

Stay in School

By Katie Reed
President, NISD Board of Trustees

One of the most wonderful benefits of attending school at Northside ISD is our commitment to serve all students. However, it's also one of our greatest challenges, because our students have a wide range of social, academic, and financial needs.

It is our mission to make sure all of them get a quality education – and a diploma.

That's not easy, but fortunately at Northside we do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to make sure students stay in school and graduate. We offer a multitude of programs and services to meet students' needs whether they have a disciplinary issue, trouble passing TAKS, or simply aren't doing well in a traditional classroom setting.

Below is a list of the spectrum of options that are available to students:

- **Alternative schools** – Northside has alternative schools for all grade levels for students who have disciplinary or behavioral issues. Though students are removed from their regular classroom, they can continue to keep up with their required coursework. The intention is for students to attend alternative school on a short-term basis and return to their home campus.
- **AVID** – This program is geared towards academically average students who would be the first in their family to go to college. Students attend AVID classes daily to help establish a college-going culture. AVID teachers provide extra support to students and steer them toward more rigorous courses that will prepare them for college.
- **College and career readiness technicians** – Staff members at every high school assist students with college and scholarship exploration, completing applications, and coordinating visits with experts in higher education to learn more about financial aid, admissions, etc.
- **Connections Program** – Social service support is provided for families who qualify as homeless or who are experiencing extreme financial need. Connections staff, who are part of the Guidance Department, assist families with securing resources for basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and supplies.
- **Early intervention** – Students who are failing a class are pulled from elective courses to focus on homework and academic skills with a teacher/academic coach. If early intervention is unsuccessful, students have course and credit retrieval options available.

- **Excel Academy** – Located at Holmes High School, Excel Academy is geared toward seniors who have 17 or more credits and have passed exit TAKS exams. The school operates from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays. Students are required to be in class at least four hours a day and can earn credits at their own pace.
- **Evening High School** – Located at Holmes High School, students can earn a half a credit at a time to make up failed courses. Evening High School runs five sessions or semesters per year.
- **Gateway to College** – This partnership with Alamo Community Colleges allows students who have been identified as at-risk for dropping out to co-enroll in both high school and college. Students are able to earn college credit while they finish high school.
- **Graduation coaches** – In addition to an extensive counseling program, high schools also have graduation coaches who focus on helping ninth graders make the transition to high school and 12th graders to graduate.
- **Holmgreen Center** – This school provides programs for students who have severe behavioral and/or emotional disabilities. The school provides positive behavioral supports in an educational setting. The goal is to offer interventions and have the student return to the home campus if appropriate.
- **Leaver clerks** – Texas school law requires students to be in attendance 90 percent of the time to receive credit for a course. Every high school has a leaver clerk to keep track of students who don't show up to school. Administrators are alerted if a student has unexcused absences so that every effort can be made to contact the student and his or her parents.
- **School Age Parenting Program (SAPP)** – This dropout and recovery and retention program provides numerous support services for teen parents so that they can stay in school and graduate. Social workers work with students to make sure daycare services are provided.
- **Small group counseling** – This service is provided for students with specific concerns with a parent/guardian's written consent. It is provided by school counselors to specifically target those social or situational variables that pose an obstacle to school success.
- **Special education programs** – Students who are eligible for special education services qualify for a variety of different options, including a co-op work program that allows students to earn high school credits through real-life work experience.

- **TAKS Blitzes** – Sessions during and after school and over the summer provide concentrated help in specific subject areas for students who are struggling to pass the TAKS tests.
- **Winter and summer graduation ceremonies** – In addition to the traditional spring graduations, Northside also holds graduation ceremonies in the winter and summer to serve as a motivator for students who are unable to finish high school in four years, either because they do not have enough credits or have not passed the exit TAKS tests. The District can tailor a program to meet these students' needs.

As you can see, Northside is very committed to removing as many barriers as possible to keep students in school. We will continue to look at other programs and services that will support our mission and increase our graduation rate.