



## Raising Blended Learners<sup>®</sup> Year 2 Evaluation Report

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## About FSG

FSG is a mission-driven consulting firm supporting leaders in creating large-scale, lasting social change. Through strategy, evaluation, and research we help many types of actors—individually and collectively—make progress against the world’s toughest problems. Learn more about FSG at [www.fsg.org](http://www.fsg.org)

All statements and conclusions, unless specifically attributed to another source, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the other organizations or references noted in the report.

## Acknowledgements

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## FUNDER LETTER

The Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation is pleased to share the Raising Blended Learners Year 2 Implementation Report. During the second year of the three year initiative, Raising Blended Learners demonstration sites began the process of defining the outcomes and indicators aligned to their success as they focused on sustaining and scaling what was working well in their blended learning programs.

And as demonstrated by their plans to scale, Raising Blended Learners sites are finding considerable success! By the end of Raising Blended Learners in June 2019, the Raising Blended Learners initiative is conservatively projected to reach more than **600 teachers across 50 schools** — directly impacting **more than 35,000 students**. In addition to scale, analyses of Raising Blended Learners impact have shown significant improvement across nearly all schools and districts and in both academic and non-academic areas. Some highlights from these results include the following:

- In the 2017–18 school year, **98 percent of all RBL schools met state academic standards**.
- **More than half of all RBL campuses received at least one academic distinction**, with some campuses achieving as many as six distinctions.
- Students in RBL schools are **more likely to be collaborative**, to **seek help if they are struggling**, and to have **better relationships with their teachers**.
- **76 percent of RBL teachers** report that they **enjoy their jobs more** since incorporating personalized blended learning into their classrooms, and **79 percent of school and district leaders enjoy their work more** since implementing personalized blended learning in their schools or districts.

Innovation is hard work, though. For every positive outcome to celebrate, there have been equal amounts of challenges to overcome. The Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation is proud to stand alongside districts through their relentless pursuit of student-centered blended learning. Just as we did last year, we applaud the demonstration sites for their transparency in sharing their blended learning journey. These districts are on the forefront of innovation in Texas, taking a leap into the unknown, and allowing us to learn alongside them, for the betterment of all Texas students.



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## INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation launched a three-year statewide blended learning initiative – Raising Blended Learners (RBL) – with the vision of “showcasing strategies for using blended learning to personalize instruction, thereby improving student achievement, particularly among schools and districts with persistent achievement gaps.” Through a rigorous selection process, the Foundation identified twenty districts to receive different degrees of support. Fifteen districts would participate in a “Pilot Network,” receiving technical assistance but no grant funding, and five districts were chosen as “Demonstration Sites,” receiving intensive technical assistance in addition to a \$500,000 grant. The five demonstration sites – Birdville ISD, Cisco ISD, KIPP Texas-Houston, Pasadena ISD, and Point Isabel ISD – represent the range of public school districts in Texas: large and small, rural and urban, district and charter.



In designing Raising Blended Learners, the Foundation and its partners recognized that improving and expanding blended learning across Texas would require a robust commitment to learning and continuous improvement. The Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation partnered with FSG to serve as the evaluation and learning partner for this initiative.

Raising Blended Learners' and FSG's evaluation and learning efforts have had a unique focus in each year of the initiative. In 2015-2016, FSG enabled learning from the RBL planning year by documenting the rigorous process through which sites applied and were selected to participate in the initiative, defined unique "problem statements" to drive their efforts, and began designing their implementation approach. The planning year report can be found here [link]. In 2016-2017, FSG documented sites' experiences with the first year of Raising Blended Learners implementation, as they further elaborated their implementation design, started implementing in a selection of classrooms and in school and district systems, observed early successes, and began confronting initial challenges. FSG's report on Year 1 of implementation can be [found here](#).

In 2017-2018 (Year 2 of implementation), the emphasis of FSG's work shifted toward building the demonstration sites' capacity to define, communicate, and measure their own progress by facilitating a structured process for developing "outcomes frameworks" that identify key outcomes and indicators for their work over time. As FSG worked with the demonstration sites over the course of the year, we also had the opportunity to conduct interviews and focus groups to hear from sites about their implementation progress in Year 2. (Note: FSG's work this year, and the resulting reflections contained in this piece, is focused on the five demonstration sites.)

Although implementation looks different in each site, for all five demonstration sites, Year 2 (2017-2018) represented three main evolutions on Year 1's efforts:

- A deepening of students', teachers', and leaders' understanding and capacity for quality implementation (building on lessons learned from Year 1);
- An expansion of implementation into significantly more classrooms, schools, and levels of schooling, in ways that were both planned and unpredictable; and
- A greater degree of focus on aligning and integrating blended learning with existing systems, structures, policies, and decision-making mechanisms to support sustainability and even greater scale. (A deepening focus on sustainability and scale has been a core aspect of the RBL strategy from its inception, and as the pilot matured, stakeholders began implementing these plans.)

However, even as sites' had some common experiences in Year 2, they also continued to follow unique paths. To contribute to continued dialogue and learning among those engaged in the personalized blended learning movement, this piece provides brief updates on each sites' work in Year 2. Although the Year 2 updates rely on less extensive data collection than the Year 1 evaluation report, they are meant to provide an instructive snapshot of how the sites have evolved their understandings of and approaches for successful blended learning implementation. In addition to building on Year 1 observations, these Year 2 updates are also intended to act as a lead in to a more comprehensive evaluation at the end of Year 3 (the final RBL grant year).

As FSG spoke with teachers, campus leaders, and district leadership at each site, we noted that the major evolutions in their understanding, strategic focus, and activities were captured in a few key themes, and that these themes were often relevant at multiple “levels” of their district system – observed in students, reflected in teachers’ mindsets and practices, and serving as the focus of efforts to shift school and district structures, systems, and culture. Thus, this year’s updates are structured according to three themes per site, with each theme explored at relevant levels of the system.

Due to the sites’ progress in refining and expanding implementation, the timing was also right to begin to more clearly define success and identify methods of tracking progress. During Year 2, the emphasis of FSG’s work shifted toward building the demonstration sites’ capacity to define, communicate, and measure their own progress by facilitating a structured process for developing “outcomes frameworks” that identify key outcomes and indicators for their work over time, reflect each site’s unique approaches to implementing personalized learning, and are intended to guide measurement, learning, strategy refinement, and communication activities going forward.

### Intended contribution to the field

Raising Blended Learners is unfolding in the context of a personalized blended learning movement that is grappling with questions about defining progress, developing measures of success, and communicating the aims and results of this work to an expanding pool of educators and key decision-makers.

Pioneering school districts and thought leaders have published a number of valuable pieces about personalized blended learning measurement in recent years. Collectively, these have helped make the case for the following types of systemic shifts (not exhaustive):

- *Expand our vision of student success* from a narrow measurement of academic achievement to one that includes academic growth, a broader set of academic standards (e.g., cognitive skill development), and a range of social emotional skills and life outcomes
- *Shift schools* towards having a data culture, in which data is collected and analyzed in real time to identify gaps and inform instructional improvement, and in which all stakeholders – students, teachers, school leaders, support staff, and parents – have more facility with data
- *Evolve how progress is reported to different audiences* – both within districts and in the context of state accountability – so that the data used to assess school and district performance actually reflects our broader aspirations for success, and leads to improvement over time

These shifts are in varying states of being realized, but together they form a foundation that we hope to build on by sharing the efforts of the five Raising Blended Learners demonstration sites. In the spirit of learning together as a field – as has been Raise Your Hand Texas’s commitment from the outset of RBL – we are presenting work that is still in progress. The five sites have taken important steps down the path of redefining outcomes measurement for their efforts, but there are still areas to be defined. Additionally, sites have discovered that their understanding of progress, the key ingredients of change, and even the ultimate goals of their efforts has become richer, more expansive, and clearer over the course of doing this work. Thus, we are reflecting their thinking at a particular point in time, and can expect it to evolve as they continue implementation.

We hope to contribute to the growing collective knowledge around blended, personalized, and student-centered learning by sharing the demonstration sites' experiences with developing their outcomes frameworks and the unique ways each site used the process and product to advance their work moving into the 2018-2019 school year (Year 3 of implementation and the final grant year for RBL).





## What Is an Outcomes Framework, and Why Does It Matter?

What we choose to measure is ultimately an expression of what we value. The time, resources, and attention spent on developing our progress and impact measures, collecting data, and discussing results fundamentally influences our understanding of what success looks like, how we communicate our work to others, and how we focus our future efforts.

Personalized blended learning shifts educators' focus toward valuing an expanded set of attributes in their students – such as agency, engagement, self-direction, and sense of belonging. At the same time, change needs to happen at multiple levels of a system – student, teacher, school leader, district, and family and community. Figuring out how to capture expanded definitions of success, as well as how change happens at different levels of a system over time, is a highly complex endeavor. An “outcomes framework,” a relatively common tool in the evaluation field, can help manage this challenge, and by doing so capture the things we most value in the context of personalized blended learning.

### What is an outcomes framework?

An outcomes framework charts the short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes sites hope to see in order to reach an ultimate vision for positive change in their students and schools.

	Vision					
	Key Elements of the Model (i.e., Design Pillars)					
	Outcomes	Short-Term (in 1-3 years)		Medium-Term (in 3-5 years)		Long-Term (in 5+ years)
	Levels of the System	Outcomes	Indicators	Outcomes	Indicators	Outcomes Indicators
	<b>Students</b> (e.g., Achievement, Mindsets, and Behaviors)					
	<b>Teachers and Classrooms</b> (e.g., Teacher Mindsets, Class Practices)					
	<b>Schools</b> (e.g., Leader Mindsets and Behaviors, School Culture, Structures, Policies, and Practices)					
	<b>District</b> (e.g., Leader Mindsets and Behaviors, District Systems)					
	<b>Parents and Community</b>					

Each component of the framework plays an important role in telling the story of the sites' blended learning work and definitions of success.

## **Vision**

- The sites' vision statements articulate the ultimate goals of blended learning implementation, in terms of the capacities students will possess, what they will accomplish, and/or how they will relate to their communities and the broader world, as a result of their experience with blended learning.
- The sites had previously defined problem statements during their planning year, identifying key academic and/or non-academic gaps to address through their work. The problem statements facilitated strong engagement by centering RBL on areas where there was a sense of urgency for change, and focused pilot design efforts on solving the highest priority issues in the district.
- The vision statements complement the problem statements by inviting sites to think multi-dimensionally about the changes they hope to see in students over the span of many years. In several sites, defining the vision led to stronger connections between RBL and longer-range aspirations for student success in college, career, and community, and stronger integration with district-wide student vision statements.

## **Key Elements of the Model (i.e., Design Pillars)**

- The "key elements of the model" describe the major strategies and activities sites are undertaking to implement blended learning.
- To date, sites have primarily defined these key elements as their design pillars (classroom-level anchors for redesigning students' instructional experiences). In the future, as sites' deepen district-wide efforts to scale and sustain blended learning, they might add school-level or district-level strategies and activities they see as also essential to their work. In the initial drafts, the sites focused on the design pillars only.

## **Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Outcomes**

- One of the key contributions of the outcomes framework is the invitation to articulate different expectations for progress over time. The framework includes space to define short-term outcomes (in 1-3 years of implementation), medium-term outcomes (those in 3-5 years), and long-term outcomes (in 5+ years).
- Many of the sites have come to recognize that some of the outcomes they had hoped to see early on will take time and effort to materialize. The outcomes framework is structured to reflect sites' current understandings and evolve with sites' experiences. Thus, we saw that for many sites, the short-term outcomes were the most fully articulated. The medium- and long-term outcomes tended to be more general – it will take time for the sites to gain a more detailed understanding of the key ingredients of longer-term success.

## Multiple “Levels” of the District System

- The field’s desired outcomes for students have been a frequent focus of conversation in RBL and in the personalized learning field. While this is central, RBL has also emphasized how different pieces of a system need to change and work together in support of classroom- and student-level shifts.
- To accompany this emphasis, the outcomes framework process encouraged districts to think about the changes needed at all “levels” of their district system to facilitate the changes they hope to see in students, including changes in teacher mindsets and behaviors, classroom practices, school leadership, school structures and policies, district structures and policies, and in the participation and support of parents and communities.

### **Distinction Between Outcomes and Indicators**

- Within the framework, we also made a distinction between outcomes and indicators so sites could clearly define what success looks like for them, while advancing the field’s thinking about the outcomes associated with blended learning.
- We defined outcomes as the changes sites hope to see as a result of their work, while indicators were defined as ways we will know whether change is happening. Making this distinction had two main benefits:
  - It invited sites to articulate aspirations for blended learning including and beyond what traditional measurement systems can currently provide data on, encouraging them to push measurement in new directions to match their innovative work.
  - It encouraged sites to take stock of the measures they were already using and identify additional opportunities for data collection that would be meaningful.
- Tying each indicator to an outcome is intended to provide sites with clarity about the significance of the indicators they use to assess progress, enabling meaning-making and storytelling with data.
- We also sought to broaden the types of data that districts could use to learn from progress. The indicators include everything from quantitative results on assessments, to shifts in student perceptions gleaned from surveys, to qualitative reflections by teachers, to evidence of district-level change observed in guidance, policy, and procedure documents.

## Why does developing an outcomes framework matter in the context of Raising Blended Learners' focus on innovation?

Demonstration sites have been deeply immersed in collecting and using data to identify gaps in student learning, inform planning and instruction, communicate about the goals and progress of blended learning, and chart progress, in order to achieve important gains for students. Developing the outcomes frameworks is an opportunity to extend this thinking across the three goals of RBL:

- Improve student achievement through implementing blended learning across diverse demographics and geographies;
- Sustain new learning models by making meaningful change in the systems and processes of the district and in the mindsets of people who implement these processes; and
- Scale effective blended learning practices and processes across school systems in Texas.

This was an important opportunity in the context of the deep innovation work underway in each district. In the planning year and Year 1 of Raising Blended Learners implementation, the sites developed a strategic foundation for their efforts:

- A “problem statement” to focus their efforts on the most important changes they hope to see in their students (in terms of population groups, academic outcomes in particular subjects and grade levels, as well as critical non-academic outcomes);
- A short list of academic and non-academic measures of success to track progress from the outset;
- Design pillars around which to make classroom-level shifts;
- Plans for deepening, sustaining, and scaling their efforts over time (e.g., staff onboarding and development, structures and policies, financial sustainability); and
- Intentions for the leadership and culture shifts that would support this work.

However, districts were also innovating around a number of unknowns:

- What is the full set of changes we hope to see in students?
- What does an effective instructional environment look like, given our unique design pillars?
- What changes on the part of educators are needed to make instructional shifts and advance student outcomes?
- What are the key components of school and district system transformation in our unique context?

Raising Blended Learners leadership and sites understood that this was a process of discovery and that sites would have been hard-pressed to provide answers to the above questions at the

outset of this work. By Year 2, however, sites had gained enough experience with implementation and had been informed by multiple years of data to reflect meaningfully on past progress and provide informed expectations about desired outcomes in the future. The outcomes framework development process was an opportunity to look comprehensively across all of their efforts, define success expansively and with a greater understanding of how definitions of success vary over time, and consider how these definitions should influence implementation.

Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. This process complemented other implementation supports provided by Raising Blended Learners<sup>1</sup> – by providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying meaningful indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve.

## Process for developing outcomes frameworks

Through a series of in-person working sessions and conference calls between February and June 2018, FSG worked with each site to develop their outcomes frameworks. We started this work in February 2018, during a Raise Your Hand Texas-hosted leadership symposium. There, sites were introduced to the conceptual background and key components of the outcomes frameworks, and began developing a framework of their own. A few weeks later, FSG facilitated an on-site working session with each demonstration site, where they revisited and elaborated on early drafts. The sites were invited to shape the frameworks to meet their unique needs, and while FSG provided “starter ideas” gleaned from the initial brainstorm, existing initiative documents, and resources from the field, the content was entirely open-ended. In a series of follow-up phone calls, the sites confirmed the outcomes and indicators identified to date, identified next steps for continuing to build out and operationalize the outcomes framework, and reflected on the strategic value of the outcomes framework process and product for guiding their efforts.

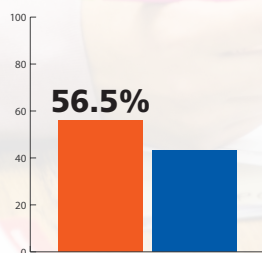
As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF BIRDVILLE



**25,000**

Approximate Total  
Student Enrollment



Economically Disadvantaged  
Students



**8.5%** African American  
**40%** Hispanic  
**42.6%** White

Ethnic Breakdown



**3**

Schools Piloting  
Blended Learning



**15**

Teachers Piloting  
Blended Learning



**1,900**

Approximate Number of Students  
in Blended Classrooms



# BIRDVILLE ISD

## Raising Blended Learners, FSG Year 2 Site Report

### Introduction

Located northeast of Fort Worth in Tarrant County, Birdville Independent School District serves roughly 25,000 students. In 2015, as members of the district leadership team recognized literacy challenges across schools, they sought the RBL grant to redesign learning in the district while addressing a key academic priority. The district's ensuing pilot is designed to facilitate a shift from "one-size-fits-all" instruction toward student-centered, personalized learning. In addition to targeting English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) outcomes, the program is designed to increase student ownership of learning.

To address these challenges and foster student success, Birdville's pilot has focused on ninth-grade ELAR classrooms across the district's three traditional high schools. Reading proficiency is the primary focus of the personalized learning efforts underway in these settings. In the initiative's second year, Birdville expanded blended learning to tenth-grade classrooms at two of the traditional high schools and focused on postsecondary readiness at the district's alternative high school, where students in high-risk situations can obtain the credits they need to graduate using accelerated quarter terms.

The district's blended learning strategy is guided by the Birdville *Portrait of a Graduate*, a vision for student characteristics that will foster success in college and the workplace. With the goal of academic and career excellence, the *Portrait of a Graduate* presents a commitment to providing learning environments that produce "empowered learners, responsible citizens, global competitors, and innovative entrepreneurs." These principles are integrated into the initiative's key design pillars, which have set the foundation for innovative and responsive classrooms that provide personalized learning pathways for Birdville students.▶

Read more about Birdville's blended learning model and student experience design pillars [here](#).

Read more about Birdville's Year 1 implementation journey [here](#).

© [https://youtu.be/oKJ\\_t1bUGW0](https://youtu.be/oKJ_t1bUGW0)

## Year 2 of Implementation

For Birdville, Year 2 of RBL has been an opportunity to take stock of lessons learned from its relatively large-scale implementation in Year 1 in order to deepen and strengthen implementation in Year 2. As a result, Birdville has shifted the leadership of its RBL pilot from Digital Learning to Curriculum and Instruction to enable stronger integration with central district initiatives, and has begun engaging a broader group of leaders in owning a shared vision of success and a common understanding of high-quality implementation. To enable successful implementation at scale, Birdville is beginning to make a shift from traditional markers of student achievement towards an emphasis on individual growth, mastery, and non-academic successes. Finally, after observing varied implementation success in Year 1, Birdville noted the need to put additional focus on defining and supporting teachers in achieving high-quality practice, even while allowing for individualization and experimentation – it has made progress toward this objective and will continue ramping up these efforts in Year 3.

### Theme 1: Establishing leadership and structures for large-scale transformation

At the district level, in the transition between Year 1 and Year 2, overall leadership of the Birdville RBL pilot shifted to the Curriculum and Instruction department from its previous home in Technology. The Technology department, provided crucial stewardship of the RBL application, planning, and early pilot implementation, and has continued to provide leadership and on-the-ground support for many aspects of implementation in the participating schools and at the district level. However, district leaders knew that it would take the concerted partnership and effort of multiple teams to make significant shifts in practice and integrate the pilot with other district initiatives. In particular, district leaders saw an opportunity for integration of blended learning with the district's literacy initiative (being led by Curriculum and Instruction). Beginning during Year 1 and ramping up in Year 2, district leaders focused on fostering a strong partnerships between Curriculum and Instruction, Digital Learning, and other departments – and stakeholders have been enthusiastic about this work. As a result of efforts to engage multiple departments in this initiative, there has indeed been greater alignment with the literacy initiative, and the move toward a shared leadership has offered an opportunity to refresh the district's vision for blended learning so that it would support the aims of integration and be owned by an even broader group of leaders.

And even as Birdville leaders have seen the need to integrate blended learning with the district's other priorities, they have also seen opportunities to use what's been learned through RBL to strengthen the district's overall strategy for student success. Going forward, one risk that district leaders recognize they will need to navigate carefully is that blended learning might get lost among other initiatives and priorities. One district leader highlighted the current tension that district leaders are grappling with: "Our top priority is literacy. Blended fits underneath that very well ... But with the demands that are put on us for many other things, blended seems to get lost."

District leaders have also been adapting their plans for scale after seeing tremendous success in the alternative high school's first year of full-school implementation and highly variable blended learning implementation within Birdville's three comprehensive high schools (discussed in greater depth in the next section). Birdville leaders have been considering various models for scaling within the traditional high schools and for seeding future innovations. For instance, one district leader raised the idea of a school within a school when looking ahead to transforming

Birdville systems. “I would love to go [to a competency-based system]. If we’re going to do something like that, we’re going to have to start small. A school within a school would be an avenue.”

At the same time, Birdville’s teachers and campus leaders have found ways to apply their lessons learned from the successes and challenges of Year 1 to their school-level implementation in Year 2. One important set of considerations has been how to position teachers and campus leaders to play effective leadership roles in ensuring successful implementation among an expanding group of teachers. The campuses have exhibited varying strength of implementation – in terms of buy-in to the initiative, quality of implementation, and pace of improvement. Several Birdville leaders attributed these differences, in part, to the campus leaders’ different leadership styles. Structures for teacher leadership and collaboration have differed from school to school. Where they have been present, they have facilitated implementation, and where they have not been as established, implementation has been weaker. The three high schools also operate in very different contexts with different levels of urgency to change, which also contributed to variability. These trends began in Year 1 and continued through Year 2.

In Richland High School, which took a methodical approach to implementation from the start, Year 2 meant continuing a steady trajectory of progress while expanding from a focus on ninth-grade ELAR to include tenth-grade ELAR as well. In Haltom High School, leaders and ninth-grade ELAR teachers started with a strong sense of urgency but initially tried to standardize implementation while providing relatively fewer teacher supports. In Year 2, the school slowed down to focus on the fundamentals of providing high-quality, yet individually-customized teacher practice while also expanding to include tenth-grade ELAR. In Birdville High School, teachers and leaders had entered the initiative with a history of success that led to low urgency for change and discomfort with innovation. Birdville High School focused in Year 2 on increasing their “readiness” in preparation for relaunching in Year 3.

In Year 2, Birdville also expanded implementation to its alternative high school, Shannon, after an extensive design process that applied Year 1 experience in a fresh leadership, teacher, and student context. Shannon provided extensive teacher support, in the context of a full-school implementation. As one campus leader described, “[At Shannon] we have daily professional learning communities with every content area. That’s huge. No one else has that. It really changed teachers’ thinking about everything they have to accomplish.” Shannon has been quick to see successes that have brought additional momentum to Birdville’s RBL initiative as a whole, and is providing learning opportunities to campus leaders and teachers in other schools.

Across all implementing schools, RBL leaders have been honing teacher support by applying learnings from Year 1 to Year 2. Some stakeholders noted that the onboarding and technical assistance (TA) provided in Year 1 was great, but was too much to absorb at times. In Year 2, as district leaders have worked directly to support teachers – in partnership with TA providers – they have adjusted to go at a slower pace. In Year 2, a few teachers also began stepping forward to play leadership roles in guiding the shifts in practice of their peers. While this has generally been seen as a positive step, teachers’ effectiveness in this role has varied. Richland High School has established the most structured teacher support system of the traditional high schools, and has a few teachers with a high degree of skill in blended practice. It has seen particular successes with teacher leadership. In Haltom, the other traditional high school implementing in Year 2, some teachers from Year 1 are providing leadership, but are approaching this role with less depth of experience with blended learning, and are thus more challenged in providing effective support to others.

© [https://youtu.be/J\\_XDSvxEVkl](https://youtu.be/J_XDSvxEVkl)

## Theme 2: Shift from traditional markers of achievement towards an emphasis on personalized academic growth and non-academic successes

Birdville teachers and leaders are engaged in a process of redefining student success to emphasize student growth and mastery, as well as note and celebrate non-academic signs of student success.▶

Birdville has been seeing promising non-academic signs of student success that have brought excitement, buy-in, and momentum to their efforts. In addition to monitoring student test scores, adults in the district are noting other types of academic and non-academic growth in students. As one district leader noted, “The big thing was transitioning to allowing more choice for kids.” A school leader also noted promising signs of increased student perseverance alongside indications of academic growth: “Students are rising to the occasion. They say, ‘It’s hard, but my teacher believes in me, and I get support.’ Some students have had Lexile increases of 2-3 levels in one semester.”▶

Several district leaders have expressed a deeper understanding of the importance of valuing student growth rather than focusing solely on meeting benchmarks for achievement. As one district leader described, “We are competitive and want our kids to do well on assessments, but we have changed our focus. [We now say] we want a year’s worth of growth out of every student.” The district has also begun to take proactive steps to equip teachers to understand and support student’s individual growth: “Every teacher, in every content [area], and from K-12, now knows the Lexile levels of their kids.”▶

Some teachers are taking incremental steps toward measuring achievement based on mastery. As one teacher noted, “My biggest takeaway from this year is how I’ve personally had to redefine mastery. What am I looking for at the end of this unit, if it’s not [a] multiple choice [test] – if I’m allowing you to create something?” Some teachers have made intentional shifts away from emphasizing State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) results as a marker of student achievement.▶ As one teacher remarked, “We freaked [the students] out a few weeks ago, when we said, ‘ten days until STAAR.’ We hadn’t talked about it. They are going to be fine. They just didn’t realize they had been [practicing] all year.”

However, teachers are making these shifts within a system that is still oriented toward traditional assessment of student achievement. Changes to school and district systems will be needed going forward for Birdville to be able to make the deep shifts that several interviewees believe are needed. One teacher commented on how she has needed to create ways of working around existing grading policy: “They make goals off of their grades. I try to make sure that grades are based on skill, so I can measure growth. [But sometimes] I’ve said, ‘We are going to grade things together and not put it in the gradebook.’ . . . I still feel tied to the grading system.”

There is hunger to move away from traditional grading and toward a competency-based system, but district leaders see gaps in their capacity to change existing systems quickly and at the scale that would be required in such a large district. As a district leader reflected, “When people bring up standards-based reporting to parents, I get overwhelmed. . . . While I believe in it and would love for that to happen, with the capacity we’re at right now, it’s not going to.”

▶ <https://youtu.be/wFAAGL9zl7c>

▶ <https://youtu.be/jRsejO4RCNg>

▶ <https://youtu.be/TVsapySZVM>

▶ <https://youtu.be/7lnqp5RZuSY>

### Theme 3: Ensuring high quality teacher practice, even while allowing individualization, by clarifying what strong implementation looks like

Over the course of two years, many teachers have gained a deeper understanding of what it takes to provide high-quality blended learning instruction and are engaged in consistently improving their practice. Many teachers have made important practice shifts, particularly around student choice, agency, and use of data. As a district leader commented, “The shift in [teacher] mindset has been great . . . That they can be that coach or facilitator of the learning . . . I don’t think that shift has completely taken place, but they are moving toward that.” Though there is still room for growth, after Year 2, teachers who have been implementing for one or more years have built a foundation of blended practice to build on. <Cliff Moran Voices From Field video>

As teachers have grown more confident, they have also personalized their approaches to greater degrees to better fit their style and students. In particular, Haltom High School teachers have made a major shift in how they view high-quality blended learning implementation. As mentioned earlier, initially, teachers in Haltom took away a message from early RBL onboarding and TA that blended learning was a strict set of activities. As one teacher remarked, “We were told a lot of things that were black and white, but the truth is there is a lot of gray area.” This year, the district gave teachers additional encouragement to individualize their practice, and now, teachers are bringing more flexibility to their instructional approach. As one teacher reflected, “Now we’re a lot more confident, there’s more comfort for each of us individually . . . If it’s [about] personalizing for students, it’s also [about] doing it for teachers.”

While increased individualization has been positive for experimentation and personalization, it has created an imperative at the district to distinguish and promote high-quality blended learning practices. Across schools, some teachers are operating with a shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality blended practice, while others have a variety of ideas of what blended learning looks like. One teacher noted skepticism about whether people share an understanding of quality implementation. He remarked, “Last year, if you asked people ‘what is blended?’ fifteen different answers would come out . . . We’ve had newsletters saying, ‘This teacher is doing blended.’ [I look at what they are doing and say], ‘Yeah, sort of.’”

Seeing the high variation in classroom implementation, in Year 1, district leaders noted a need to devote attention in Year 2 toward defining what high-quality implementation looks like. The enhanced partnership between Curriculum and Instruction, Digital Learning, and other departments is intended to do this by connecting the blended learning pilot to district-wide expectations for excellent teaching. Substantial progress was realized in Year 2, and this will be a continued emphasis in Year 3. To support this shift, the district has multifaceted plans to create stronger guidance about what high-quality implementation looks like, including approaches such as the development of model classrooms, observation rubrics, and other tools.

© <https://youtu.be/ongA1ypUtg4>






## Looking Ahead: Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress

Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. By providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve. As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

The effort in Year 2 to engage a cross-departmental group of leaders in stewarding and contributing to the blended learning initiative created an opportunity to refresh Birdville's vision for blended learning so that it would be more fully integrated with the district's overall strategy and be owned by this broader group of leaders. By the end of Year 2, Birdville also had the opportunity to observe how varied implementation had been from campus to campus, and the striking successes and continued struggles that implementation had yielded so far. This high degree of variation across schools and classrooms created a need, and opportunity, to draw on the experience of all implementing campuses to develop a shared vision of success and a common understanding of what high-quality implementation looks like, and to consolidate ideas about the teacher support structures, changes in school practices and policies, and culture shifts needed to support successful school and district transformation.

Birdville’s RBL leaders had already been building momentum toward the official establishment of a multi-departmental Blended Learning Committee, which they began convening in Spring 2018 to develop a five-year implementation plan for scaling and sustaining blended learning across the district. The outcomes framework development process came at an opportune time to facilitate conversations among district leadership about Birdville’s aspirations for blended learning. Birdville’s RBL leadership team engaged a particularly large group during in-person workshops, including campus leaders from across all four implementing schools, members of the Curriculum and Instruction and Digital Learning departments, the head of Human Resources, and members of the data and assessment team. Birdville also strongly oriented the outcome framework around the district’s overarching vision for student success – thus leveraging the outcomes framework process to support broader alignment with district priorities.

## Summary of Birdville ISD Outcomes Framework

	<b>Vision</b>
Birdville ISD is committed to growing empowered learners who are responsible citizens, global competitors, and innovative entrepreneurs. We advance this vision through personalized blended learning focused on engagement, increased rigor, and a commitment to innovation, in order to transform the educational experiences of students.	
	<b>Design Pillars</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Flexible Instruction</li> <li>✓ Data-Driven Instruction</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student Agency</li> <li>✓ Rigor and Relevance</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Competency-Based Learning</li> </ul>	
	<b>Levels of Change</b>
<b>Students</b> (Portrait of a Graduate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Empowered Learner<sup>2,3,4</sup></li> <li>✓ Responsible Citizen</li> <li>✓ Global Competitor</li> <li>✓ Innovative Entrepreneur</li> </ul>
<b>Teachers and Classrooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Instructional Shifts<sup>5</sup></li> <li>✓ Teacher Mindsets (Portrait of a Teacher)</li> </ul>
<b>Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ School Structures, Policies, and Practices</li> <li>✓ School Leader Mindsets and Behaviors (including Portrait of a Leader)</li> </ul>
<b>District</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ District Structures and Systems</li> <li>✓ District Leader Mindsets and Behaviors</li> <li>✓ Parents and Community</li> </ul>

Birdville crafted six SMART Goals by which to measure their progress. Though the outcomes framework is a more comprehensive articulation of what Birdville hopes to achieve through implementing personalized blended learning, all of the six SMART Goals are reflected within the framework. See footnotes to track where SMART goals are embedded within the framework.

## Observations about Birdville ISD's Outcomes Framework

Ultimately, the outcomes framework is intended to provide common language around aspirations and expectations for blended learning, and to make connections with related aspirations that are the focus of other initiatives. To advance Birdville's aims of integrating blended learning with other district objectives and initiatives, RBL leaders used the process of developing the outcomes framework as a strategic exercise to further define what Birdville's *Portrait of a Graduate* (a district-wide vision for what Birdville students should be able to do and achieve after graduating) looks like in practice, inclusive of blended learning. Though valuable for guiding the district's efforts, the Portrait did not specify the shorter-term student outcomes that would demonstrate that Birdville was on track to reach that vision with its students. RBL leaders used the outcomes framework development process to engage school and district leaders in stating more concretely how they hope students progress toward the *Portrait of a Graduate*, how the instructional practices and teacher mindsets and behaviors emphasized in blended learning are intended to foster students' progression toward the Portrait, and what school and district systems and structures are needed for teachers to effectively shift their classroom practices, mindsets, and behaviors.

The outcomes framework development process provided campus and district leaders an additional opportunity to reaffirm the most relevant existing initiatives with which to integrate blended learning (e.g., the district's literacy initiative), and highlighted high-priority areas of systems changes to focus on (e.g., grading policy and a movement toward competency-based progression, updates to scheduling policies). Thinking through blended learning's place within the broader district had the additional benefit of expanding district and campus leaders' conception of what success looks like for all students in the district, beyond those participating in blended learning.

In addition, the outcomes framework contains a number of other important reflections across each group of stakeholders.

### Students

- By focusing on all dimensions of the *Portrait of a Graduate*, it brings heightened attention to certain non-academic student outcomes that blended learning is well-positioned to promote, but that have not been explicitly focused on (e.g., ability to engage in critical discourse, appreciation of diversity and engagement with different points of view, entrepreneurial skills, and engagement in service to the community)

### Teachers, Leaders, and Schools

- Makes explicit connections between desired teacher mindset and behavior shifts, and the school- and district-level support needed to achieve these outcomes in teachers. In doing so, it raises items to the top of school and district leaders' change agenda, including a) integrating blended learning with the district's Literacy Framework and its accompanying "workshop model" for instruction; b) providing useful models, coaching, and aligned teacher assessment as teachers shift their role in the classroom toward facilitating learning and providing students greater ownership; and c) beginning to shift toward an assessment system based in gauging and supporting mastery

- Highlights a desire to pair the *Portrait of a Graduate* with a similarly detailed articulation of what effective teaching and school leadership look like, and what progressive steps are needed to reach that picture of teacher and leader success; Birdville intends to create an aligned Portrait of a Teacher and Portrait of a Leader to operate alongside the *Portrait of a Graduate*

### District

- Articulates the districts' role in teacher development and support for blended learning, including holding a shared vision of success
- Puts a stake in the ground around moving toward a competency-based system, while setting expectations appropriately that this will take significant time given the extensive work involved to shift such a large system and given other major initiatives already underway

### Parents and Community

- Places a greater emphasis on parent participation in district activities, understanding of blended learning and literacy, and full participation in blended learning at home than had been articulated previously

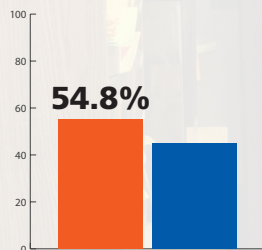


## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CISCO



**900**

Approximate Total  
Student Enrollment



Economically Disadvantaged  
Students



**0.8%** **18.1%** **77%**  
African American Hispanic White

Ethnic Breakdown



**2**

Schools Piloting  
Blended Learning



**4**

Teachers Piloting  
Blended Learning



**300**

Approximate Number of Students  
in Blended Classrooms



# CISCO ISD

## Raising Blended Learners, FSG Year 2 Site Report

### Introduction

Cisco, Texas is a rural community, two hours west of Dallas, with a population under 4,000. Cisco Independent School District serves 872 students, with 55% living with economic disadvantage. In recent years, Cisco has quickly transitioned from limited technology use to adopting blended learning as a core strategy for improving student performance.

While the district has consistently ranked highly in standardized testing, advanced achievement rates have remained stagnant among specific student populations. Through blended learning, Cisco's leaders hope to push their students to achieve at the highest levels possible. They viewed the RBL grant as a structured opportunity to raise the bar for student achievement and operationalize the use of technology in the district. Through engagement with the school board, staff, parents, and other local stakeholders, district leaders sought buy-in for their efforts by highlighting how the grant could promote deeper learning and bolster student achievement in the already-competitive district.▶

As stated in their pilot proposal, Cisco is deploying its Elevate blended learning initiative to "elevate all elementary and middle school students to their own individual high levels of academic achievement in math and science." The district's pilot is based on a set of design pillars that will enable a high quality, student-centered learning experience.

Read more about Cisco's blended learning model and student experience design pillars [here](#).

Read more about Cisco's Year 1 implementation journey [here](#).

### Year 2 of Implementation

Cisco's Year 2 story has been shaped by three interrelated themes: organic spread, expansion of their vision, and a culture of relational trust and strong growth mindset. Cisco ISD made an intentional choice to support an organic expansion of personalized blended learning driven by the interest and readiness level of teachers, in addition to implementing their scale plan. Looking back on Year 2, they reflected on the success of this strategy as well as the challenges of supporting rapid scale. Excitement around early signs of success and the desire to continue expanding and deepening implementation has led to an expansion of Cisco's vision for the success of personalized blended learning. Both rapid expansion of implementation and the broadening of their vision were possible because of strong trust within and between each level of the system, and the way that leaders have fostered a growth mindset and culture of experimentation among teachers, campus leaders, and district leaders.

© <https://youtu.be/ews23YHsoRY>

## Theme 1: Organic Spread

Cisco scaled more quickly than expected in Year 2, driven by a combination of their scale plan and additional teacher readiness and interest. Teachers, campus leaders, and district leaders have all contributed to conditions that supported both planned and organic spread of personalized blended learning in the district.

The leaders of Cisco's RBL initiative reflected that they picked teachers who had an interest and inclination to participate, which resulted in strong buy-in among the first cohort and gave other teachers time to familiarize themselves with personalized blended learning before participating. As one interviewee put it, "We picked the willing [who] also had the ability to try something new." Over the course of Year 1, teachers who were not included in the original cohort had an opportunity to observe what was happening in their peers' classrooms, and their interest grew as they saw the effectiveness of the strategies being used and the impact on students. By Year 2, even more teachers than planned were eager to implement.👉

Thus in Year 2, Cisco not only fulfilled its intention of implementing in fourth- through eighth-grade science, but also added third-grade math and science, third- and fourth-grade English language arts, sixth- and eighth-grade social studies, and all subject areas in fifth grade. Throughout Year 2, those implementing have continued to welcome their peers into their classrooms. The strong personal relationships and informality that exists among Cisco's teachers have created a culture in which teachers feel comfortable entering each other's classrooms and speaking frankly about their experiences and opinions. This culture has facilitated organic spread of personalized blended learning. Even several teachers who expressed skepticism and reluctance about personalized blended learning have demonstrated an interest and willingness to learn about it.👉

Campus leaders are creating structures to support organic spread, such as allotting time for teachers to visit implementing classes. For example, an interviewee shared that "they gave the entire kindergarten and first grade a half day off to walk through all of the classrooms." Additionally, leaders and teachers in the pilot are responding to additional teacher interest by creatively reallocating resources and support to accommodate non-pilot teachers. For example, teachers who had digital devices in their classrooms prior to RBL and then received additional ones – purchased through the grant – have directed previous devices to interested non-pilot teachers. The RBL project manager and school leaders have facilitated this process so that resource constraints do not limit the organic spread of personalized blended learning.

However, despite efforts to support non-pilot teachers, this degree of organic spread has created a need to plan for more intentional professional development for those not in the pilot. Among those who have begun to implement aspects of personalized blended learning on their own, some do not have the depth of understanding of personalized blended learning that would allow them to make intentional decisions about implementation. Their implementation is somewhat superficial, emulating what they are seeing in their peers' classrooms without having an understanding of the rationale behind their practices. RBL leaders are currently considering how to support an expanding circle of teachers as they make independent jumps toward personalized blended learning.

👉 <https://youtu.be/8fiVVUYgwOE>

👉 <https://youtu.be/koQe9vDfn1Y>



## Theme 2: Expansion of Vision

Cisco ISD's original vision for RBL was to use personalized blended learning to develop student agency and increase rigor in order to accelerate achievement among advanced students in math (and in Year 2, science). District leaders and teachers shared that they are seeing exciting signs of student agency in math and science – the two subject areas that are officially in the pilot – and that the science curriculum lends itself particularly well to the shift towards student agency. One district leader said, “When I walk into dynamic science classes, I’m blown away. [It’s] amazing. [There’s a] high level of agency.” When asked to describe how they know that students are moving towards being lifelong learners, teachers reflected on the small but significant shifts they are seeing. For example, “When a student mentors another and they are back on target . . . Or when they say, okay I’m being a butterfly, and they get themselves back on [task].” Having seen these subtle yet meaningful changes in student behavior, school and district leaders were able to conceptualize a broader vision that links student agency and other key mindsets in the short term on the pathway toward lifelong outcomes.

And the impact has not been limited to advanced students. Teachers are recognizing that the personalized learning strategies that they implemented with the original intent of building agency and providing enrichment specifically for advanced students are transforming how they plan for and implement instruction for all students. They are excited about implementing personalized learning to improve instruction across the board. One teacher reflected, “You can prove things you knew as a long time teacher. You knew different modalities were needed, and now you’re getting support [to implement accordingly].” Teachers are already observing positive impacts among all students – “the high ones, the low ones. You’re able to work with them. It helps everyone.” Their increased focus on data has allowed teachers to identify and address gaps in student learning, resulting in significant learning gains. A district leader shared, “I can’t help but grin when I see the power of the gap filling.” Going forward, teachers are interested in doing vertical alignment between grade levels by using data to identify gaps that could be corrected earlier.

The shifts among students and teachers have led to a shared recognition that blended learning is working well for students, which is causing interest in the approach to spread as quickly as it has. One interviewee shared, “It’s been successful . . . everyone recognizes it, which is why whole school is doing it.”

• [https://youtu.be/Va6LE-m\\_tsY](https://youtu.be/Va6LE-m_tsY)

• <https://youtu.be/y-kz4nIA-68>

• <https://youtu.be/gfm7uoKZhso>

• <https://youtu.be/OKyqqX1iuxE>

• <https://youtu.be/J4znllDd1Sg>

### Theme 3: Relational Trust and Growth Mindset

Strong relational trust exists at each level of the school system in Cisco ISD, which enabled RBL leaders to facilitate a cultural shift towards growth mindset and comfort with experimentation, key factors supporting successful implementation of personalized blended learning.

Teachers at both the elementary and junior high school see each other as resources. In contrast to many districts that rely on structured planning time to drive collaboration, Cisco teachers meet whenever they need to collaborate. They share a sense of connection and trust that enables this more informal approach, and they benefit from the opportunity to problem solve in an environment where they can be open about their experiences.

As campus leaders have developed a deeper understanding of personalized blended learning in the second year of implementation, they have been more involved and better positioned to support teachers. Teachers experience the campus leaders as encouraging their autonomy and supporting them in implementing according to each of their individual styles. This flexibility has made teachers more excited about implementation. As one teacher put it, "Administration has been extremely supportive in allowing me the flexibility to let it look differently . . . They embraced your personality and style of teaching to do what's best for kids." Teachers also trust that campus leaders will provide the support they need to be successful. For example, campus leaders have provided release time when requested. A teacher said, "They've said repeatedly, 'If you need a day, you just have to say it, and we will get you covered.' It has been really encouraging to get that support." 🎥

District leadership has fostered innovation by sending a consistent message about the value of experimentation and by being nimble in the way it supports teachers and campus leaders. The superintendent's frequent presence on campus has made teachers feel supported in the work, and district leaders believe that the "consistent message from top down that experimenting with new things was okay" empowered teachers. Similarly, campus leaders felt that they had the license to experiment, which made them more confident in allowing teachers the same freedom. The district communicated the message that "Y'all are going to give some breathing room to teachers. I'm going to give breathing room to you." Furthermore, because of a strong relationship with the district and campus leadership, the Project Manager has been able to serve as a bridge between teachers and leadership, problem solving and providing support in an agile and responsive manner that has further developed trust with teachers.

© <https://youtu.be/9UicPVczxgc>




## Looking Ahead: Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress

Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. By providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve. As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

Because of Cisco's successes in implementation and scaling, they came into the outcomes framework process with a sense of excitement and momentum, which positioned them to think expansively about their vision for the initiative and to seriously consider the system shifts that will support continued scaling and future sustainability. Cisco's implementation is well ahead of schedule due to organic expansion to additional subjects and grade levels. As a result, the participants in this process were highly engaged and positioned to think about an expanded vision and plans for district wide scale and sustainability. Additionally, since Cisco had experienced an expansion of their vision of success from an original focus on increasing the achievement of advanced students to encompassing growth for all learners, this process positioned them to think expansively about how this vision translates into outcomes along the way.

This year, the elementary and junior high campus leaders have taken greater ownership of the initiative. Their engagement was evident in the way that they were present for and contributed to the outcomes framework development process. In addition to strong campus leadership, another theme that emerged through the process of creating the outcomes framework was the role of teachers as collaborators and leaders in the initiative. Because Cisco is a small district without a curriculum director, teachers have created the materials needed to implement personalized blended learning in their classrooms. Though at times overwhelming, this has placed teachers at the center of shaping the initiative. In recognition of this, Cisco prioritized FSG having conversations with as many Year 1 and Year 2 teachers as possible so that we could understand the full arc of implementation. Thus, while teachers were not directly involved in drafting the framework, their perspectives were incorporated. As Cisco articulated its shared vision for success in personalized blended learning, leaders emphasized their ongoing commitment to teacher autonomy and the teachers' use of professional discretion to adapt instruction to the needs of their students.

# Summary of Cisco ISD Outcomes Framework

	<b>Vision</b>
Students will become independent thinkers and lifelong learners who achieve their highest potential and are prepared for college and careers in an ever-changing world. To support this vision, we will provide students the opportunity to engage in meaningful and differentiated/personalized learning experiences and teach them how to take ownership for their own learning.	
	<b>Design Pillars</b>
<div>✓ Data-Driven Instruction</div> <div>✓ Personalized Learning Experiences</div> <div>✓ Student Agency and Engagement</div> <div>✓ Rigor</div>	
	<b>Levels of Change</b>
<b>Students</b>	<div>✓ Student Achievement<sup>6</sup></div> <div>✓ Student Mindsets and Behaviors<sup>7,8</sup></div>
<b>Teachers, Leaders, and Schools</b>	<div>✓ Instructional Shifts<sup>9,10</sup></div> <div>✓ Teacher Mindsets and School Culture</div> <div>✓ School Structures, Policies, and Practices</div>
<b>District</b>	<div>✓ Vision and Culture</div> <div>✓ Professional Development and Staffing</div> <div>✓ Scaling, Sustainability, and Governance</div>
<b>Parents and Community</b>	<div>✓ Parents</div> <div>✓ Community</div>

Cisco crafted five SMART Goals by which to measure their progress. Though the outcomes framework is a more comprehensive articulation of what Cisco hopes to achieve through implementing personalized blended learning, all five of the SMART Goals are reflected within the framework. See footnotes to track where SMART goals are embedded within the framework.

## Observations about Cisco ISD’s Outcomes Framework

At a moment in time in which Cisco is celebrating early successes and planning for the future of scale and sustainability, engaging in structured conversations about outcomes was a “refresher” on what Cisco set out to do with RBL and a chance to continue building collective ownership for the work going forward. Furthermore, Cisco recently learned that it will have a new superintendent next year. The outcomes framework will serve as a tool for communicating about the RBL initiative to the incoming hire.

A second area of strategic value was the opportunity for participants to delve deeply into their motivation and vision for the work. Following from an expanded vision, participants articulated a broader set of student outcomes, including a set of long-term aspirations for students, and drew connections between shorter-term student capacity gains, such as the development of a growth mindset and ownership over their learning, and students’ longer-term development into lifelong learners. They discussed how self-directed learners will be better prepared to thrive and contribute in a future world in which the nature of work itself is changing. Thus, participants emphasized that student agency may be the most important attribute to build for a student’s future. They also discussed a number of other important mindsets and behaviors.

For example, the importance of developing citizenship mindsets and behaviors was previously valued but had not been made explicit. Identifying outcomes relating to citizenship and collaboration makes it clear that students need explicit instruction to develop in these areas, pointing the way toward future efforts to further refine Cisco's instructional model.

Thirdly, the process reinforced the importance of engaging parents and shifting their mindsets about learning. Participants spent time identifying the key mindset shifts that would allow parents to better support their students in becoming self-directed learners.

In addition, the outcomes framework contains a number of other important reflections across each group of stakeholders.

## Students

- Reflects the way that Cisco's vision for personalized blended learning has broadened as they have shifted their focus towards long-term outcomes for all students
- Emphasizes the importance of preparing students to be self-directed, lifelong learners who are prepared for a changing world
- Strengthens previously implicit values around citizenship and contributions to the surrounding community

## Teachers, Leaders, and Schools

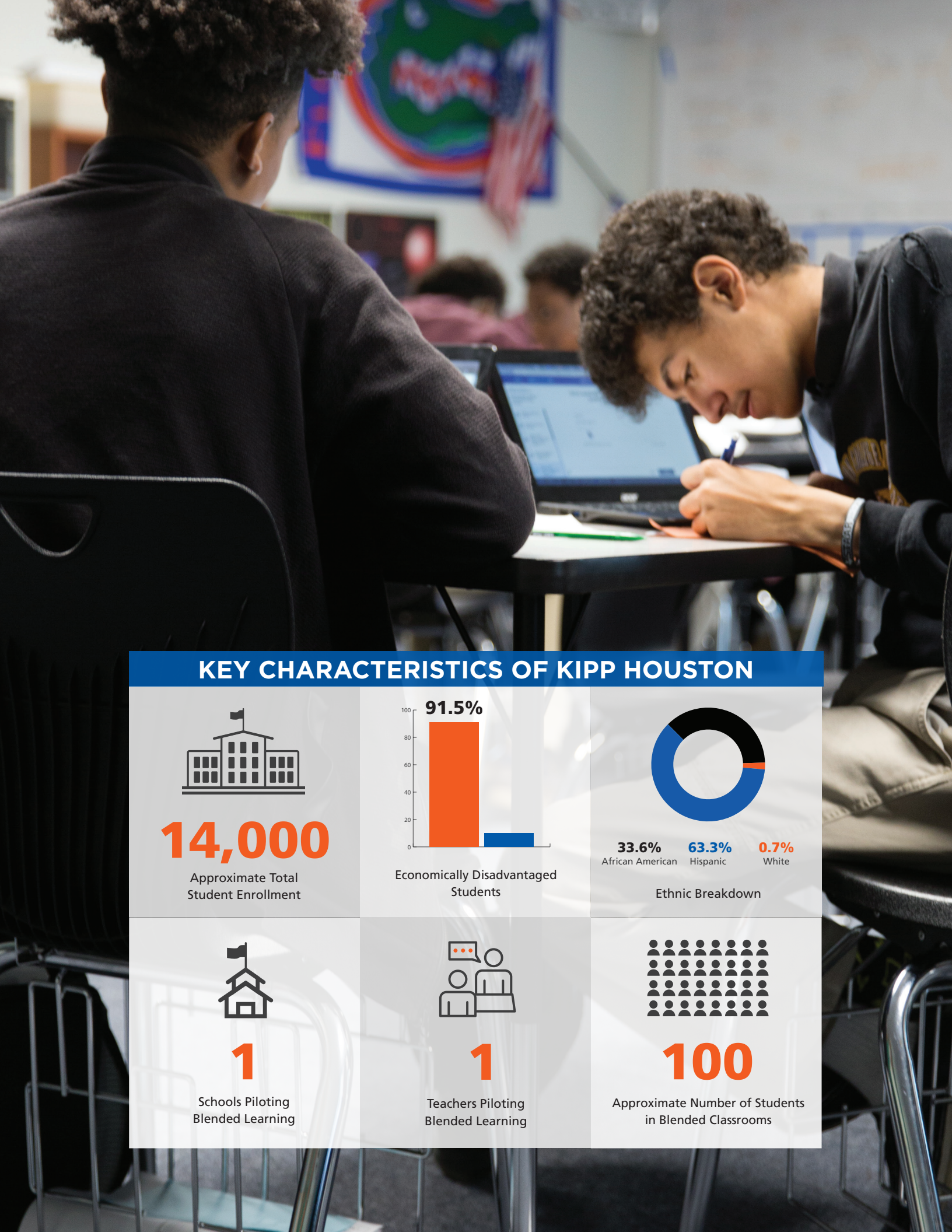
- Centralizes student choice and agency, as well as the role that teachers play in differentiating instruction and creating a classroom culture that embraces differences among students
- Reflects recognition of the importance of teachers and leaders being comfortable with experimentation as well as the way that relational trust between teachers and school leaders enables risk-taking, vulnerability, and continuous improvement
- Reflects prioritization of professional development and other support for implementation of personalized blended learning and the role that more experienced teachers can play in leading professional development for their peers

## District

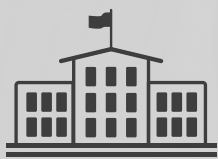
- Captures Cisco's commitment to scaling and sustaining personalized blended learning. Key strategies include building towards a shared vision among all district employees and embedding supports and resource allocation for personalized blended learning in all key district systems, including professional development and staffing.
- Expresses the district's commitment to giving schools autonomy and incorporating site leaderships' voices into district decision making, in particular as it pertains to personalized blended learning

## Parents and Community

- Highlights the significant work that needs to be done to engage parents and help them understand the importance of growth and student self-direction

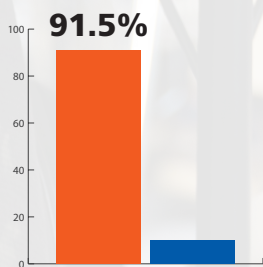


## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF KIPP HOUSTON



**14,000**

Approximate Total  
Student Enrollment



Economically Disadvantaged  
Students



33.6% 63.3% 0.7%  
African American Hispanic White

Ethnic Breakdown



**1**

Schools Piloting  
Blended Learning



**1**

Teachers Piloting  
Blended Learning



**100**

Approximate Number of Students  
in Blended Classrooms



# KIPP TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS-HOUSTON

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## Raising Blended Learners, FSG Year 2 Site Report

### Introduction

During the 2017-2018 school year, what was then KIPP Houston Public Schools joined forces with the three other KIPP regions in Texas – Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio – to form a statewide network called KIPP Texas Public Schools. KIPP Texas-Houston, the largest of those regions, enrolls nearly 15,000 students across twenty-nine schools. Founded in 1994 as the first KIPP location in the country, KIPP Texas-Houston has always held a prominent position in the national KIPP network, and within the broader Houston education community. Since its founding, KIPP Texas-Houston has sought to provide high-quality education options for low-income minority students in the city. Reflecting on the challenges many of their high school graduates face in postsecondary education, KIPP Texas-Houston's leadership saw the Raising Blended Learners grant as an opportunity to lay a stronger foundation in math in the middle school years. Moreover, the RBL initiative aligned with KIPP's focus on developing the student agency and resilience necessary to succeed in college.

For their first blended learning pilot project, the network focused on a single flipped classroom at one school, to help more students successfully complete Algebra I in eighth grade and continue along an advanced math sequence through high school. During Year 1, KIPP Texas-Houston hosted a summer Algebra Boot Camp that utilized a flex blended learning model to prepare rising eighth graders for Algebra I.

Read more about KIPP Texas-Houston's blended learning model and student experience design pillars [here](#).

Read more about KIPP Texas-Houston's Year 1 implementation journey [here](#).

## Year 2 of Implementation

KIPP Texas-Houston's Year 2 story has been marked by three themes: significant expansion of their pilot after a Year 1 of focused implementation, a deeper understanding and intensified focus on student agency, and a start on the culture shifts needed to for KIPP Texas-Houston to focus on building student agency while maintaining a high bar for academic outcomes. KIPP Texas-Houston made an intentional choice to begin its pilot in one classroom, in one school. As their pilot has expanded to multiple classrooms in multiple schools, this transition is bringing to the forefront a wide range of mindset, behavior, instructional practice, regional support structure, and cultural shifts that, while present in Year 1, have become more prominent when working with a broader set of stakeholders and systems. Their deepened focus on student agency and on broader culture shift toward developing and measuring students' non-academic outcomes is an outgrowth of their learnings from expanded implementation in Year 2.

### Theme 1: Expanding from Implementing in One Classroom to Transforming a System

In Year 1 (school year 2016-2017), KIPP Texas-Houston focused implementation on demonstrating and refining successful practices in one classroom. Knowing that leaders would buy in if they saw results, KIPP Texas-Houston RBL leaders thought that a focused approach would allow them to rapidly test approaches and demonstrate success. They carefully selected the Year 1 teacher for his experience with the curriculum and skill as an instructor. In Year 2, KIPP Texas-Houston significantly expanded the pilot to include Algebra 1 classrooms in four schools, as well as fifth- through seventh-grade math in one school. This pivot led KIPP Texas-Houston to focus more intensively on teacher support, school transformation, and network buy-in, setting the stage for further expansion in Year 3.

During Year 2 (school year 2017-2018), KIPP Texas-Houston had a relatively high proportion of beginning-level teachers in the RBL classrooms and schools (both in their experience with personalized blended learning, and in their overall teaching careers), which urged RBL leaders to focus on teacher readiness and progression. As an instructional coach noted, "As we've implemented this with multiple teachers, it's given us a perspective on what exactly is required of a teacher in terms of readiness, and it has helped us understand the phases that a teacher will go through." Several of the Year 2 RBL teachers faced a steep growth curve, but with dedicated coaching, began to make progress.

Having blended content available has been a boost to teacher success, but when it has not been available, creating content has been a significant burden. By blended content, we mean both teacher-facing resources such as lesson plans, questions to facilitate students' conceptual thinking, and internalization aids, as well as student-facing resources such as aligned digital content, progress trackers, and choice-based activities. To fully sustain personalized blended learning, KIPP Texas-Houston is waiting for blended content to be available to the entire network for its curricula. In the meantime, the availability of content has significantly influenced KIPP Texas-Houston's strategy – they hired an instructional coach to create content over the summer and have also adapted their scale strategy to focus on grade levels and subjects where content already exists or where the teacher has the flexibility and capacity to create content on his/her own with minimal support.

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© <https://youtu.be/1LkvaXOgxd5>

From Year 1 into Year 2 – and now going into Year 3 – KIPP Texas-Houston pursued a “grassroots spread” approach with school leaders. RBL leaders have taken time to cultivate the participation of school leaders who are most willing and ready, and have been engaging those schools in a process of expansion focusing initially on one grade level within the school before expanding. As a network leader noted, working with the willing has facilitated expansion: “At KIPP Spirit now we’re seeing the same thing we saw at KIPP Liberation. One classroom and now it’s starting to spread. The people who are in charge of instruction at Liberation and Spirit are continuing their ownership of this.” Along the way, RBL leaders have also supported organic spread among a few non-pilot teachers who have demonstrated strong interest, which has led to notable successes: “We had one [English language arts] teacher who was ready . . . He’s the second highest scoring teacher in [NWEA’s Measures of Academic Progress] in KIPP in the nation.” However, the KIPP Texas-Houston RBL pilot is running up against some of the limitations of its approach of starting small in schools. Although school leaders are very committed to personalized blended learning, up to now, they have tended to see this as one of many initiatives in their schools – rather than as the core to their work.

Additionally, although personalized blended learning has gotten significant traction in participating schools – and has sparked interest in others – teachers and campus leaders have noted that regional practices and professional development (PD) do not yet address the specific needs of blended learning. The RBL initiative is situated in the context of the broader movement at KIPP Texas-Houston to institutionalize new, conceptually rigorous curricula in math and English language arts and to provide the necessary teacher supports to deliver the curricula. With the understanding that these curricula are challenging to implement effectively, teachers are receiving intensive PD on the content, and the region is emphasizing certain instructional moves that aid in success in traditional classrooms. Meanwhile, the curricula emphasize learning through conceptual discourse and do not include scaffolding to personalize learning environments. In years 1-3 of curriculum implementation, there is less space for experimentation and customization for specific classroom and school needs, which makes the distinction between traditional and blended models more acute. There is also limited time in teachers’ schedules to support them specifically with blended strategies. One school leader commented on the challenges she faces in carving out sufficient support for teachers implementing personalized blended learning: “This year the KIPP region is standardizing PD too . . . I need to build in [additional] time for planning . . . to help my teachers get a more sustainable start to the year.”

In 2017-2018, RBL leaders observed that teachers who were more experienced with the math curriculum were able to produce higher scores employing blended learning approaches, while those less experienced with teaching and with the curricula were expending all of their energy internalizing and preparing lessons and not able to focus on introducing blended practices.

Observing these dynamics, RBL leaders feel increasing urgency to align with the existing systems and structures that support instruction and to align on approaches for achieving non-academic outcomes through personalization. Furthermore, they see demonstrating clear markers of success and strong school-level demand as the keys to gaining stronger network-level understanding, excitement, and participation in blended learning.

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• <https://youtu.be/dRVkF-6K09E>

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• <https://youtu.be/IP1L2LQGIHA>

## Theme 2: Honing in on Student Agency

KIPP Texas-Houston's RBL initiative has a dual focus on improving academic achievement in math and fostering student agency. KIPP Texas-Houston's data-driven culture and comprehensive curriculum have facilitated successes in problem-solving and conceptual understanding around math. In contrast, despite promising signs of success, making significant gains in student agency has come more slowly. During Year 2, RBL leaders recognized the need to place additional focus on transforming culture, instructional practice, and school policies to promote student agency.

So far, RBL participants have focused on building student agency by designing instruction to elevate students' awareness of where they stand on a given topic and provide meaningful opportunities to make choices about what to work on based on their individual degree of mastery. RBL leaders have seen early examples of increased student independence as a result. As a regional leader noted, "It's really cool watching kids self-manage. [Seeing] students owning their work and being able to advocate for what they need are two new skills." A teacher reflected on how many students' improved capacity for self-management has translated into a stronger growth mindset: "Students don't get frustrated if they don't know something. They used to say, 'I failed this, and it's a huge unit.' Now, it's broken down, they know what they need to work on, and they see it as 'this is what it is' rather than getting discouraged."

While KIPP Texas-Houston leaders are encouraged by early successes with student agency, they have also noted that this year's teachers have varied in their ability to make shifts that promote agency. In response, RBL leaders have placed attention on defining a skill progression for each of the RBL design pillars and methodically coaching teachers in mindsets and practices associated with each pillar. The process has taken time, and progress has differed among teachers. As one individual noted about his/her school in particular, "We haven't been able to evolve that far, not because of lack of design, but teacher management . . . [Agency is] strongest at fifth and eighth. We have more work in sixth and seventh." RBL leaders also see room to expand their conception of student agency beyond "choice" and to deepen the breadth and effectiveness of their efforts to promote agency, and are supporting teachers on building in classroom-level data-driven learning practices for students while also considering ways to coach teachers in student goal-setting and student coaching.

Some school leaders are also beginning to consider how they can transform their school structures in order to promote student agency: "If I want agency to exist, what structures need to be trashed, and what do I need to create? What can I do to create more space for coaching or free learning spaces?" School leaders have also done work to create environments that support teacher's own agency and experimentation, including restructuring content team meetings, facilitating data discussions, giving teachers freedom to change existing practices, and supplying additional resources as needed. As one teacher reflected, "In general, my school is supportive

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• <https://youtu.be/YFw0WCmK46s>

• [https://youtu.be/U8kQIZ\\_Abp0](https://youtu.be/U8kQIZ_Abp0)

• <https://youtu.be/Kq4Xy5Xckis>

of what I want to try even if it sounds off [from] what is typical . . . It's a partnership." At times, school leaders' support has extended to creating some exceptions to network-wide practices that limit teacher agency or place burdens on teachers implementing personalized blended learning. However, teachers must still comply with some regional and school practices that are not aligned with blended learning.

While KIPP Texas-Houston is supportive of personalized blended learning, leadership has not yet articulated "guardrails for innovation," leaving schools and teachers uncertain about their latitude to exercise agency in making changes. While this has not been a major impediment to small-scale implementation, RBL leaders noted that having greater clarity about KIPP Texas-Houston's perspective on innovation would provide more freedom to the initiative.

### Theme 3: Responding to Pressures around Academic Achievement

While RBL leaders have made gains in prioritizing student agency🎯 and supporting experimentation, and while the network is supportive of innovation, at times the delay in increased academic outcomes for students is a challenge for KIPP Texas-Houston. However, RBL leaders are committed to persisting through early variability in student academic achievement: "[At the end of Year 2], we weren't seeing academic results in the way we expected to. But the [regional leadership] who observe [the classrooms] say we are doing things right, and setting students up for success. "

Teachers have also worked to find the right balance between teaching content and building agency. As one individual noted, "Especially as we move towards testing season, the focus is so heavily on content. It forces teachers into relying on incorrect assumptions [about] how students learn best . . . That mindset [of focusing on content] is here because [our network is] so high stakes, and [the focus] narrows as we get closer to testing." The collective team of teachers, school leaders, and regional leaders has yet to determine how they will balance the needs of using innovation to improve the student experience for future students, while also ensuring all students learn today. Presently, RBL leaders are working with regional leaders to increase alignment and buy-in throughout the broader system by demonstrating that building agency and achieving academic outcomes are mutually reinforcing. They have also sought ways to support all teachers in balancing content and skill development, and are using the Algebra I Summer Boot Camp as a time to develop teachers' capacity to create learning environments that ensure academic outcomes and build student agency.



## Looking Ahead: Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress


Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. By providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve. As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

Year 2 of Raising Blended Learners marked a major inflection point in KIPP Texas-Houston's efforts as they grew from a small pilot in one classroom in Year 1 to expanded pilots of Algebra I classrooms in four schools, as well as fifth- through seventh-grade math classrooms on one campus. Year 2's expanded implementation shed light on what it takes to successfully implement blended learning in terms of teacher readiness and mindsets, dedicated coaching, access to professional development and learning opportunities, as well as school leader support. Efforts to continue expanding personalized learning from Year 2 to Year 3 have focused on working with the most willing and ready school leaders to pilot, prove the concept can work with a small group of teachers in their school, and spread further within the school and "bottom up" to the rest of the network. This focus on grassroots spread is in keeping with the network's approach to innovating, whereby schools pilot new practices with relative independence, and as they demonstrate results, they engage leaders in making changes at the network-level to promote their scale and institutionalization.

Now, with two years of blended learning results to show – and with the imperative to ensure sustainability by the end of Year 3 (the end of the Raising Blended Learners grant) – network and school leaders closely involved in RBL are intensifying their thinking about what it would


take for the pilot to take root and flourish within the network. Their considerations so far have centered on engaging a wider circle of network leaders in viewing blended learning as essential to the future of the network, and in aligning curricula, policies, and systems with the needs of blended learning. Given this trajectory at KIPP Texas-Houston emphasizing grassroots spread, and the current desire to engage broader regional leaders, the outcomes framework development process focused on engaging a small, core group of school and network leaders who have thus far been most involved in implementation. Many of the conversations about the content and use of the framework centered on continuing to define, energize, and support planned and organic growth in classrooms and schools while also laying a foundation for gaining traction and integrating with critical regional departments.

## Summary of KIPP Texas-Houston Outcomes Framework



Vision

To build a better tomorrow, we educate our students with the academic and character skills necessary to thrive in college and lead choice-filled lives. Through student-centered blended learning, students build the agency and academic rigor to prepare them for college and life beyond.



Design Pillars


✓ Agency

✓ Data-Driven Learning

✓ Rigor

✓ Blended Learning

✓ Coaching Sessions



Levels of Change

Students	<div><div>✓ Achievement and Growth<sup>11,12</sup></div><div>✓ Agency<sup>13</sup></div><div>✓ Learner Mindset, Behavior, and Strategies</div><div>✓ Collaboration and Belonging</div><div>✓ Digital Literacy</div></div>
Teachers, Leaders, and Schools	<div><div>✓ Teacher Behaviors and Classroom Practices<sup>14</sup></div><div>✓ Teacher Mindsets and Beliefs about Learning</div><div>✓ Community of Teachers / Teacher Professional Learning</div><div>✓ School Structures, Policies, and Practices</div></div>
Network	<div><div>✓ Network Leader Mindsets and Behaviors</div><div>✓ Network Systems</div></div>
Parents and Community	<div><div>✓ Parents</div><div>✓ Community</div></div>

KIPP Texas-Houston crafted four SMART Goals by which to measure their progress. Though the outcomes framework is a more comprehensive articulation of what KIPP Texas-Houston hopes to achieve through implementing personalized blended learning, all four of the SMART Goals are reflected within the framework. See footnotes to track where SMART goals are embedded within the framework.

## Observations about KIPP Texas-Houston's Outcomes Framework

KIPP Texas-Houston approached this process with a dual focus on a) developing a framework that could support them in measuring success, and b) creating a stakeholder engagement tool to support onboarding of new teachers and school leaders and communication with a broader group of network leadership. Understanding the data-driven culture that guides much of KIPP's work, they knew that providing clarity around outcomes and measurement would help build excitement, understanding, buy-in, and alignment around this work.

This process was an opportunity to add specificity to key outcomes that KIPP Texas-Houston had identified at the outset of the pilot and that had remained relevant through Year 2. In particular, the outcomes framework process provided space and structure to reflect on what KIPP has learned about why student agency matters for overall student success, and how to articulate the mindsets, behaviors, and supports that will enable student agency going forward. The discussions also highlighted the need to use non-academic data to promote a cultural shift across the system in recognizing and proactively supporting student agency.

The process also linked teacher mindsets and instructional shifts explicitly to student outcomes. Particularly during Year 2, the KIPP Texas-Houston team had already done extensive work in articulating the instructional shifts needed to implement blended learning and coaching teachers in adopting new practices. By relating these shifts to desired student outcomes, this process situated this instructional work more strongly in the rationale supporting these shifts. Additionally, this process highlighted the need to make changes in the classroom and in school structures and culture in order to support the desired outcome of increased student agency.

Finally, the process provided an occasion to consider the additional work needed to gain buy-in among regional leaders for expanding beyond a pilot in one classroom to implementation in many classrooms and schools, and for integrating with the broader vision and systems of the region. RBL leaders see additional network buy-in as critical for gaining clarity and agreement about a) the network's allowance for – and boundaries around – innovation within a highly structured system; b) when, where, and how to integrate blended learning into classrooms; c) which blended systems to implement; and d) the process for making decisions around integration. RBL leaders viewed the framework as an important tool for building network-level understanding of blended learning and excitement about its potential impacts.

In addition, the outcomes framework contains a number of other important reflections across each group of stakeholders.

### Students

- Reflects an emphasis on college persistence, in keeping with the network's original interest in implementing blended learning to address low rates of college persistence among recent graduates
- Articulates a set of non-academic outcomes – to a greater degree of detail and with more progression over time than RBL leaders had previously stated – including student agency but also emphasis on learner mindset and behaviors, collaboration and sense of belonging, and digital literacy that will help students ultimately succeed in college and career

## Teachers, Leaders, and Schools

- Links instructional shifts to their corresponding student outcomes, providing a stronger rationale for these teacher mindset and behavior shifts, and hopefully prompting dialogue over time about the additional mindsets and shifts necessary to reach the deeper changes in student agency
- Reflects a shift in focus from Year 1, what blended learning looks like and what is required for one already-skilled teacher implement a blended model successful, to Year 2, what success looks like over time for a group of teachers implementing blended learning from different starting skill levels and using multiple learning modalities)
- Includes a focus on building a supportive community of teachers to engage in the type of professional learning needed when multiple teachers are implementing

## Network

- Reflects KIPP Texas-Houston’s anticipated process of proving a concept at a relatively small-scale in order to usher in larger-scale implementation and systems change, including outcomes around RBL leaders’ own behavior in engaging a broader set of network leaders in proactive communication, advocacy, and alignment
- Reflects that further clarity about the network’s perspective on innovation in Year 3 will guide school and network leaders in making the systemic changes needed to support sustainability and scale of personalized blended learning beyond Year 3 of RBL
- Articulates how RBL leaders hope to align blended learning implementation in the coming years with key network policies including: vision for teaching and learning, school and classroom practices that are promoted or required by the network, curricula and classroom content, and professional development

## Parent and Community

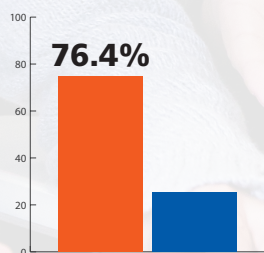
- Brings a new level of focus on how parents can participate proactively in supporting student shifts. Prior to the outcomes framework development process, there had been little concerted discussion of the role of parents and community in the networks’ blended learning initiative. Including parents and community in the outcomes framework puts a focus on parents and community on the agenda for future implementation efforts.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PASADENA

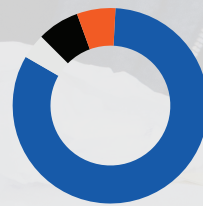


**56,000**

Approximate Total  
Student Enrollment



Economically Disadvantaged  
Students



**7.2%** **82.7%** **6.2%**  
African American Hispanic White

Ethnic Breakdown



**4**

Schools Piloting  
Blended Learning



**23**

Teachers Piloting  
Blended Learning



**600**

Approximate Number of Students  
in Blended Classrooms



# PASADENA ISD

## Raising Blended Learners, FSG Year 2 Site Report

### Introduction

Located southeast of Houston, Pasadena Independent School District is the largest of the RBL pilots — with over 55,000 students enrolled, the school district is one of the sixteen largest in Texas. Ninety-two percent of the district's youth are students of color, and almost 30% are Limited English Proficient (LEP). Nearly 80% of district students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 58% are considered academically at-risk. Responding to disparate student outcomes, district leadership developed an interest in blended and personalized learning as a means of better serving the academic needs of all students.

Unlike other demonstration sites, Pasadena ISD had embarked on a robust personalized learning pilot before beginning the RBL grant. In the 2015-2016 school year, the district began implementing its Connect Personalized Learning Program, a personalized learning initiative and part of the Summit Learning Program (then called Summit Basecamp). This ongoing effort was mutually reinforcing with Raising Blended Learners, which helped expand Connect into additional schools across the district.

Pasadena's Connect Program is targeting academic success measures, cognitive skills, and ultimately increasing the number of district graduates who complete college within six years of high school graduation. The model includes personalized learning time, project-based learning, one-on-one mentoring, and Socratic seminars.

Read more about Pasadena's blended learning model and student experience design pillars [here](#).

Read more about Pasadena's Year 1 implementation journey [here](#).

### Year 2 of Implementation

Year 2 of RBL represents Pasadena ISD's third year of implementation of Connect, their personalized blended learning program. One of the main stories of this year has been Pasadena's growing commitment to districtwide expansion of Connect, and its subsequent decision to widen the circle of leadership to include all district departments. In parallel, RBL leaders are also attuned to the need to deepen implementation by building a clearer vision and aligning teacher supports for high-quality teaching in the context of personalized blended learning. As Pasadena continues to hold these two efforts in balance, they have recognized the need for a clearer articulation of which elements of Connect should be standard and which schools have room to experiment with and make their own.

## Theme 1: Making Connect Everyone's Business

With a rapid expansion from three to twenty-three schools in the first three years, and with the anticipation of implementing Connect in over half of the district's sixty-five schools in 2018-2019, Connect represents one of the largest implementations of personalized blended learning among the nation's public school districts. This rapid expansion made it clear that the original small circle of leaders supporting the initiative had to grow; Pasadena is moving past the pilot stage to one in which Connect is everyone's business. This shift toward districtwide implementation requires Pasadena to be strategic in how it engages and supports stakeholders at each level of the school system.👉

As Connect has grown quickly, district and school leaders have recognized the importance of building strong buy-in among teachers. District leaders anticipate an ongoing need to help teachers new to Connect internalize "the why" behind the shift to personalized blended learning.👉 As one district leader shared, "Some of the teachers here didn't have a choice, they went full campus . . . Once a teacher gets it, or has that aha moment, we're good. It's getting every teacher to have that aha moment." In response, Pasadena has been developing a new coaching model based around a set of core values that capture the essence of personalized blended learning.

As schools have expanded implementation, particularly those that have expanded full-school, teachers and school leaders have adjusted classroom practices and school-wide systems to make Connect more accessible to all students. Thus making Connect everyone's business is not just about expanding the group of adults involved, but approaching implementation in a way that takes into account the needs of more diverse students. One teacher at a school that shifted from partial- to full-campus implementation this year, said, "Last year we didn't face some of the challenges we are facing this year with special education. It's felt like this year's issues are more challenging." She reflected that in the process of meeting these challenges, teachers have developed a broader set of tools, which allow them to more effectively meet a wider range of student needs.👉

During the 2017-2018 school year, the core district team also realized that they needed to open the circle of leadership so that the pilot would be more inclusive. Whereas having a small dedicated team while the pilot was first getting up and running allowed them to be nimble problem-solvers, quality implementation at scale will only work if individuals and processes throughout the system shift to support personalized blended learning.👉 Reflecting this shift, one district leader shared, "We were working so tight and so hard in the circle, to knock things out, because the challenges were unique. It took us three years to realize we need to bring everyone in." Now, RBL leaders are doing intentional work to build buy-in among those who have not thus far been involved in Connect: "As we expand, [there are] more people who come in without wholeheartedness . . . Connect is a hard thing to do without wholeheartedness." Thus, part of their work has evolved to helping leaders throughout the district develop awareness of and an affinity for personalized blended learning. District leaders recognize that this is a challenging process. One said, "We are asking them to learn and get out of their comfort level . . . How we fix that is a lot of communication . . . lots of exposure. Lots of classroom visits. We always try to expose the positives, why are we doing this, the impact on kids."👉

👉 [https://youtu.be/YL\\_m9xp6iVE](https://youtu.be/YL_m9xp6iVE)

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👉 <https://youtu.be/HAYdqnIBoeM>

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👉 <https://youtu.be/aRo7m7PJaUE>

## Theme 2: Supporting Greater Depth of Implementation

Driving for greater depth of learning, while also managing the breadth of scale of implementation, is a challenge for a district as large as Pasadena. Each year, a new set of students, teachers, and campus leaders experience their first year of Connect. At the same time, those who have already been implementing are still in the process of articulating what high-quality practice looks like and honing professional development, curriculum development, and other components of the work. As a result, stakeholders agreed that implementation quality varies significantly across the 23 participating schools in 2017-2018; this presents a challenge for the district to address even as it continues expanding.🔗

Teachers in their second year of implementation reflected that they were more confident in giving students greater ownership over the learning process.🔗 After watching students experience productive struggle but finish the previous year in a positive way, these teachers felt more comfortable shifting responsibility towards students earlier in the year. As one teacher said, “I tried to let them take the lead sooner rather than later. . . . This year it was easier to explain and easier to release.” In addition to feeling more confident, teachers have gained a clearer idea of how to help students become more self-directed. For example, they have been teaching students to ask for appropriate help rather than anticipating needs for them.🔗

While this represents a deepening of implementation, the 2017-2018 school year also surfaced aspects of teacher practice in need of improvement, for example strengthening instruction to support students’ cognitive skill development. Whereas it was common to prioritize content progression through personalized learning time in the first years of implementation, district and campus leaders are now placing stronger emphasis on cognitive skill development and project-based learning. Teachers recognize this as the next step in their development, and expressed a need for more targeted professional development and aligned curriculum to support this shift.

This year has clarified a number of strategic areas that will support Pasadena in further refining implementation. First, the district recognizes a need to articulate what beginning, intermediate, and advanced implementation of personalized blended learning should look like. As a result of Pasadena’s expansion trajectory, teachers within some schools have different amounts of experience. Also, years of experience do not necessarily correlate with depth or quality of implementation. A clear articulation of a teacher’s trajectory will serve as a guide for professional development, coaching, evaluation, and self-reflection.

Secondly, to strengthen Pasadena’s emphasis on cognitive skills, the district intends to build capacity in the Curriculum and Instruction Department to develop curriculum that supports cognitive skill development as well as create more training for teachers targeted at this aspect of implementation.🔗 Finally, the district is transforming its coaching model to align it with personalized blended learning, with an emphasis on helping teachers develop the mindsets that support quality implementation. One component of this transformation is shifting the role of campus leaders towards being instructional leaders and building capacity among other staff members to serve as coaches.

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🔗 <https://youtu.be/SeZC0q9e4J4>

🔗 <https://youtu.be/ycnp1OEJsPU>



### Theme 3: Tight vs. Loose

Defining what is “tight vs. loose” means articulating clear standards for quality implementation that are shared across school sites and campuses, while also defining realms in which experimentation and personalization are encouraged. Both standardization and autonomy play important roles in promoting high quality implementation, and this may be especially true in a large district engaged with innovation.

At Pasadena, implementation has in some ways become more standardized as Connect has expanded. Whereas the first cohort of Connect teachers had a high degree of autonomy – for example, the freedom to create their own content – subsequent teacher cohorts have experienced a greater level of standardization, including a required district-created curriculum. While this has provided consistency, some teachers, particularly those with at least a year of experience implementing, miss the greater leeway. At the same time, Pasadena has more work to do in developing a shared understanding of good teaching in a personalized blended learning classroom, particularly to support quality implementation among less-experienced Connect teachers.

One district leader reflected on the importance of both fidelity to a shared vision and also room for personalization, and on the implications for expanding Connect to new teams of teachers: “How do we stay true to the fidelity of the program? I think first-year teachers, we almost brainwash them. They are so scared to make mistakes. Year two they loosen up a little . . . So as long as we keep the fidelity, then we’ll be okay . . . We want them to add flavor, as long as it is enhancing the recipe.” District leaders have articulated a need to better define what is tight vs. loose in onboarding, professional development, and coaching so that campus leaders and teachers can individualize their approach, while also adhering to a clear shared vision of high-quality implementation.



## Looking Ahead: Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress

Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. By providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve. As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

This year represents a pivotal moment for Pasadena's implementation of Connect as the district begins to intentionally scale across a large urban system. At the start of Connect in the 2015-2016 school year, Pasadena intentionally started small, with only three of their schools implementing the program. During the 2018-2019 school year, Pasadena plans to implement Connect in 34 of its 65 schools, representing approximately 7,500 students, 20% of Pasadena's student population.




Recognizing the necessity of building support among a large group of stakeholders to successfully scale, at the beginning of 2018, the leadership team convened a strategic committee to support the scale and sustainability of personalized blended learning in Pasadena. As a district leader noted, "Everyone in the room – [human resources, finance, etc.], everyone is impacted by Connect . . . That's a mindset shift. It's a big deal to say to the district, 'This is not a pilot, this is not going away. This is how we do it now.'"

The Pasadena leadership team viewed the initial outcomes framework workshop as an opportunity for engagement beyond their core team of RBL leaders, and convened a broad set of stakeholders to attend the first workshop. After participating in the workshop, district leaders saw value in using the outcomes framework process to address some of the strategic considerations, culture changes, and needs for onboarding and capacity building that accompany large scale implementation. Some context to consider is that while other districts are in their second year of implementing personalized blended learning, Pasadena ISD is in its third year, and many aspects of Connect have already been clearly defined. Because the outcomes framework template encouraged them to think about change at multiple levels of a system, and to consider the interactions between each level, it became an ideal tool for helping Pasadena put a spotlight on key areas of work as they undertake transformational systems changes.

As an example, the process highlighted the powerful implications of threading common values through each level of the system (e.g., students, classrooms, schools, and district). RBL leaders identified a set of themes (i.e., mindsets/behaviors) that are important at each level of the school system: 1) resilience and growth mindset, 2) ownership/self-direction, 3) collaboration and relational trust, and 4) purpose and relevance. They developed outcomes within each theme and formed aspirations for intentionally infusing the themes throughout onboarding, leadership development, professional development, and other communication. Below, we provide examples of how they threaded the themes through the various levels of the system.

Another key realization was the need to more clearly articulate proactive guidance about what is required/standard and what is open to experimentation across schools. This would allow teachers and schools to have room to experiment while implementing, while also advancing a common vision for teaching and learning.

## Summary of Pasadena ISD Outcomes Framework

	<b>Vision</b>
<p>Our ultimate goal is to provide all students with the cognitive skills and habits needed to be successful in college, work, and community.</p> <p>In Connect, students develop habits and skills that support them in being self-directed learners. We value teaching students how to learn more than what to learn and focus 70% of our efforts on skill development, improving the brain’s capacity to think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention.</p>	
	<b>Design Pillars</b>
<div><div>✓ Mastery Based Content Progression through Personalized Learning Time</div><div>✓ Project Based Learning to Develop Cognitive Skills</div><div>✓ Mentoring to Build Stronger Student/Teacher Relationships</div><div>✓ Building Lifelong Habits of Success</div></div>	
	<b>Levels of Change</b>
<b>Students</b>	<div>✓ Student Achievement<sup>15</sup></div> <div>✓ Student Mindsets and Behaviors<sup>16</sup></div>
<b>Teachers, Leaders, and Schools</b>	<div>✓ Supporting Student Achievement and Self-Directed<sup>17,18,19</sup></div> <div>✓ Teacher/Leader Mindsets and Behavior</div> <div>✓ School Structures, Policies, and Practices</div>
<b>District</b>	<div>✓ District Leader Mindsets and Behaviors</div> <div>✓ District Systems</div>
<b>Parents and Community</b>	<div>✓ Parents</div> <div>✓ Community</div>

Pasadena crafted five SMART Goals by which to measure their progress. Though the outcomes framework is a more comprehensive articulation of what Pasadena hopes to achieve through implementing personalized blended learning, all five of the SMART Goals are reflected within the framework. See footnotes to track where SMART goals are embedded within the framework.

## Observations about Pasadena ISD’s Outcomes Framework

As described in the previous section, engaging in the outcomes framework process was valuable to Pasadena because it helped them conceive of strategic moves to support their districtwide transformation. Incidentally, as the leadership team worked together to refine the outcomes framework, they reflected that going through a similar process at the school-level of identifying outcomes, especially for students, teachers, leaders, schools, would in itself be a useful onboarding technique. They envision repeating a similar activity with each new group of school leaders who are onboarding to implement Connect at their schools.

Additionally, participants reflected on a number of specific ways that the process was helpful:

- The process allowed them to have structured, focused conversations with each other about topics that they had each pondered individually.
- The process highlighted the tremendous progress that has already been made in the last few years because it was an opportunity to look at their work as part of an overall trajectory and take stock of how far they had advanced already.
- The framing of short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes helped to clarify the next set of actions required by various stakeholders.
- As Pasadena prepares to onboard ten additional Connect schools, RBL leaders plan to use the outcomes framework as a resource to build collective responsibility for implementation.

In addition, the outcomes framework contains a number of other important reflections across each group of stakeholders.

### Students

- Captures Pasadena's emphasis on teaching students how to learn through cultivating mindsets, behaviors, and cognitive skills (i.e., "how to learn") rather than focusing primarily on content (i.e., "what to learn")

### Teachers, Leaders, and Schools

- Describes key features of a personalized blended learning classroom including the creation of classroom norms, use of data and assessment, personalized instruction, and establishing classroom culture and relationships among students and between teachers and students

### District

- Emphasizes the critical role that professional development and training play in supporting successful implementation of personalized blended learning, especially at scale
- Highlights systems changes such as reallocating resources; developing processes for data collection, analysis, and continuous improvement; and developing a comprehensive parent communication plan
- Acknowledges the need for a clear articulation of a student's educational path through Connect and for alignment of curriculum, assessment, and grading policies

### Parents and Community

- Envisions parent engagement as a purposeful and gradual process in which parents move from understanding and beginning to engage with Connect to actively supporting their students' development as self-directed learners



I  
REFUSE  
TO  
SINK

THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO PRACTICE AND GET BETTER AT AN OBJECTIVE YOU DID NOT UNDERSTAND. THIS STATION HAS SOME RULES:

- MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE ON TASK AT ALL TIMES.
- YOU CAN CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO WORK ON BY USING YOUR TEKS TRACKER.
- WORK THE PROBLEMS OUT ON SEESAW OR ON A WHITEBOARD.
- WHEN YOU ARE READY TO TAKE YOUR POST TEST, LET MRS. REEVES KNOW SO SHE CAN APPROVE IT.
- LOG INTO IT'S LEARNING TO TAKE YOUR POST TEST. POST TESTS ARE UNDER RESOURCES - TEK BIN POST TEST FOLDER!
- WHEN YOU ARE DONE, LET MRS. REEVES KNOW SO SHE CAN REVIEW YOUR SCORE.
- IF YOU FAILED, YOU HAVE A SECOND CHANCE TO TAKE AND PASS THE TEST. (THIS TEST IS ONLY FOR POST TESTS)

KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
STAY  
ANCHORED

 **TEKS Bins**

4.2B  
4.2C

4.2E

4.2H

4.3A  
4.3B

4.5A  
4.5B

4.5C  
4.5D

4.6A  
4.6B

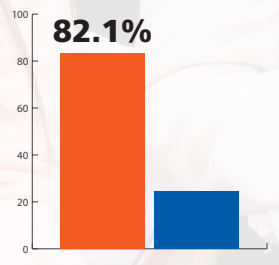
4.4D  
4.4E

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF POINT ISABEL**

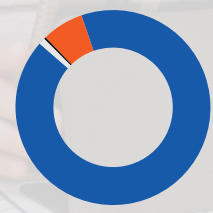


**2,500**

Approximate Total Student Enrollment



Economically Disadvantaged Students



0.6% African American  
91.6% Hispanic  
6.9% White

Ethnic Breakdown



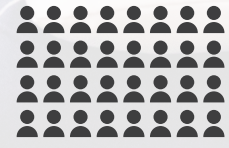
**3**

Schools Piloting Blended Learning



**6**

Teachers Piloting Blended Learning



**200**

Approximate Number of Students in Blended Classrooms



# POINT ISABEL ISD

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## Raising Blended Learners, FSG Year 2 Site Report

### Introduction

Point Isabel ISD, located at the southernmost tip of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley, enrolls approximately 2,500 students. Eighty-two percent of students served by the district are economically disadvantaged, and over 60% are considered academically at-risk. District leaders saw the RBL grant as an opportunity to transform teaching and learning practices and increase student motivation, with the goal of better preparing students for postsecondary education. The superintendent has encouraged risk-taking and innovation in Point Isabel; the Raising Blended Learners work has played an important role in operationalizing her vision.

Point Isabel named its initiative Project S.A.I.L. (Student Achievement via Individualized Learning). Dubbed by the district as “a grassroots approach to personalized learning,” the first-year pilot included a station rotation model in two elementary school math classrooms at separate schools, and a flex model in four core courses of seventh grade. The district planned on expanding the pilot to high school in Year 2.

Prior to RBL, the district has outlined six “compasses” to navigate student learning experiences:

1. Increase student achievement, engagement and motivation
2. Provide self-paced learning opportunities
3. Establish a positive school culture
4. Achieve personalized learning for each student
5. Gain access to actionable data and rapid feedback
6. Improve mentoring experiences

Read more about Point Isabel’s blended learning model and student experience design pillars [here](#).

Read more about Point Isabel’s Year 1 implementation journey [here](#).

## Year 2 of Implementation

Three themes emerged during Point Isabel's second year of RBL implementation. First, in response to growth of the pilot, teachers, school leaders, and district staff created new structures for collaboration and support. Second, the district grappled with how to match the high level of buy-in with an equally high level of follow-through. Finally, Point Isabel embraced an expansive use of data to understand student progress and inform instruction.

### Theme 1: Providing Support at Scale

Point Isabel's implementation of personalized blended learning grew significantly from Year 1 to Year 2. In the first year, six teachers participated, including just one in each of the two elementary schools and four at the junior high school. In contrast, twenty-six teachers participated in Year 2, including additional classrooms in both elementary schools, the entire junior high school, and the ninth grade in the high school. As a result of this rapid expansion, the district as a whole intensified its focus on personalized blended learning and school leaders rose to the challenge of providing support for teachers at the campus level.

School leaders, particularly in the elementary schools, were surprised by the high level of interest in personalized blended learning among teachers and recognized a need to provide more in depth support: "If they're willing to get in and do the work, I'm not going to stop them. Now, how are we going to align so no one gets left behind?" At times, school leaders felt they were "stretched thin," but still managed to provide a substantial amount of support. For example, both elementary school campus leaders meet with implementing teachers multiple times a week to provide professional development and coaching, and to facilitate the sharing of effective practices.

School leaders also reflected on the ways in which expansion has opened up new opportunities for collaboration. Having more teachers implementing at each site allowed teachers to learn from each other and has led to faster improvement. One school leader said, "Now that we have eleven teachers there is a flow of ideas, a round table. We moved so much quicker this year because we could share celebrations and what didn't work, and learn." The Year 1 implementers have been able to support those starting in Year 2. As one school leader shared, "[A teacher in her second year of implementation] is providing her expertise. When you go into her classroom, she's way ahead of our other blended learning teachers. They are learning from her about their setbacks. That has been helpful." Scaling has also allowed for a degree of vertical alignment, particularly within the elementary schools, and the development of common language and expectations, which Point Isabel stakeholders believe has benefitted students.

In parallel to school leaders' support of teachers, district wide instructional coaches have been providing significant emotional and other support to teachers. They have been working to continue providing intensive support while also positioning school leaders to play a strong role in teacher development.

© <https://youtu.be/N7iv-Vf8pic>

© <https://youtu.be/g9suz8YLxD8>

## Theme 2: Building Buy-in

Participants at different levels of the school system have exhibited varying degrees of buy-in to implementing personalized blended learning. The district leadership has a strong vision and sense of urgency and excitement about expanding implementation and driving for quality and depth. This year, they perceived a growing enthusiasm among teachers and school leaders, but have also in some cases been frustrated by the pace of change or inconsistencies in practice.

While there are many positive signs of student engagement in personalized blended learning classrooms, district leaders shared that there has been mixed buy-in among secondary students. They perceive that “there are as many kids who don’t like it as do,” and attribute this to the fact that students are being held accountable to a higher level of rigor, and thus harder work, than they were previously. Secondary students’ mixed student buy-in may also be contributing to inconsistent buy-in among their teachers.▶

Particularly at the elementary level, there have been significant shifts in teacher practice. District leaders attribute this to shifts in teacher mindsets and a high level of buy-in. As one district leader described, “They had the mindset shift almost instantly, which is great. The practices have trailed, as we’d expect, but I’ve been amazed at how quickly implementation with fidelity has happened. I thought there’d be more pushback, reluctance, caution, [thinking] it’s a fad.”▶

Among school leadership, buy-in is often linked to confidence.▶ Campus leaders gained confidence in their ability to support implementation of personalized blended learning in Year 2. A district leader shared, “Last year this was so new to us and there was such a high learning curve that it was stressful . . . Not to say we are experts this year, but since we’ve gone through it for a year, you can see the difference when principals talk to their staff. There’s just a different level of engagement with this work, because we feel comfortable talking about it now . . . ”

On the other hand, district leaders perceive that there is still work to be done in building school leaders’ capacity to serve as instructional coaches and commitment to fully implementing all aspects of the district’s approach to personalized blended learning. For example, at times campus leaders have pushed back about the need for the many meetings involved in implementation (e.g., data-driven instruction and inquiry meetings or parent meetings) and there is still the sense that they may undertake requested activities in order to comply, rather than because they have fully internalized the importance of completing them. District leaders recognize that continuing to shift ownership to campus leaders is an important aspect of creating sustainability in Year 3 and beyond.

District leaders have consistently demonstrated buy-in and have also made noticeable progress in key areas they have focused on for improvement. At times they struggle with finding the right balance of pushing implementation forward and giving campus leaders and teachers time to come to it themselves.

The board has been supportive of implementation▶ and created space for experimentation and learning, without expecting immediate results, which has provided a stable foundation for implementation.

▶ <https://youtu.be/RxpqizAgV9g>

▶ <https://youtu.be/bJS5whnMffU>

▶ <https://youtu.be/qcvh6F9REq8>

▶ <https://youtu.be/wDsD6hNYDvo>

### Theme 3: Shifting from a Focus on STAAR to an Expansive Use of Data

Historically, Point Isabel ISD has placed a strong emphasis on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test scores as a measure of student progress. As a result, school culture, classroom practices, and mindsets of school leaders, teachers, and students were all oriented towards achievement on the STAAR test. In recent years, and in large part due to blended learning, Point Isabel has shifted from a narrow focus on STAAR toward embracing a broader sense of student progress that relies on multiple measures of success, including NWEA Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) growth data, data from various platforms, and other assessment tools.

Point Isabel applied to be part of the pilot of Local Accountability Systems, a program established by House Bill 22 in 2017, which allows district and charter schools to develop plans to locally evaluate their campuses. Point Isabel's plan enables them to use NWEA MAP as part of their accountability score for the state, which is in line with Point Isabel's intention to focus on student academic growth and other measures of progress.

The district is de-emphasizing STAAR scores and limiting the amount of STAAR prep allowed, but they know that campuses still experience pressure related to STAAR and that it is difficult to fully eliminate STAAR prep. A district leader shared, "[We] compromised. Fifteen days out from the [STAAR] test, they get 20 minutes of whole group instruction to review objectives." The superintendent believes that improved STAAR scores after Year 2 would give campuses more confidence going forward. She said, "The majority have shifted with us. More will if [this year's STAAR] scores are good."

Simultaneously, Point Isabel has been exploring numerous strategies for embedding data analysis into teachers' and school leaders' planning on a real-time basis to help each student progress. Developing a more expansive data culture involves shifts at every level of the school system. Teachers are drawing on numerous sources of data to inform their understanding of student progress and students' learning needs. NWEA MAP has become a locus for collaborative data analysis across the district. In junior high and ninth-grade classrooms, where they are implementing Summit Learning, teachers have access to data reflecting students' progress on mastering content and developing cognitive skills through the Summit Platform. At the elementary level, where they are developing their own model of personalized blended learning, teachers use a variety of formative assessments to gather student achievement data.

Instructional leaders have been meeting with teachers regularly to analyze data, helping to create and reinforce the new culture. Additionally, they have been using data to guide their own interventions with students. A school leader shared that while she previously would have relied on the Dean of Instruction to provide her with student data, she now pulls up the Summit Platform and a student's NWEA and discipline data on the spot so she "can have a conversation about where they need to be." In some cases, these sources of data represent a different way of conceptualizing student learning. For example referring to the secondary level, where teachers use Summit's cognitive skills rubric, a district leader reflected, "Those [cognitive skills] are skills we never assessed before."

• [https://youtu.be/984bcDUnf\\_U](https://youtu.be/984bcDUnf_U)

• <https://youtu.be/hhrCHBcjMfc>

• [https://youtu.be/v\\_QzwWH5YO5](https://youtu.be/v_QzwWH5YO5)

In addition to incorporating new types of data, there is a new culture of using this data to identify and solve problems – such as gaps in student learning – and to inform instruction. An elementary school leader shared, “When we looked at NWEA data, it was good to look at each student . . . They were able to see that at second grade, they were not able to count coins, but if you look at the learning continuum, in kinder they couldn’t recognize coins. They could see, ‘I’m going to have to go back to fill in that gap.’”

Point Isabel’s emerging data culture has enabled differentiation of instruction for students at different points in their content mastery and skill development. When Point Isabel first implemented blended learning, they were able to incorporate multiple learning modalities, but students’ progression through the curriculum was still “one size fits all.” Through engaging in data-driven instruction and inquiry, teachers have more fully embraced the personalized learning approach. They are coming to see personalized blended learning as far more than a platform for delivering content in multiple ways; rather it is an iterative process of using data to understand students’ individual learning needs and personalizing their pathway.

While students are less focused on year-end standardized tests, students are generally more aware of their data and are able to use data to assess their own learning and next steps. A district leader shared that students are “aware of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve their skills,” such as one student who reflected, “I got red because I’m not very good at adding two digits.” The shift towards a more expansive definition of progress and use of data has been easier for younger students. An elementary school leader has observed that younger students, who have had less experience with models other than personalized blended learning, have had an easier time focusing on growth and do not seem to place much weight on standardized tests. Older students have learned over time to focus on the test, and as a result many fear tests, especially state tests.

School culture is beginning to shift; school leaders at both elementary schools shared that their school practices no longer reinforce a STAAR-focused culture. “[There are] no t-shirts, signs, or pep rallies to beat the STAAR,” one teacher explained. “The focus has shifted [from] one test, one assessment, one accountability measure, to looking at each student and what they can do to catch up [when they are behind] or to move ahead.”

• <https://youtu.be/4YomkpQjMfw>

• <https://youtu.be/lhl9DLKkBY>

• <https://youtu.be/McW9vrRIDbM>






## Looking Ahead: Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress

Developing outcomes frameworks in Year 2 was intended not only to support sites in measuring impact, but also to help sites continue to adapt their strategy and implementation. By providing sites with a replicable process for defining outcomes and identifying indicators for measuring progress, FSG sought to position sites to define, gather, and learn from meaningful data over the lifetime of their blended learning efforts, even as their work continues to evolve. As Raising Blended Learners moves into Year 3 of implementation, and final year of the grant, the outcomes frameworks will continue to serve as one of the strategic tools to guide implementation, as well as a means to guide reporting on the academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators each campus experienced over the three years of the initiative.

Between Year 1 and 2 of RBL implementation, Point Isabel experienced rapid expansion of the personalized blended learning from six to 50 teachers, which shifted their attention this year towards sustainability at scale. As the initiative continues to expand, district leaders recognize the importance of sharing ownership and leadership in order to ensure sustainability. This year, though the district continued to play key roles in supporting implementation at each school site, campus leaders began to assume greater responsibilities. Thus, one focus area for this year has been building the level of buy-in and capacity of campus leaders to support implementation of personalized blended learning. All of these campus leaders participated in the onsite outcomes workshop.

The RBL demonstration sites varied in the relative emphasis they placed on the outcome framework process as a tool for developing strategy versus a pathway for measuring success. Notably, Point Isabel had a strong intention to use the outcomes framework as a practical tool for guiding measurement towards success in an ongoing way. From the beginning, Point Isabel also displayed a strong sense of ownership for the outcomes framework. Unprompted, they collaborated on revising their vision statement in advance of their in-person workshop facilitated by FSG. In addition, they emphasized the importance of attaining widespread buy-in for the framework before finalizing it and devoted time to discussing specifically when and how to use the framework as part of regularly scheduled planning meetings.

## Summary of Point Isabel ISD Outcomes Framework

	<b>Vision</b>
	Upon graduation every student is equipped with the <b>skills, knowledge, mindsets, and habits to maximize their individual potential</b> , thereby enabling them to reach their life goals and be productive members of society.
	<b>Design Pillars</b>
	<div> <div>✓ Collaborative Relationships</div> <div>✓ Student Agency</div> </div> <div> <div>✓ Rigor and Relevance</div> <div>✓ Personalized Pathways</div> </div> <div> <div>✓ Data-Driven Instruction</div> </div>
	<b>Levels of Change</b>
<b>Students</b>	<div>✓ Student Achievement<sup>20,21</sup></div> <div>✓ Student Mindsets and Behaviors<sup>22,23,24,25,26</sup></div>
<b>Teachers, Leaders, and Schools</b>	<div>✓ Instructional Shifts<sup>27,28</sup></div> <div>✓ Teacher Mindsets</div> <div>✓ Leader Mindsets</div> <div>✓ School Structures, Policies, and Practices</div>
<b>District</b>	<div>✓ District Leader Mindsets and Behaviors</div> <div>✓ District Systems</div>

Point Isabel ISD crafted nine unique SMART Goals across its four campuses by which to measure their progress. Though the outcomes framework is a more comprehensive articulation of what Point Isabel hopes to achieve through implementing personalized blended learning, all nine of the SMART Goals are reflected within the framework. See footnotes to track where SMART goals are embedded within the framework.

## Observations about Point Isabel ISD's Outcomes Framework

In concert with implementation of personalized blended learning, the district is embracing a more multifaceted definition of success that includes a broader set of measures and an emphasis on student growth over proficiency, rather than the previous heavy emphasis on preparing for strong performance on the annual STAAR test. Simultaneously, they are building the capacity of teachers and school and district leaders to use numerous sources of data to inform instruction in real time. The outcomes framework articulates the varying and long-term outcomes Point Isabel hopes to see among students and thus encapsulates the shifts in thinking about accountability, data, and success that are underway.

Traditional measures of academic achievement – including both STAAR and NWEA MAP – are included in the outcomes framework. But it is notable that in the process of drafting the framework, participants focused their attention on articulating a much broader set of student outcomes. They recognized that while achievement is important, they also want to see students growing throughout the year and working within their zone of proximal development (working on tasks that are challenging enough to stretch them, but not so challenging that they will be overwhelmed). Additionally, they want students to be able to apply their knowledge across multiple contexts and disciplines and be prepared not only to enter college, but to persist and graduate.

The outcomes framework articulates a shared vision between the elementary and secondary levels, but also highlights the need for ongoing vertical alignment and articulation of how the student experience and expectations differ at each grade level. For example, at the junior high and high school levels teachers use the Summit Learning Program and assess students using Summit's cognitive skills rubric. At the elementary level, educators do not yet have a standard way of assessing cognitive skills. Through the process of drafting the outcomes framework, participants discussed the importance of cognitive skill development at all grade levels, and set an intention to map a trajectory for cognitive skill development from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Although Point Isabel has more work to do in fleshing out the details of student progression in each category of outcomes, the outcomes framework provides a good starting point for thinking about students' development trajectory.

In addition to building confidence and communication capacity, the outcomes framework represents a tool for building shared commitment for actionable steps that move the work forward. District leaders reflected that while there has been a high degree of buy-in for personalized blended learning, in some cases, actions have not matched people's shift in mindsets. They see the outcomes framework as an opportunity to set clear milestones for progress at each level of the system.

In addition, the outcomes framework contains a number of other important reflections across each group of stakeholders.

### Students

- Reflects the value that Point Isabel places on both growth and achievement
- Suggests an educational model in which students are expected to make progress towards grade-level and graduation requirements, but also one in which students engage with work that is appropriate to their current stage of readiness

- Provides an opportunity to consider K-12 alignment as well as the variation of expectations at different grade levels
- Reflects the importance of cognitive skills in a district where assessing students based on cognitive skill development is new to most teachers
- Places a strong emphasis on student mindset and behavior shifts reflective of Summit's Habits of Success and emphasis on the self-directed learning cycle, but also of the priorities and vision of those implementing at the elementary level

### Teachers, Leaders, and Schools

- Reflects a recognition that teachers develop their capacity to implement personalized blended learning at their own pace
- Notes that teachers are supported by having a clear pathway to development, and defines a need for articulating what high-quality teaching looks like in the context of personalized blended learning
- Highlights campus leaders' role as instructional coaches, supporting teachers' development along a continuum
- Highlights the importance of building teachers' capacity to provide rigorous instruction and design rigorous learning activities
- Describes how student data is integrated in planning and instruction and articulates how teachers' ability to use data to drive instruction becomes more sophisticated as they gain more experience
- Emphasizes the importance of mindset shifts for teachers and leaders, including growth mindset and the ability to embrace risk taking, productive failure, and iteration

### District

- Reflects the important role that district leaders play in creating an environment that fosters trust and encourages experimentation
- Highlights the district's role in supporting instructional excellence, including through promoting rigorous instruction and creating a coherent coaching model and other forms of support
- Captures Point Isabel's recognition of the importance of planning for sustainability of the initiative by aligning financial plans and district processes to support implementation

### Parents and Community

- Reflects the key role that the school board has played in supporting implementation of personalized blended learning



## CROSS-SITE OBSERVATIONS FROM YEAR 2

As FSG worked with the five demonstration sites to build their outcomes frameworks, we sought to honor the unique vision, implementation pathway, priorities, and context of each site, and to reflect these in both the process and the frameworks themselves.

However, we also noted a few themes that appeared across all sites:

- How well Year 2 worked as a time for creating the outcomes frameworks
- The opportunity this process presented for all sites to reaffirm and expand their vision – and use their vision to deepen implementation
- The ways sites used the process to strategically engage stakeholders and build their capacity
- The need for new tools and processes for re-conceiving the use of measurement for improvement

## Theme 1: Timing

The creation of an outcomes framework can serve different purposes at different points in the innovation process. There was general agreement across the sites and within RBL that while sites may have benefitted from this process at any point in their trajectory, engaging with it in Year 2 of the pilot was good timing. Sites had enough experience and learning to meaningfully build out the framework. Having seen early signs of success – and having gained lived experience of the types of shifts that needed to happen at each level of the system to enable this success – sites were prepared to define more specifically the outcomes they hoped to see and how each level of the system would interact to produce those outcomes.

Two themes that appeared across all sites' outcomes frameworks were how to plan for scale and sustainability of the initiative. Again, because of sites' lived experience of expansion from Year 1 to Year 2 of the pilot, and because of their growing confidence and commitment to scaling further and sustaining the initiative beyond the span of the RBL grant, sites were well positioned at this particular point in time to engage with the outcomes framework process as a tool for developing strategy for scale and sustainability. Sites were also able to reflect on the progress they had already made in the first two years of implementation.

Sites were also ready (to varying degrees) to place more attention on measurement than they were at the start of implementation. Whereas all sites created SMART Goals prior to Year 1 of implementation, these goals typically reflected a limited vision of the outcomes they hoped to see and how they might measure them. Centering their efforts on a focused set of goals provided sites with a good starting point early on in the process. Now that sites have developed their frameworks, they can see how the SMART Goals fit within a broader vision of success. In addition, now that sites are seeing some quantitative indicators of success (e.g., test scores), and experiencing the qualitative impact of personalized blended learning, they are eager to develop appropriate measures to more closely track and communicate progress to a variety of stakeholders. The outcomes framework process allowed them to start down that path.

## Theme 2: Vision

Through the process of creating their outcomes frameworks, sites both reaffirmed their vision for personalized blended learning and in many cases expanded their vision. Additionally, although the sites began this process with a view of it primarily as a measurement-related exercise (and while the process did advance sites' thinking about measurement in valuable ways), charting progress from their current activities to their ultimate vision also helped sites refine and deepen their strategic priorities for students.

In several cases, sites reached greater clarity about their longer-term aspirations for students, particularly relating to career and life outcomes, and made clear links between the short- and medium-term outcomes they hoped to see and this broader vision of success. Additionally, several sites reached or began to explore an expanded vision of innovative teaching practices. For example, at least two sites engaged in conversation about shifting to competency-based progression. This and other ideas for transforming their school systems emerged organically when they considered the outcomes they hoped to see at each level of the school system and how these outcomes fit together in practice.

Similarly, in the process of developing outcomes across multiple levels of the school system, several sites recognized key themes that were important across levels. These themes represented deep aspirations for mindset and culture shifts that would enable them to reach their ultimate vision of personalized blended learning.

### **Theme 3: Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity**

Sites used the process of drafting the outcomes framework to strategically engage stakeholders and build buy-in and/or leadership capacity. The varied combinations of individuals who were selected to participate in each site's framework development process reflect the different leadership structures and needs for leadership development at each site. Through participating in the outcomes framework process, educators also increased their capacity for thinking broadly about student success and systemically about the interlocking pieces of district change. A variety of needs or new strategic opportunities emerged organically from this process, with significant enthusiasm from participants to put them into practice. Together, this connection to engagement and capacity building stands in contrast to the ways in which measurement is traditionally used for compliance and accountability in the K-12 system – and suggests that a different focus, on improvement and capacity building, may be a more fruitful direction for measurement and assessment in the future.

### **Theme 4: Educators need both tools and processes for re-conceiving the use of measurement for improvement**

Current field conversations around measuring personalized blended learning tend to center around the need for more and better tools to capture signs of student success that extend beyond test scores, and FSG agrees this is a need. The outcomes framework process surfaced multiple opportunities for this within and across sites. Sites frequently noted a desire to develop observational rubrics, surveys, and a variety of systems for capturing what students actually know and can do as a natural extension of stating outcomes specifically for personalized blended learning.

In addition, we'd suggest that adaptive processes that help educators to collaboratively define success and then work together to improve their work present just as big of a challenge to the field as new tools (if not more so). Jumping too quickly to tools and methods can cause those leading transformational efforts to overlook the work of assembling diverse coalitions of stakeholders, developing shared mindsets and mental models, and agreeing on what steps are needed to improve – in other words, the messy, essential work of leading and managing change. Through the lens of improving measurement, developing the outcomes frameworks provided a valuable process for RBL sites to take stock of their efforts so far, track evolutions in their thinking, and continue to evolve their ideas for the path forward.

# REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> To support the RBL districts, Raise Your Hand Texas assembled a group of nationally respected technical assistance (TA) providers, collectively referred to as the “Ecosystem” of supports. The Ecosystem has included CA Group (overall management of the initiative, and support for student experience design, pilot implementation, and capacity building), Afton Partners (school finance), TNTP (teacher professional development), Texas Tech University (blended learning graduate certificate program and video library of personalized learning classrooms), EdSurge (technology selection), YouthTruth (rigorous student surveys), and FSG (evaluation and learning partner).
- <sup>2</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Achievement (STAAR Results; STAR 360 Results, End of Course Exam Results)
- <sup>3</sup> SMART Goal [Traditional HS]: Student Engagement and Motivation (Student Survey)
- <sup>4</sup> SMART Goal [Alternative HS]: Attendance (School Data)
- <sup>5</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Rigor (Student Survey)
- <sup>6</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Achievement (STAAR Results, NWEA MAP Results)
- <sup>7</sup> SMART Goal: Student Engagement and Persistence (Student Survey)
- <sup>8</sup> SMART Goal: Peer Collaboration (Student Survey)
- <sup>9</sup> SMART Goal: Teacher Development (TNTP Teacher Observation Rubric)
- <sup>10</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Rigor (Student Survey)
- <sup>11</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Achievement (STAAR Results)
- <sup>12</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Growth (NWEA MAP Results)
- <sup>13</sup> SMART Goal: Student Agency (Student Survey)
- <sup>14</sup> SMART Goal: School Culture (Student Survey)
- <sup>15</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Growth (STAAR Results, NWEA MAP Results)
- <sup>16</sup> SMART Goal: Student Mindset, Self-Efficacy, and Agency (Student Survey)
- <sup>17</sup> SMART Goal (Elementary Only): Academic Rigor (Student Survey)
- <sup>18</sup> SMART Goal: Student Relationships with Teachers (Student Survey)
- <sup>19</sup> SMART Goal: Student Relationships with Peers (Student Survey)
- <sup>20</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Growth (EOC Results, STAAR Results)
- <sup>21</sup> SMART Goal: Academic Growth (NWEA MAP Results)
- <sup>22</sup> SMART Goal [Secondary Only]: Student Self-Directed Learning Skills (Student Survey)
- <sup>23</sup> SMART Goal [Secondary Only]: Student Engagement (Student Survey)
- <sup>24</sup> SMART Goal [Elementary Only]: Student Agency (Student Survey)
- <sup>25</sup> SMART Goal: Student Relationships with Peers and Teachers (Student Survey)
- <sup>26</sup> SMART Goal [HS Only]: College and Career Readiness (Student Survey)
- <sup>27</sup> SMART Goal: Student Relationships with Teachers (Student Survey)
- <sup>28</sup> SMART Goal [Elementary Only]: Academic Rigor (Student Survey)



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