.
- **A shared instructional vision:** The district’s adoption of HQIM and an accompanying pacing guide gave Acceleration Days a common instructional foundation to build on, rather than requiring the OOT to construct one from scratch.
- **Financial resources:** OOT drew on a substantial base of Texas Education Agency (TEA) resources and used grant funds to secure external coaching support, both of which helped sustain implementation at the school level.

What Hindered

- ***Rigid instructional systems:*** The same HQIMs and pacing guide that gave Acceleration Days a theory of action also constrained it. Their rigidity made it harder to carve out room for a model that, by design, asked schools to pause standard instruction.
- ***Siloed central office departments:*** Competing priorities between the OOT and other central office departments slowed the kind of cross-departmental alignment Acceleration Days required to expand.
- ***Uneven school-level capacity:*** Principal turnover and variation in teachers' capacity to take on new practices limited how consistently Acceleration Days could take hold once schools opted in.

About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

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