

Texas high school's flight lessons may help solve pilot shortage

Mesa Airlines CEO warns pilot shortage could force airline passengers to pay more, and Rising Aviation High School tries to help

By Joy Addison | Fox News



Raising the next generation of pilots

Several airlines are struggling with staffing shortages, which could make flights this summer more expensive. Rising Aviation High School in Addison, Texas, could help with the pilot shortage.

ADDISON, Texas – Several airlines are struggling with staffing shortages, which could make flights this summer more expensive. But a high school in Texas is working to help ease the problem in the future.

American Airlines recently announced it will end service to four cities due to a pilot shortage. Jonathan Ornstein, CEO of regional carrier Mesa Airlines, said that as fewer flights become available, those with available seating cost more.

Ornstein said the pilot shortage arose because many pilots retired during the COVID-19 pandemic, and fewer new pilots have entered the workforce. He also cited more restrictions and requirements to gain a pilot certificate as a contributing factor.

"The cost of becoming a pilot has become so great, because you need so many more hours," Ornstein said. "It's really limited the ability for anyone who is not a very wealthy person to become a pilot."

Rising Aviation High School in Addison, Texas, could help with this shortage. Principal Brent Fitzgerald said each student graduates with flight hours and a sport, recreational, private or drone pilot's license.



The airport in Addison, Texas, hosts flight classes for high school students. (FOX Business / Fox News)

"Students come just like any high school. They show up at 9 a.m. and they're here for the day. In addition, we have flight training built into the day," Fitzgerald said.

The school has just completed its first year and has more than tripled enrollment for the upcoming fall, thanks to summer camps where teens can dive into their aviation passions.



Rising Aviation High School in Addison could eventually help alleviate the pilot shortage by training future pilots.

Fitzgerald added that as camps continue over the summer and fall, the school's student population will continue to grow.

"Last year, on our first day, we had two students," Fitzgerald said. "That grew to about eight total students for the year. Now, we're already looking at 25 to 30 students."

Camper Timmy Aluko said the experience has piqued his aviation interest.

"You're literally going to high school in an airport," Aluko said. "Who wouldn't want to do that?"



Rising Aviation High School Principal Brent Fitzgerald said each student graduates with flight hours and a license.

Fitzgerald said the opportunities for students are not limited to flying planes. Students could take advantage of all learning opportunities at the Addison airport.

"We think there's a huge benefit to being located on the airport," Fitzgerald said. "Students can accomplish their flight training, or they may go down the street or across the other side of the airport to work on an internship at a maintenance facility, for example."

Mesa Airline's CEO also suggested raising the pilot retirement age and allowing pilots certified in other countries to sub for pilots in the U.S. until the pilot shortage issue is less severe.