Innovation in Action at
Irene L Chavez Excel Academy
Northside ISD, San Antonio, TX

Innovation drives success with 90% graduation of at-risk students

THE CHALLENGE:
meet at-risk kids where they are
The Northside Independent School District wanted to reach kids who weren't making it to school. What kept them away? Jobs, teenage pregnancy, living independently ... and feeling like outcasts.

THE SOLUTION:
innovate with a clear mission
• Work to remove all the obstacles facing at-risk students
• Create a flexible learning environment that reflects students’ realities
• Make learning accessible even to those most at-risk
• Provide all the support each student needs
• Carefully plan for graduation and college and career success

Irene L. Chavez Excel Academy uses innovative learning environments to support at-risk students age 17-21, and overcome traditional limitations like space and time.
innovative practices that work at the Academy

STRONG COMMUNITY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

• **Shared vision**: School leaders and the community rallied around a shared vision and goals
• **“Stay in School”**: Together, they built a successful, creative “Stay in School” public service campaign, won a three-year Texas Education Agency grant for their pilot program, and become a permanent part of the district

FLEXIBLE PACE AND SCHEDULES

• **School never closes**: The building’s open Monday–Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., but students can work online 24x7.
• **In-person contact**: 17-year-olds must attend on-site at least **five** consecutive hours each school day (18+-year-olds: at least **four** straight hours daily).
• **Focused and on task**: Students focus on just two courses at a time, with full credit courses requiring just four weeks to complete.

HIGHLY-QUALIFIED, CROSS-CERTIFIED TEACHERS

• **Six exceptional teachers** lead instruction in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health, Art, and Spanish.

CLEAR PLANNING FOR GRADUATION AND BEYOND

• **Plan to graduate**: Students meet with the whole team upfront to map courses and plan graduation dates.
• **Prepare for what’s next**: Guest speakers, workshops, training, and activities prepare students for the rest of their lives.

SUPPORT, FOREVER!

• **Clear away obstacles**: Whether students need food bank access or first-in-the-family college guidance, the school is there for them.
• **There for life**: As Principal Darren Calvert says, “When students graduate, they’re fully aware we will always help them. When you get us, you get us for life.”

Why it works

Students can come to school whenever they get here. Whatever challenge they face, they can work school around that. There’s no fluff: it is straight instruction. Kids are getting exactly what they need.

Darren Calvert,
Principal, Irene L. Chavez Excel Academy

Take the lead

and learn about the innovation online and blended learning solutions that empower the Academy’s students.
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