



Dropout Recovery Programs

At Alternative Education Campuses

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Set goals and administer rewards to encourage students to complete credits.

All profiled districts offer hybrid instruction for all non-core courses to allow students to move through content at their own pace. To ensure students complete credits and move toward graduation, **District B** and **District C** set goals for credit accumulation and reward students for completed courses.

Offer dropout recovery program students support services during the school day to address academic and behavioral at-risk indicators.

To address at-risk students' low reading levels, **District C's** dropout recovery program incorporates Achieve 3000, a program designed to improve reading competency, into the daily school schedule. At **District D's** dropout recovery program, behavioral counselors meet with students in group sessions during the school day.

Provide dropout recovery program teachers with professional development opportunities specific to at-risk student instruction. District A and District E

pay alternative education teachers stipends to teach trainings specific to at-risk student instruction (e.g., blended instructional methods) to peer alternative education staff. To standardize the peer training program at District E, the Director of Alternative Education coordinated with alternative education campus principals to set one stipend amount, establish roles and responsibilities, and provide coaching for all teachers who deliver trainings. In addition to providing alternative education teachers across the district with professional development programs, contacts report that the teacher leaders program recognizes and supports teacher leaders, which builds an alternative education leadership talent pipeline.

Use state-wide assessment data, graduation rate, dropout rate, attendance rate, and students' post-graduate plans to evaluate dropout recovery programs.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) collects data on performance on end-of-course assessments and annual graduation/dropout rate to assess alternative education campuses. In addition to the metrics the TEA uses, the Director of Alternative Education at **District E** measures the average dropout rate across district high schools and attendance of dropout recovery program students to evaluate program performance. Contacts explain that successful dropout recovery programs reduce district dropout rates because they enroll and graduate at-risk students who would have dropped out of high school otherwise, and student attendance correlates with their success. Further, contacts add that principals of dropout recovery programs at **District B** and **District C** consider students who determine post-graduate plans (e.g., receive college acceptance, enlist in military branch) to be demonstrations of successful dropout recovery programs.

2) Structure

Instruction and Acceleration Methods

No profiled dropout recovery programs offer GEDs. However, adult education departments at **District C** and **District E** partner with local community colleges to provide GED programs to adults in the districts.

All profiled Texas dropout recovery programs use **Edgenuity** software for online instruction.

Instruct Core Classes in Person to Provide At-Risk Students with Content Support

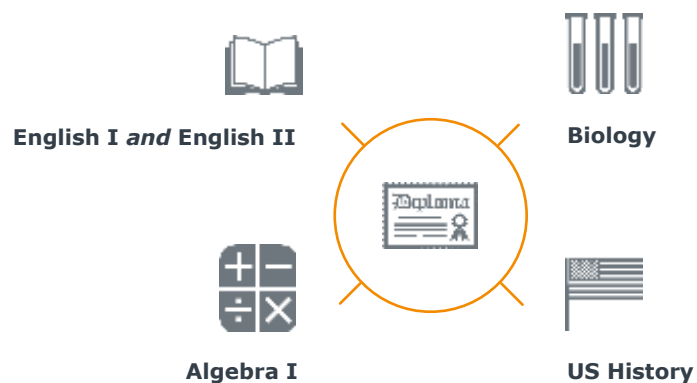
All profiled school districts use both in-person and blended instruction to teach dropout recovery program students. Thus, students at all profiled dropout recovery programs attend school at physical alternative education campuses to receive instruction.

Specifically, dropout recovery programs at all profiled Texas school districts (i.e., **District A, District B, District C**) use in-person instruction to teach each of the five high school core courses that culminate in a State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course assessment (EOC). To receive a diploma, high school students in Texas must receive at least a grade of Meets Grade Level performance on every section of each of the core courses' EOCs. Contacts explain that dropout recovery programs teach core courses in person to help students learn content necessary to pass EOCs and graduate.

While dropout recovery programs at profiled Texas school districts instruct core courses in person, all profiled districts offer hybrid instruction for all non-core courses. Students can access all non-core course content through online software. Contacts explain that students complete courses at their own pace; students attend class periods, but they work through course content online at desks by themselves. However, students may ask class teachers for support with content they struggle to understand.

Dropout recovery program teachers at District B do not assign homework to students. However, contacts add that students may choose to complete coursework online after the school day to progress toward graduation more quickly.

Courses with an EOC that Texas Students Must Pass to Graduate High School



Set Goals and Administer Rewards to Change Student Habits and Motivate Students to Graduate High School

Dropout recovery program administrators, counselors, and teachers at **District B** and **District C** establish academic and behavioral goals for students. Further, dropout recovery programs use rewards to recognize students who achieve their goals.

Example Academic and Behavioral Goals and Rewards for Program Students

Behavioral



Goals:

The Principal of the dropout recovery program at **District C** sets attendance and discipline goals with matriculating students whose records display low attendance and previous violations of the code of conduct, respectively. Contacts report that the Principal hopes the goals will help students change their attendance and behavioral habits.

Rewards:

- Early release on Fridays for perfect attendance for the week

Academic



Goals:

Dropout recovery program counselors and teachers at **District B** and **District C** empower students to set their own academic goals. At District C, the Principal and academic counselors work with students to establish realistic goals. Teachers at District B's alternative education campus evaluate student progress toward goals and set new goals every three weeks. One school day every three weeks, campus administrators announce that it is goal day, and during each period students meet teachers individually to discuss their goals. Teachers encourage students who do not meet their goals to seek necessary support services.

Rewards:

- Certificates for course completions
- Recognition for course completion during schools' weekly assembly

To Encourage At-Risk Students to Graduate, Provide Opportunities to Learn about Post-Graduate Pathways

At **District A**, one full-time college and career readiness counselor serves dropout recovery program students every Thursday and Friday.

The Principal of the dropout recovery program at **District B** organizes a program that teaches students about four post-graduate pathways: military, vocational, career, and college. The program includes student trips to job sites and colleges, guest speakers on campus, and a conference in late spring. The conference uses break-out groups, job fairs, and conversations with professionals and college students to expose dropout recovery program students to the four post-graduate pathways.

To supplement the program, the dropout recovery program at District B partners with a local university to bring college students to campus to serve as mentors to students with senior status. The mentors work individually with students. Specifically, the mentors help students to complete college and financial aid applications and write scholarship essays, and tutor students who request assistance with coursework.

To Ensure Programs Prepare Students for College and Careers, Consider Requiring Post-Graduation Plans

At **District B** and **District C**, dropout recovery programs expose students to college and career opportunities through college and career counselors and the program highlighted above. Contacts report that the principals consider students who determine post-graduate plans (e.g., receive college acceptance, enlist in military branch) to be demonstrations of successful dropout recovery programs. Contacts explain that dropout recovery programs should both accelerate students to graduate and place students onto a path post-graduation. Further, dropout recovery program students at District B must share their post-graduation plans with the program's Principal prior to graduation. The Principal announces each student's plans when they receive their diploma at a graduation ceremony.

Facilitate Student Access to Counseling Services to Address At-Risk Behavior

District A, **District B**, and **District D** employ at least one counselor full-time.

In addition to the one full-time college and career readiness counselor who works part-time at the alternative education campus, District A's dropout recovery program employs one full-time guidance counselor. District B's alternative education campus employs one full-time guidance counselor and three full-time student and family advocates, and District D's alternative education campus employs two full-time guidance counselors.

Alternative education campuses at **District D** and **District E** received external grants to fund behavioral counseling services for dropout recovery program students.

One of District D's dropout recovery program's guidance counselors coordinates with counseling services to bring behavioral counselors to campus. All students meet with behavioral counselors in groups (i.e., 1:15 counselor-student ratio) once per week during the school day. The campus guidance counselor also coordinates individual appointments for students who require additional counseling services during the school day. Further, behavioral counselors travel to the campus that operates the dropout recovery program to meet with students, which mitigates barriers to accessing services (e.g., lack of transportation to counseling center). Together, the weekly group sessions and optional one-on-one meetings ensure that at-risk students receive necessary counseling services through the dropout recovery program.



Consider Offering Supplemental Reading Instruction to Support Students with Low Reading Levels

Contacts at **District C** report that 87 percent of the students whom the district serves are low socio-economic status. Contacts add that most students with low socio-economic status demonstrate low reading levels, which is an indication of a student who is at risk of not graduating. To address this at-risk indicator and move students toward graduation, District C's dropout recovery program provides students with Achieve 3000, a program designed to improve reading competency.

Daily Schedule

Incorporate Support Services into School Day Schedules to Address Student Risk Indicators

Profiled dropout recovery programs use schedules similar to traditional high schools. However, programs at **District C** and **District D** dedicate class time in school day schedules for at-risk students to receive support services.

For example, the school day at District C's dropout recovery program starts at 8:00AM and ends at 3:30PM. The schedule includes eight 45- or 50-minute class periods. Students receive instruction through the reading program Achieve 3000 during one class period each day. Further, students may study for or take an EOC that they failed previously during one class period every day. On Fridays, students with perfect attendance for the week may leave after the seventh class period.

The dropout recovery program at District D uses two different daily schedules regularly. The Monday/Thursday schedule includes three long class periods and one guided study at the end of the school day. The Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday schedule includes three short class periods; one 85-minute time slot for behavioral counseling, career, life, and services counseling, or clubs; and one guided study at the end of the day. The Principal incorporates guided study periods into each school day to provide students with time dedicated to supplemental instruction (e.g., tutoring). However, contacts report that few students attend the optional guided study period due to lack of district-funded transportation after 3:30PM.

School Day Schedules at *District D's* Alternative Education Campus that Operates the Dropout Recovery Program

Monday/Thursday Schedule

- 1:50 – Core I
- :10 – Break
- 1:50 – Core II
- :40 – Lunch
- :05 – Break
- 1:45 – Core III
- 1:00 – Guided Study

Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday Schedule

- 1:25 – Core I
- :10 – Break
- 1:25 – Core II
- :05 – Break
- :50 – Behavioral, Career, Life, and Services Counseling or Clubs
- :40 – Lunch
- :05 – Break
- 1:45 – Core III

Structure School Days to Accommodate Student Learning Styles and Work Responsibilities

Contacts at **District A** note that the Principal of the dropout recovery program allows students to enroll part-time in the program, because the campus does not offer daycare services.

The California Department of Education requires continuation high school students to spend only 15 hours per week at school.¹ The Director of Alternative Education designed **District E's** continuation high school schedules to ensure students receive 15 hours of classroom instruction across Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday every week, which the California Department of Education recognizes as one complete week of high school education. This weekly schedule allows District E's continuation high schools to offer students experiential learning opportunities each Wednesday. Specifically, continuation high school students meet with their advisor and attend elective classes every Wednesday morning, and participate in their work-based learning opportunity each Wednesday afternoon. Contacts explain that experiential learning engages at-risk students better than traditional classroom instructional methods.

At **District B**, the alternative education campus allows dropout recovery program students to choose between two times to begin their school day: 8:10AM and 10:10AM. Contacts report that the Principal of the dropout recovery program provides students with the option to start their school day late in the morning to accommodate student work schedules. Contacts note that students who work evening shifts find the start time in the late morning helpful, because they use the additional time in the morning before school to sleep.

Additionally, District B's dropout recovery program's schedule includes a 25-minute period called Explore. During the period, all dropout recovery program administrators, staff, and students who are on campus gather for an assembly. The Principal directs the meeting, and determines whether to use the time to discuss topics pertinent to alternative education students (e.g., post-graduate pathways, substance abuse counseling), educate students about current events through news channels, host guest speakers to inform students about post-graduate pathways, or allow students to pursue supplemental counseling and instruction. Contacts report that the dropout recovery program administrators implemented the Explore period to provide students who begin their school day at 8:10AM with a break from individual work and classroom instruction, and students who start at 10:10AM with a transition into

¹ "Continuation Education," California Department of Education, accessed August 7, 2018, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eq/ce/>.

classes. Contacts explain that at-risk students typically struggle to maintain focus for extended periods of time.

District B's Dropout Recovery Program's Daily Schedules

Contacts at **District B** note that dropout recovery program's schedule does not include passing periods because many disciplinary violations occur during those periods at traditional high schools in the district.

Master Schedule

- 7:45 – Building Open
- 7:45-8:05 – Breakfast
- 8:10-9:10 – First period
- 9:10-10:10 – Second Period
- 10:10-10:35 – Explore Period
- 10:35-11:35 – Third Period
- 10:35-12:35 – Fourth Period
- 12:35-1:15 – Lunch
- 1:15-2:15 – Fifth Period
- 2:15-3:15 – Sixth Period

Early Morning Start Time Schedule

- 7:45 – Building Open
- 7:45-8:05 – Breakfast
- 8:10-9:10 – First period
- 9:10-10:10 – Second Period
- 10:10-10:35 – Explore Period
- 10:35-11:35 – Third Period
- 10:35-12:35 – Fourth Period
- 12:35-1:15 – Lunch
- 1:15-2:15 – Fifth Period
- 2:15-3:15 – Sixth Period

Late Morning Start Time Schedule

- 10:10-10:35 – Explore Period
- 10:35-11:35 – First Period
- 10:35-12:35 – Second Period
- 12:35-1:15 – Lunch
- 1:15-2:15 – Third Period
- 2:15-3:15 – Fourth Period

3) Logistics

Facilities, Teachers, and Capacities

Consider Co-Locating Dropout Recovery and Disciplinary Programs on One Campus to Reduce Costs through Shared Staff and Services

District administrators at **District B** and **District C** house dropout recovery programs and district alternative education programs (DAEPs) in one facility. The TEA requires every public school district in the state to operate a DAEP, a program to place and serve students with severe and/or persistent behavioral violations (e.g., fighting on campus, truancy). At District B and District C, one campus principal oversees both the dropout recovery program and the DAEP. These programs do not share additional administrative or educational staff, with the exception of counselors that serve campuses throughout the districts (e.g., student and family advocates). However, contacts at District C report that next year dropout recovery program teachers may supervise DAEP students occasionally to support the program's one teacher.

Profiled School Districts Set Maximum Teacher-Student Ratios to Determine Dropout Recovery Program Capacities

At **District A** and **District C**, dropout recovery program principals establish program capacity. Contacts report that principals set maximum teacher-student ratios based on historical numbers of dropout recovery program teachers and perceived student need for individualized instruction. Principals then determine an approximate program capacity based on the maximum teacher-student ratio.

Similar to District A and District C, the Principal of **District D's** dropout recovery program determines program capacity based on maximum teacher-student ratio. However, contacts at District D note that Oklahoma state law establishes the maximum teacher-student ratio on alternative education campuses at 1:15.

To allocate resources for the year, **District E** administrators measure the number of students on each of the district's campuses on the 20th day of the school year. Yet, high school students typically receive their first grades after the 20th day of the school year. Consequently, counselors refer students who exhibit academic at-risk indications during the first marking period to dropout recovery programs after the district allocated resources for the year based on campus enrollments. Thus, contacts report that District E's alternative education campuses do not receive district funding in proportion with the number of students they serve each year.

Last year, District E's Director of Alternative Education reassigned some alternative education teachers to different alternative education campuses after the 20th day of the school year to move programs toward a 1:20 teacher-student ratio. Contacts suggest that the Director reassigned teachers to distribute district alternative education resources more proportionately among alternative education campuses.

Maximum Teacher-Student Ratio and Approximate Dropout Recovery Program Capacity at Profiled School Districts

District	Number of Teachers	Max. Teacher-Student Ratio	Approximate Capacity
District A ²	4	1:10	40
District B	5	1:12	60
District C	4	1:12-1:13	45-50
District D	10	1:15	150
District E	Varies across campuses	1:20	Varies across campuses

Consider Paying Teachers Stipends to Instruct Peers on Topics Specific to At-Risk Student Instruction

All profiled school districts provide dropout recovery program teachers with professional development opportunities specific to at-risk student instruction. Dropout recovery program teachers at **District A**, **District C**, and **District D** may also attend general district-wide professional development sessions.

District E pays alternative education teachers stipends to teach trainings specific to at-risk student instruction to peer alternative education staff. To standardize the peer training program, the Director of Alternative Education coordinated with alternative education campus principals to set one stipend amount, establish roles and responsibilities, and provide coaching for all teachers who deliver trainings. The teacher leaders instruct peers during the alternative education staff's weekly professional development meeting, which occurs every Wednesday afternoon. In addition to providing alternative education teachers across the district with professional development programs, contacts report that the teacher leaders program recognizes and supports teacher leaders, which builds an alternative education leadership talent pipeline.

Further, contacts suggest that the teacher leaders program reduces the amount the district spends on professional development for alternative education teachers. Specifically, contacts estimate that the salary of one high school instructional teacher is \$115,000, whereas the alternative education campuses in the district spend \$10,000-15,000 on stipends for teacher leaders each year.

Similar to at District E, one of District A's dropout recovery program teachers receives a stipend to serve as the technology liaison for the alternative education campus. The technology liaison holds one one-hour training per month on a different technological program used in the district (e.g., Google Drive, Istation) for program teachers.

² The data for District A reflects only the districts' dropout recovery program for eighth and ninth grade students.

Example Professional Development Topics for Dropout Recovery Program Teachers



Blended Instruction

Some months, the technology liaison at **District A** holds one hour trainings on Edgenuity, a technology platform for online instruction. Further, one alternative education teacher at **District E** offers trainings on blended instruction during some of the district's professional development sessions for alternative education staff.



Classroom Management

Administrators at **District A's** campus that operates the dropout recovery program contracted with Safe & Civil Schools to bring classroom behavior management instruction to dropout recovery program teachers during the summer. Contacts add that teachers may also attend one of the Safe & Civil Schools programs offered in Texas during the school year.



Mental Health First Aid

Each staff member at **District B's** alternative education campus that operates both the dropout recovery program and the DAEP receives youth mental health first aid instruction.

Admissions

For more information on at-risk criteria for Texas students, see the TEA's webpage [At-Risk Indicator Code](#).

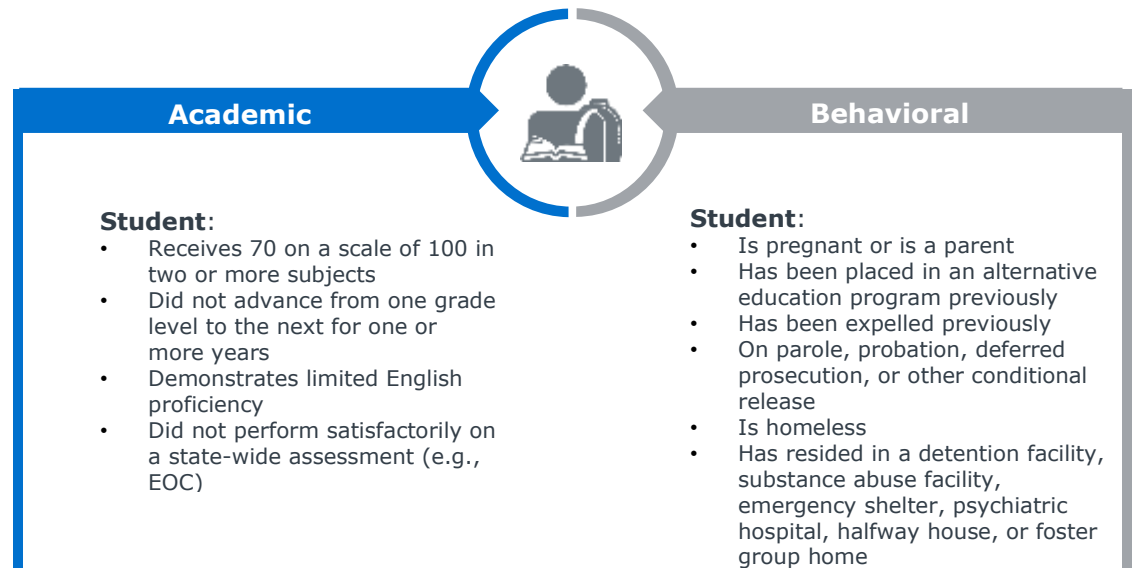
Encourage Counselors at Traditional High Schools to Refer At-Risk Students to Dropout Recovery Programs

At all profiled school districts, students must apply for admission into dropout recovery programs. Administrators at profiled dropout recovery programs at Texas school districts (i.e., **District A**, **District B**, and **District C**) only admit students to the program who meet at least one of the TEA's criteria for at-risk students. Contacts at District A note that many applicants demonstrate both academic and behavioral at-risk indications. Specifically, contacts at District C add that dropout recovery program administrators typically admit students who are between one to two grade levels behind academically, pregnant students, and students with children.

To decrease dropout rates and improve graduation rates, guidance counselors at all profiled school districts' traditional high schools refer students with at-risk indications to dropout recovery programs. At **District D**, guidance counselors at the district's three traditional high schools act as extensions of the district's dropout recovery program. Counselors communicate with the dropout recovery program administrators frequently about potential referrals to the program. Because counselors refer only at-risk students to the program, the program admits every student who submits an application.

Further, contacts at District C note that its dropout recovery program does not admit matriculating high school students directly into the program due to its limited capacity. Rather, all middle school graduates and high school students new to the district enroll in the district's traditional high school first. Contacts add that counselors at the traditional high school refer most applicants to the program.

Example At-Risk Indicators



Design Brochures to Advertise Alternative Education Programs

No profiled school district offers incentives (e.g., free and reduced-price meals) to students who enroll in dropout recovery programs.

District E allows matriculating high school students to apply for admission to alternative education campuses with dropout recovery programs. To increase awareness of the district’s alternative education campuses with dropout recovery programs, the Director of Alternative Education at District E collaborated with district and school administrators to create brochures for each of the alternative education campuses. Contacts attribute an increase in the number of applications for admission to district advertising initiatives.

Example Content for Alternative Education Campus Brochures



For more information on Index 4, see the TEA's webpage [Performance Reporting Resources](#).

Contacts at **District C** report that the TEA uses Index 4 of the Performance Index Indicators to evaluate alternative education campuses across Texas. Index 4 comprises two components that measure post-secondary readiness: performance on EOCs and annual graduation/dropout rate.

Similar to the TEA, the Director of Alternative Education at **District E** uses graduation and dropout rates to evaluate the district's alternative education campuses. However, the district collects only the four-year cohort graduation rate, which does not capture dropout recovery program performance, because most students in the program require more than four years to receive their diploma. Thus, contacts at District E suggest that the Director of Alternative Education use the one-year graduation rate (i.e., do students with enough credits to be classified as seniors receive a diploma within one year) or five-year cohort graduation rate to assess dropout recovery program performance.

The Director of Alternative Education measures two additional metrics to evaluate program performance: average dropout rate across district high schools' campuses and student attendance at alternative education campuses with dropout recovery programs. Contacts explain that successful dropout recovery programs reduce district dropout rates because they enroll and graduate at-risk students who would have dropped out of high school otherwise, and student attendance correlates with graduation.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What programs do contact school districts offer at alternative education campuses?
 - How do districts serve nontraditional populations through programs at alternative education campuses?
- What methods do contact school districts employ to accelerate students who attend alternative education campuses?
- How do contact school districts staff alternative education campuses?
 - What professional development opportunities do districts provide to staff at alternative education campuses?
- What support services do contact school districts provide to students at alternative education campuses?
 - Specifically, what counseling services do districts offer at alternative education campuses?
 - How do districts fund support services at alternative education campuses?
- What do contact school districts require for acceptance into programs at alternative education campuses?
- What is the typical schedule for contact alternative education campuses?
 - At what times do contact school districts offer programs?
- How do contact school districts set capacities for programs at alternative education campuses?
- How do contact school districts advertise programs at alternative education campuses to prospective students and their parents?
 - How, if at all, do districts incentivize prospective students to enroll in programs at alternative education campuses?
- How do contact school districts assess programs at alternative education campuses?
 - Which programs, if any, improve student graduation rates?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- Profiled school districts' websites
- California Department of Education. "Continuation Education." Accessed August 7, 2018. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/eo/ce/>.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed directors of alternative education and principals of alternative education campuses with dropout recovery programs.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

District	Location	Approximate Size (Enrollment/Schools)
District A	Texas	17,000 / 30
District B	Texas	9,600 / 15
District C	Texas	4,000 / 10
District D	Oklahoma	24,000 / 25
District E	California	49,000 / 125