

Student input fuels turnaround

By:

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District:

Eminence Independent Schools

Superintendent:

Buddy Berry

Program category:

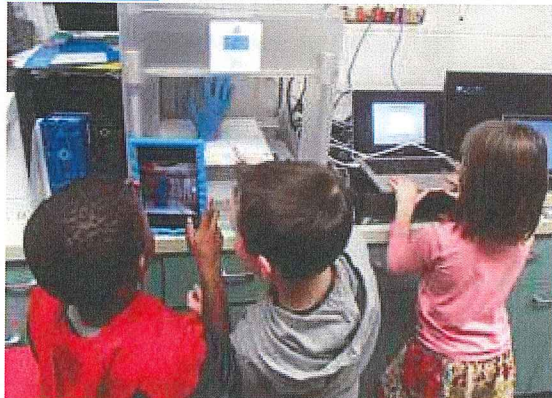
[College/career readiness](#)

State:

Kentucky

Award Cycle:

[March 2015](#)



Just three years ago, Eminence Independent Schools in northern Kentucky was facing a crisis—namely, it was failing.

The K12 district hadn't met AYP in years, enrollment was drastically declining, and only 39 percent of students were graduating at the state-determined benchmarks for college and career readiness.

“We only had two mobile devices in the entire district, and learning was completely traditional,” Superintendent Buddy Berry says. “We had no AP or honors classes, just a common curriculum for all students.”

Berry realized it was time for a complete redesign. In 2012, the district developed a new system called School on FIRE (Framework of Innovation for Re-inventing Education).

The model was based on student engagement: Berry and other administrators interviewed every student in the district. They asked questions such as, “What is your idea of the perfect school?” and “What are things you like and don't like about your school?”

The common themes that emerged were that instruction needed to be personalized and authentic, and that more technology and higher-level courses were necessary to prepare for life after graduation.

Adding programs

The district used Title I funds to implement a 1-to-1 laptop program. They also developed an early college program with nearby Bellarmine University, which allows students to earn up to an associate's degree by high school graduation.

Eminence also created the state's first Wi-Fi-enabled bus to give students access to online curriculum while traveling to the university to take college-level courses.

In the high school that formerly had no AP or honors classes, the average senior will graduate this year having taken at least one semester of college-level courses. None of the students who participated in the early college program have dropped out of high school or college.

In 2014, Eminence became the first district in the state to reach 100 percent on the benchmark for college and career readiness—a significant increase from 39 percent two years prior. The district also went from not meeting AYP to being in the top 5 percent of high schools in the state. Enrollment has grown by 40 percent in the past three years, for a total of 850 students this school year.

Along with the Common Core, the district created its own set of standards—called “Exemplars of Eminence Excellence”—that students must achieve before moving up a grade level. Under these standards, every student will graduate having mastered hundreds of Web 2.0 tools such as Google Apps and auto CAD design.

They also will have gained extensive training in coding, philanthropy and project-based learning. For example, to pass kindergarten, students must learn basic skills for coding, 3-D printing, and videoconferencing.

Where a traditional kindergarten class might have a reading station, an Eminence class has students videoconference their reading station to another classroom. Students in kindergarten, grade 5, grade 8 and grade 12 are also required to defend their learning in front of a panel of teachers and administrators to move to the next grade.

“We get so caught up in the burden of the Common Core curriculum and making sure we do that, that we lose sight of those critical attributes for next-generation learners,” Berry says. “We’ve been purposeful to give students both.”

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