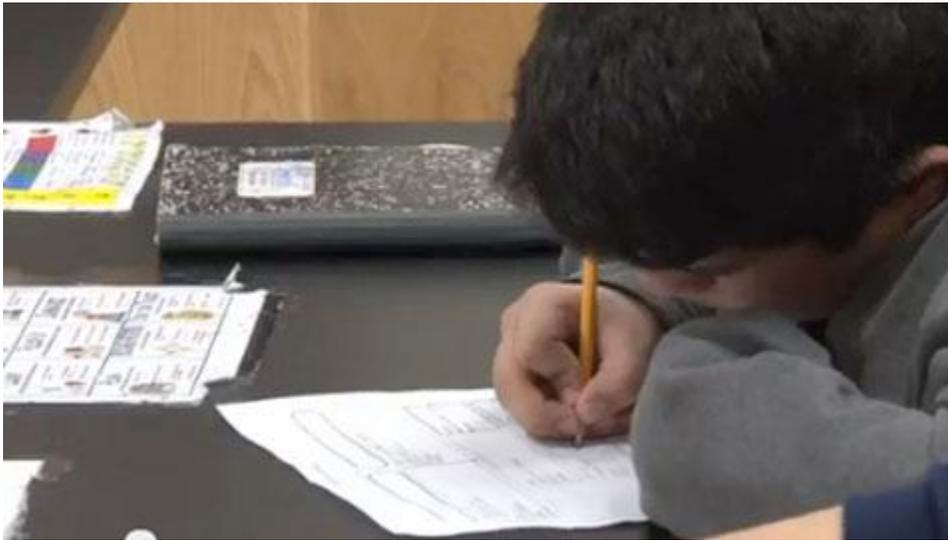


Pilot study changes how students learn

Posted By [Free Press Contributor](#) On April 3, 2013 @ 5:01 pm In [Schools](#) | [No Comments](#)



[1]

A Simon Middle School student using the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) that Principal Matt Pope said is nothing short of transformational for his students. (Courtesy Photo)

by **KIM HILSENBECK**

Students at Simon Middle School are immersed in a pilot study using Strategic Instruction Model (SIM). The results so far, according to Simon Principal Matt Pope, are nothing short of transformational.

In a partnership between Central Texas schools, Dell and E3 Alliance, Simon was one of seven area middle schools that benefitted from RAISE up Texas. The goal of the program is to build college and career readiness.

Under a one-time \$1 million dollar grant from the Dell Foundation, the middle schools, including Simon as well as Goodnight in the San Marcos CISD, were able to implement SIM. Developed in 1988 by researchers at the University of Kansas-Center for Research on Learning, SIM is a research-based model for whole-school reform.

Proponents say at its core, the model is promoting effective teaching and learning of critical content in schools. SIM helps teachers make decisions about what is of greatest importance, what teachers can teach students to help them to learn, and how to teach them well.

This new method of instruction is a critical piece of the model.

Each of the middle schools in the RAISE up Texas program funded by the Dell Foundation have a SIM coach – a teacher who goes through professional development training to learn the SIM way. At Simon, it's Kristyna Brewer.

Another benefit to Simon being involved, Pope said, is that when the initial seed money runs out, Hays CISD will have its own in-house trainers and professional development instructors, which is a significant chunk of the cost to implement SIM.

Yet perhaps more important than training teachers in SIM is how students become engaged in the learning process.

Pope, who has been at Simon for three years, two as assistant principal, said students used to just receive information from teachers.

With SIM, “Students are taking an active role in their own learning,” Pope said.

He spoke recently at an E3 Alliance summit to Central Texas business leaders – many of whom are keeping a pulse of the future workforce pool.

“SIM completely transforms thinking,” he told the audience.

His assertions are based on higher scores on end of unit assessments and benchmark assessments.

“We’ve seen huge gains on those test,” Pope said.

He said parents have also provided feedback about seeing higher grades on report cards.

Under SIM, school-wide learning in every subject is affected. Teachers learn how to more effectively organize the content. Pope said SIM gives teachers a way to organize and differentiate the material for all levels of learners.

At the same time, students benefit from organizing what they learn. Students can expect the same kind of instruction in each class because the teachers are all using SIM strategies. The process encompasses strategies for acquiring information from the printed word, strategies for organizing and memorizing information, strategies for solving math problems, and strategies for expressing information in writing (including on tests).

“And these are strategies the students can take with them throughout their educational life and into the workforce,” Pope said.

For example, there are four SIM strategies specifically related to reading:

- Paraphrasing – students express main idea and details in their own words
- Self questioning – students develop questions concerning reading passages and read to find answers
- Visual imagery – students visualize scenes in detail
- Word identification- students decode unfamiliar words by using context clues and word analysis

In a video produced by E3, one student talking about SIM told viewers, “It will help basically the rest of your life.”

In that same video, Brewer said, “SIM has truly transformed student learning.”

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