



# TRECA: supporting at-risk students with personalized learning

Removing barriers to learning to help students achieve their goals

*Offering an online alternative to traditional K-12 education in Ohio, TRECA often serves as a last line of protection for students who are at risk of dropping out. To support and motivate these students to achieve their goals, TRECA relies on D2L's Brightspace platform to deliver personalized online learning experiences that engage and empower learners.*

## AT A GLANCE

**Student Number:** 2,900

### Interviewees:

- Angela Martin, Director of TRECA Digital Academy
- Kristina McLaughlin, School Improvement Coordinator
- Ty Hoyles, SAFE Coordinator



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*Kristina McLaughlin, School Improvement Coordinator, TRECA*

## SUMMARY

As a specialist in dropout prevention and recovery, TRECA aims to motivate students who have been disillusioned by traditional education. The organization adopted D2L’s Brightspace platform to help it provide an engaging online learning experience that would scale—enabling personal, one-to-one relationships between TRECA’s teachers and the thousands of students who need their support.

## QUICK FACTS

- Enables personalized learning, tailored for individual students and groups with similar needs.
- Empowers at-risk students to complete their high-school education with flexible online learning in a safe environment.
- Provides detailed analytics to help teachers monitor students’ performance and motivation.
- Facilitates compliance with Ohio state requirements with accurate reporting on attendance and retention.

## HELPING STUDENTS FIND THEIR PATH

TRECA Digital Academy is a public school with a difference—or rather several differences: It serves the entire state of Ohio; it delivers its K-12 program entirely online; and it focuses on helping students who have struggled in traditional school environments.

As a specialist in dropout prevention and recovery (bringing students who have already dropped out back into education), TRECA faces high expectations from the State of Ohio, while working with students whose life situations often make learning incredibly challenging.

Ty Hoyles, SAFE Coordinator at TRECA, comments: “We have students who are contending with all kinds of medical, social and emotional issues. For students who have had years and years of not being motivated at school, it’s hard to break that cycle.”

Kristina McLaughlin, School Improvement Coordinator, explains: “To make learning relevant, we always need to think about it from the student’s point of view. If they can’t see why they need to learn something, it’s up to us to give them that motivation.”

TRECA faculty need high-quality professional development to help them find effective ways to engage with students whose prior experience of education has been difficult. Since time is limited and student numbers are high, they also need tools that can help them spend as much time with students as possible.



As Angela Martin, Director of TRECA, says: “Ultimately, our goal is to help our students find their path. That means making sure that everyone—whether student or teacher—is on the right journey to help them reach their goals.”

### **CREATING A PLATFORM FOR CONTROL AND CREATIVITY**

As an online school from the start, TRECA has considerable experience of using learning management systems (LMS) to help students and teachers learn and communicate. However, when its existing LMS was acquired by another vendor, the organization decided to reevaluate its options.

“When we thought about running our courses without an LMS, we realized all the things we’d lose,” says McLaughlin. “It’s not just that an LMS gives you more control, it enables greater creativity in the way you interact with your students too.”

She adds: “When we saw D2L’s Brightspace platform, we knew it was the direction we needed to go for our new LMS. Brightspace offered us all the tools and the support that we needed to get started, and today the platform is really our equivalent of the school building that students walk into every day.”

One of the most important features for TRECA is the platform’s support for conditional releases and grouping. These features enable faculty to identify students with shared interests or needs, and unlock content and tools specifically designed for them. For example, TRECA runs a book club that involves mailing books to groups of students and then bringing the students together to discuss them. Using the Brightspace platform, TRECA can then create discussion boards that allow book club members to continue these interactions online.

“Brightspace enables us to really narrow our focus on students and differentiate the way we support each individual. That might mean helping them to close a skill gap, or pushing them further ahead, or even opening them up to a completely new way of thinking.”

*Kristina McLaughlin, School Improvement Coordinator, TRECA*



TRECA also uses the Brightspace platform for professional development for teachers. It has recently built an onboarding process to cover the first 90 days of a new teacher’s induction. Teachers start out with a student account in Brightspace, which helps them understand both how the system works and how their students experience it.



“The analytics capabilities of Brightspace are extremely beneficial to teachers. They give teachers the ability to look at data on students’ assignments and quiz scores that helps them reflect on how well they are getting through to our students. That’s what truly makes Brightspace powerful, and we’ve seen big changes in the way we teach as a result.”

*Angela Martin, Director of TRECA Digital Academy*

Finally, the Brightspace platform helps TRECA meet its compliance obligations by making it easy to track and report on student attendance and truancy rates. Administrators can instantly generate reports showing when and how frequently each student is logging in to the platform, and how long each one is spending on online learning.

### **MAKING STUDENTS FEEL SPECIAL**

From analyzing its user logs, TRECA has direct proof that its students are making good use of the LMS—logging in regularly, spending valuable time online, and progressing in their courses. The reliability of the Brightspace platform makes it a robust system of record for this important data, which TRECA provides regularly to the State of Ohio’s education and court systems.

Martin adds: “The analytics capabilities of Brightspace are extremely beneficial to teachers. They give teachers the ability to look at data on students’ assignments and quiz scores that helps them reflect on how well they are getting through to our students. That’s what truly makes Brightspace powerful, and we’ve seen big changes in the way we teach as a result.”

She adds: “The ability to target specific students has been a game-changer. You don’t have to teach the whole class, you can work with groups of kids or individual students who have specific needs. That’s a really powerful element to Brightspace.”

Hoyles gives a specific example: “We recently had a student who had some mental health issues that resulted in him becoming homeless. By bringing together his teachers, advisors, and the SAFE team, we not only helped him finish the half-credit of English he needed to graduate high school, but we helped him apply for jobs to keep his place in a local shelter, and worked with local services so he could eventually get his own apartment. He got his diploma last week.”

“The tools in Brightspace help us ensure that every student feels like they are the only student in class. I can make a student understand just how valuable they are to me and how valuable I feel their participation is. I might have 200 students in my class, but it’s so personalized that feels like it’s one-on-one.”

*Kristina McLaughlin, School Improvement Coordinator, TRECA*