

San Antonio Independent School District

Implementation of Kid's College

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The purpose of this report is to summarize the impact on reading and mathematics achievement growth as a function of an online student intervention and instructional program in the 10th largest school district in Texas, San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD).

San Antonio Independent School District is more than 100 years old and currently serves approximately 55,000 students in pre-K through 12th grade. San Antonio Independent School District has experienced declining enrollment for 40 years, having lost about one-third of its students to surrounding districts, charter schools and private schools. This is a district struggling against the economic impact of declining enrollment and, at the same time, meeting the needs of diverse student population.

“When enrollment goes down, the amount of (state) funding of course is reduced, and that means less of the programs and electives that keep students engaged in schools.”

Superintendent Robert Durón

However, under his leadership, SAISD is making academic progress. In 2008, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) announced that 34 out of 100 SAISD schools have achieved Recognized status. This represents an increase of 6 schools compared with the year before.¹ And, in a recent study² conducted by The Brown Center of Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, SAISD is included in the top 10 districts experiencing the greatest rate of student improvement in the nation.

Among the resources being used in SAISD to support greater student learning is Kid's College – an online tool that delivers differentiated instruction in mathematics and reading. Kid's College delivers differentiated instruction in exactly the manner called for by researchers working with English Language Learners:

“Regardless of the type of program..., remember that it's your responsibility to deliver instruction to these students in a way that meets their needs...”³

Kid's College engages students in an online environment with content appropriate to their skill levels. Kid's College becomes progressively easier or more challenging as students continue to practice and learn. But the self-paced online experience is only part of the story about how Kid's College supports differentiated instruction for every student. Twice a year, every student takes an online assessment.

This assessment results in customized, detailed workbooks that target every individual student's areas of need. The teachers also receive an Instructional Spotlight report which automatically groups students by common areas of need. The teachers can then provide intervention targeted to exactly what each student needs to learn or re-learn.

¹ August 1, 2008 www.SAID.net

² www.SAISD.net, January 29, 2010

³ B. Peterson & K.D. Salas. Rethinking Schools Online. “Working Effectively with English Language Learners,” Fall 2004.

Teachers receive updated Spotlight reports periodically throughout the year. This ensures that teachers are current in their understanding of what their students know and can do, and where they need help.

This periodic identification of where learning has broken down for each student helps teachers routinely and consistently tailor their instruction to maximize the learning growth of each student. Because Kid’s College produces the customized instructional workbooks automatically, there is no work burden for the teachers in locating supplementary or remedial content. The students continue to work in Kid’s College online and in the workbooks to advance their skills.

A Snapshot of SAISD

One of the oldest districts in Texas, SAISD serves predominantly poor and minority students. Ninety-six percent of SAISD’s enrollment is Hispanic, and 92% are qualified for either free or reduced priced meals or other support for economically disadvantaged students. Sixteen percent of students are English Language Learners enrolled in either Bilingual programs or in ESL programs.

From an accountability perspective, SAISD has both challenges and successes. The performance of SAISD⁴ on the TAKS test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) from the 2008-2009 school year shows SAISD students performing below the state. This table reports the percentage of students passing (first time administration) on each grade level accountability test for reading or mathematics. The gap between SAISD student performance and overall state performance ranges from 4 to 15 percentage points in reading and from 10 to 17 percentage points in mathematics.

	Reading	Mathematics
Grade 3		
State	90%	86%
District	84%	72%
<i>Difference</i>	-6	-14
Grade 4		
State	86%	88%
District	76%	76%
<i>Difference</i>	-10	-12
Grade 5		
State	85%	86%
District	70%	76%
<i>Difference</i>	-15	-10

⁴ AEIS 2009 report for SAISD

	Reading	Mathematics
Grade 6		
State	93%	82%
District	90%	65%
<i>Difference</i>	-3	-17
Grade 7		
State	87%	82%
District	81%	65%
<i>Difference</i>	-6	-17
Grade 8		
State	95%	82%
District	91%	67%
<i>Difference</i>	-4	-15

In order to accelerate the academic growth of students who are struggling with either mathematics or reading, Kid’s College was rolled out to 72 elementary and middle schools in SAISD in January 2009. Each school was allowed to decide whether they wanted to offer Kid’s College during the regular school day as a supplemental instructional program or as part of an after school program. Forty-two after school programs implemented Kid’s College. Between January and the start of the new school year, over 46,000 students logged in and worked in Kid’s College in SAISD. These students answered 972,289 total questions. They answered between 1 and 15 questions each time they logged in. And, the time students spent in Kid’s College was approximately 60 percent during school hours and 40 percent after school. The average time spent in each session in Kid’s College ranged from 2 minutes to 19 minutes. For students in grades Kindergarten through grade 5, this indicated that the students across the grades and age range within SAISD were engaged and interested in Kid’s College content.

Findings from the Case Study of Smith Elementary School

Kid’s College was selected by the principal of Smith Elementary to deliver differentiated instruction across a wide range of student achievement levels. Smith Elementary had approximately 576 students enrolled in grades K-5 during the 2008-2009 school year. Of these 85 percent were Hispanic, 14 percent African American, and 1 percent White. Twenty-seven percent were classified as Limited English Proficient. And, 95 percent of the student population was classified as economically disadvantaged. Of these 576 enrolled students, 496 (86 percent) were active learners in Kid’s College. Sixty-six percent of Smith Elementary students used Kid’s College during the course of regular instruction. Thirty-four percent participated in Kid’s College in their after school program.

Smith Elementary was the number one participant in Kid’s College for the district. Smith students spent the most time engaged in Kid’s College and answered the most questions for a total of 309,638 questions.

On the average, these students answered over 600 mathematics and reading skills questions during five months. The average number of questions answered each time the students logged into Kid's College was 19.3. The maximum amount of time engaged in Kid's College at one sitting was 107 minutes. The average (mean) time engaged per sitting was 15 minutes.

A closer look at student engagement in Kid's College reveals that a sample of students with the highest participation in Kid's College answered on average 2,721 questions with an average overall percentage correct of 80 percent. Students answered as many as 2,756 questions at grade 3, as many as 4,375 questions at grade 4, and as many as 3,139 questions at grade 5. Two conclusions emerge from these data. First, the technology is not a barrier for young children of the digital generation and second, that students were thoughtful about their work – thoughtful enough to answer most of the questions correctly.

An analysis of TAKS data for this sample of high users indicates improvement in TAKS reading and mathematics scores from 2008 to 2009, the time in which these students began utilizing Kid's College regularly. For these high users, the average TAKS reading score in 2009 was over 2300. The average TAKS mathematics score was over 2500. These students exceeded the Met Standards on the vertical scale. For the sample of high user students for which TAKS data was available from the prior year, these students increased their TAKS mathematics scores by an average 141 points and their TAKS reading scores by an average 115 points.

For a sample of students with the lowest participation in Kid's College, the average TAKS score was 1738 in mathematics and 2100 in reading. The differences between TAKS scores for high users of Kid's College versus low users are worth paying attention to.

Jhonaton's Story

One Smith Elementary student's story is particularly powerful. This story tells the possibilities that can result from student engagement with Kid's College. Meet Jhonatan.

When Jhonatan moved to San Antonio from Mexico and enrolled in Smith Elementary as a fifth grade student, he could speak, read, and write very little or no English. He began in Kid's College in February at the Kindergarten level in both reading and mathematics. He had quick success with mathematics at the Kindergarten level, answering 96 percent of the questions correctly. In Kindergarten reading, he answered 84 percent of the questions correctly.

By March, Jhonatan had already progressed to fourth grade level in mathematics, answering 67 percent of the questions correctly. His reading achievement moved at a somewhat slower pace, but by April, Jhonatan was mastering both fourth and fifth grade content in both reading and mathematics.

Jhonatan was not a high user of Kid's College, but he was steady. He answered 3,573 questions in total. He worked in Kid's College almost 1,500 minutes from January through June. And he did this work primarily in the after school program (84 percent). Notably, within three months, Jhonatan had moved from Kindergarten mastery to third grade mastery and was practicing fourth and fifth grade skills.

Conclusion and Implications

All students can accelerate their achievement growth when supported by the right tools. The right tools provide differentiated instruction and align to the state content standards. Elementary school is a critical period for students when they begin to build the knowledge and skills for middle and high school. If Kid's College can accelerate the reading and mathematics skills of students like Jhonatan who arrive in this country with no English skills, Kid's College can help all students. Some students will be like Jhonatan – struggling to get started on the right learning path. Others will need review and reteaching. Others will need and want a quick “refresher course.” Whatever their needs and whatever their goals, Kid's College can help each student be more and more successful in school.

SAISD has challenges ahead with the economic conditions and with figuring out how to meet the diverse needs of their students. But Kid's College is a ready tool to help more and more students learn and succeed.