Student growth motivates teachers to embrace digital reading data

South Texas educators see Tier 1 increases after using Istation Reading and Istation Español to differentiate classroom teaching

When Rio Grande City Consolidated ISD introduced a digital reading program two years ago, some teachers balked at student assessments being performed by a computer.

Those concerns abated as teachers saw increased proficiency for the 4,100 students using Istation Reading and Istation Español, says Serapio Trillayes, executive director for curriculum and instruction for the district, which is located in South Texas, near the Mexican border.

"Teachers missed the face-to-face assessments, but there's excitement and motivation when they see growth month to month, with students going from Tier 3 to Tier 2 or from Tier 2 to Tier 1," Trillayes says.

Istation provides digital and in-person lessons, strategies and tools to support diverse teaching practices, such as small- and whole-group instruction. Differentiated instruction and personal learning are supported by Istation's seven essentials for blended learning. These include formative assessments, adaptive curriculum, personalized data profiles, teacher-directed lessons, school-to-home connection, professional development and proven results.

Monthly assessments

Each month, Rio Grande City students take a 30-minute computerized, game-like assessment on five components of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Students then use Istation daily, with the program adjusting the material and the level of difficulty according to individual student needs.

"It's very challenging," Trillayes says. "If a student masters certain concepts, they're going to take it to the next level.

For students at or above grade level, we utilize Istation for enrichment."

Rio Grande City, whose students all qualify for free or reduced lunch, used Istation for pre-K through grade 5 for two years before expanding to grades 6 through 8 for the 2018-19 school year.

Results have been positive across all grades, Trillayes says. From September 2017 to May 2018, the Tier 1 first-grader reading group grew from 257 to 289, a gain of about 12.5 percent. During the same period, the Tier 3 group dropped about 21 percent from 188 to 148.

Administrators can generate reports at the district, school, grade, classroom or individual level. Teachers then use this information to choose Istation resources or their own to differentiate instruction in the classroom.

Spanish component

For about 600 pre-K to grade 1 ELL students, learning to read is a two-step process that is assisted by Istation Español.

"Research tells us that once a child masters the skills and concepts in reading in their native language, they can easily transfer them to the other lan-

guage," Trillayes says. "So Spanish-dominant students learn those skills in Spanish and transfer them to English."

Istation Español is not a translation tool; it is designed by Spanish-language educators for pre-K through grade 5 Spanish literacy. All materials, including assessments, are in Spanish.

Teachers welcome this and the entire Istation program, which supports—not supplants—them, Trillayes says.

"Teachers are using this data to differentiate instruction," Trillayes says. "But how can you know how to differentiate instruction if you don't have data? The data is very motivating and is helping children learn to read.

"It's what we want. If students can read and comprehend, they can do any other subject."

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