



MASSP IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH



Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals



Star of Innovation Award Application Form

School Name Austin Online Academy Grade Levels 9-12
Name of School District Austin Public Schools
Name of Principal Jessica Cabeen
Application Submitted By Matt Schmit and Jessica Cabeen
School Street Address 3013rd ST NW
City, Zip Austin MN 55912
Telephone Number 507-460-1830
MASSP Division SE
Name of Program Austin Online Academy

Please answer the following questions on a separate sheet/s of paper.

- Description of the program.
- How has it impacted your school?
- What difficulties did you encounter in its implementation?
- What issue/s might another school encounter in replicating this program?
- Do you have any data to show the impact of this program? If so, please share it with us.

Applications must be submitted to MASSP offices by March 1.

PHONE: 612-361-1510 • FAX: 612-361-6340
MASSP • 2 Pine Tree Drive • Suite 380 • Arden Hills, MN 55112

Questions? Please contact:
Bob Driver, Executive Director
612-361-6159

Star of Innovation Award Application: Austin Online Academy

Description of the program.

Established in Fall 2021, Austin Online Academy is a virtual school committed to innovation and inclusivity. Initially designed as an alternative pathway to high school graduation, the program has evolved to meet diverse student needs, creating a supportive and enriching environment for accelerated learning.

Aligned with our dedication to academic excellence, all 10th-grade students at Austin Online Academy participate in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. This intentional decision challenges students, providing a rigorous education that readies them for higher education and showcases our commitment to intellectual growth.

Additionally, Austin Online Academy proudly holds NCAA certification, allowing student-athletes to seamlessly balance academic pursuits with sports interests. This certification reflects our holistic approach, emphasizing the importance of a well-rounded experience for success both academically and athletically.

To meet individual needs, our program accommodates both full-time and part-time students, ensuring accessibility and personalized education for our diverse student body. Taught by licensed Austin Public School teachers, classes are complemented by weekly MTSS meetings, quarterly social activities, and bi-weekly advisory check-ins to provide ongoing support.

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by young mothers, Austin Online Academy offers comprehensive resources, including drop-in support and academic counseling. Our goal is to create an inclusive space where every student, regardless of circumstances, can thrive academically.

Austin Online Academy is not just a virtual school; it is an environment embracing diversity, empowering students, and illuminating a path to a brighter future.

How has it impacted your school?

Through online courses, students enjoy enhanced flexibility in their schedules, facilitating participation in PSEO courses, pursuit of extracurricular passions, and the ability to maintain employment commitments. This fosters a personalized and adaptable educational experience, catering to individual student needs.

By forging partnerships with Austin High School and Austin Area Learning Center, we have established comprehensive support systems tailored to the diverse needs of our students. Collaborating with counselors, success coaches, mental health practitioners, medical professionals, and community outreach organizations, we aim to raise awareness about the range of services available. This collaborative effort allows us to intervene effectively, accelerating student learning while providing meaningful educational experiences and career pathways.

Additionally, our program has become a supportive learning environment for young mothers working towards their high school diploma. Notably, two mothers graduated last year, and we recently celebrated a mid-year graduate who successfully balanced her studies with caring for her two-year-old daughter. In an exit interview, one student expressed, "The Austin Online Teachers would not let me fail." This testimonial underscores our commitment to supporting every student on their educational journey.

What difficulties did you encounter in its implementation?

One of the significant challenges we faced was defining the parameters of our program, establishing clear distinctions between what it is and what it is not. Through student interviews and parent feedback, we successfully set enrollment guardrails and implemented detailed onboarding processes for our families. Additionally, we developed a comprehensive website that outlines essential soft skills for online learners and provides organizational and time management resources.

Creating a distinct brand and effectively communicating it to both internal and external stakeholders has proven crucial. This transparency has been instrumental in raising awareness among students, families, and staff at our High School. By clearly articulating our program's identity and limitations, we empower ourselves to best serve and support students exactly where they are in their educational journey.

What issue/s might another school encounter in replicating this program?

Three areas to consider when considering implementing online programming within your district.

Strong Infrastructure: The success of Austin Online can be attributed to the visionary leadership of Dr. Joey Page and Matt Schmit. Establishing dedicated staff and aligning the online program with its brick-and-mortar counterpart is essential to ensure the rigor of online learning matches that of in-person education.

Relevant Professional Development: A critical aspect is providing professional development tailored to virtual teaching and the nuances of leading a virtual school. Collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Online Learning Alliance has been foundational in aligning our efforts with statewide initiatives, offering professional development that is both relevant and meaningful for staff.

Connection with District High Schools: The success of Austin Online relies heavily on a supportive administrative team. Ensuring that Austin Online is not an afterthought but a program viewed as a support to all students is crucial. Establishing strong connections with district high schools, as seen in our partnership with Austin High School and the Austin Area Learning Center's leadership team, is integral to the success and integration of the online program into the broader educational landscape.

Do you have any data to show the impact of this program? If so, please share it with us.

Percentage of Courses Passed at Austin Online Academy:

21-22	22-23	23-24
S1: 34.3% passed. S2: 38.5 % passed.	S1: 40.7% passed. S2: 52.1% passed.	S1: 75% passed