

# Reducing drop-out rates

## Keller Independent School District

*Keller, Texas*

Keller Independent School District (Keller) has 42 schools serving more than 35,000 students in a growing suburban community situated north of Fort Worth, Texas. One of the schools—New Direction—is a small alternative high school that serves students who need an alternative style of learning in order to graduate. The school offers students a reduced schedule of two online courses at a time. Since its inception, the school has seen positive results, says Elaine Plybon, Keller's Virtual and Blended Learning Coordinator because "students are doing high school the way they need to do high school." Because of the positive results, Plybon and other educators and administrators in Keller saw a need to expand the program, but the district didn't have the space onsite at New Direction. Consequently, other high schools in the district started creating their own programs that were modeled after the one started at New Direction so that they could better serve students who were at risk of dropping out.

Over the last three years, three Keller high schools have adopted a similar program, each with their own unique spin. To participate, students move from enrollment in their home high school and are enrolled into the new hybrid program. Students are able to access digital courses that are imported into the district's learning management system. Students are supported by a paraprofessional in a separate learning area with additional teacher support throughout their scheduled time at school. Students are also able to take a traditional class (for example, a unique elective) if the course is not available digitally.

Fossil Ridge High School started Panther Academy three years ago. Students are onsite all day, and teachers rotate through the learning space to provide direct instruction and hands-on learning with a focus on credit recovery. Timber Creek High School began its program, known as Flight School, two years ago. Students in Flight School spend four hours a day on campus with a learning coach and teachers in a dedicated lab space. In order to be admitted to Flight School, students have to apply for admission and sign a contract to pledge their accountability to their learning progress. The students in the program have grown supportive like a family and cheer each other on and hold each other accountable. In fall 2018, the school started with 20 students and by mid-year, 18 had graduated, so the program admitted 18 more students in spring of 2019. Because of the program's success, Timber Creek is piloting the Launch program that identifies freshmen who are failing and need additional support to stay on track for graduation. Similar to Timber Creek's Flight School, Central High School's Ignite program takes a hybrid approach focused on supporting meaningful learning processes.

All three programs have visuals on the wall that track student success, and each student has their own unique reasons for needing the hybrid program. When credits are completed, students get to walk the stage at a graduation ceremony with family and friends, or they can choose to attend the end of year graduation at their school along with their peers. In the 2018–2019 academic year, some schools expanded their program to include students who want to take original credit courses with a goal of graduating early and starting college or career. Plybon shares that what they have learned is that this program is less about drop-out prevention and more about realizing that some students need a different way "to do school," and this hybrid program gives them that option.

This profile was developed through correspondence with Elaine Plybon of Keller Independent School District.