Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

A Case Study by Melody S. Gee

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sibme

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Executive Summary

Cypress-Fairbanks ISD in Harris County Texas includes 91 schools and serves over 117,000 students. The district's Curriculum & Instruction and Accountability (CIA) team helps over 8,000 teachers with professional development and growth by providing access to technology, resources, support, and opportunities for collaboration.

After hearing about one school principal's experience with Sibme in 2015, the Cypress-Fairbanks CIA team launched into action to offer it as a resource option to more principals. Today, roughly 40 campuses across the Cypress-Fairbanks district are using Sibme software, each specifically tailoring the platform to the needs of their students, faculty, and administrators.

In the following case study, three members of the Cypress-Fairbanks Curriculum & Instruction and Accountability team present their experiences and conclusions with Sibme software, including higher rates of collaboration, modeling and sharing best practices with more convenience and wider reach, and quantifiably improved student achievement. Interview participants also provide recommendations to other districts considering Sibme, based on three years of piloting and scaling across nearly half the schools in Cypress-Fairbanks district.

Interview participants include:

Dr. Linda Macias
Associate Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction and Accountability

Barbara Levandoski
Director Elementary Curriculum & Instruction

Lana Mock
Director Middle School Curriculum & Instruction

Introduction: Sharing a Good Idea

Dr. Linda Macias first heard about Sibme from Becky Koop, a Cypress-Fairbanks elementary school principal who attended a presentation by Sibme founder and CEO Dave Wakefield in her graduate course at Rice University. After Ms. Koop brought Sibme to her campus for the "opportunity to build collegial work among teachers," she shared the platform and her experiences with the Cypress-Fairbanks CIA team. Dr. Macias recalls, "Certainly, teachers videoing their lessons, being able to give themselves feedback and then connect with a colleague to give feedback was the piece that was of most interest to us." She and her team then invited Sibme to present their software platform to the principals in their district.

Video is the Best Tool for Improvement

Members of the Cypress-Fairbanks CIA team already knew from research that what teachers think is happening in the classroom doesn't always match what's really going on. Familiar with Jim Knight's[1] work, the team knew that video provides "the best opportunity and best tools to improve the work that you do."

Dr. Macias elaborates on the unparalleled ability of video to give teachers an honest look at whether "there's too much teacher-talk and not enough student-talk, if they're really just calling on one group of kids, if they're only standing on one side, if the group in the back needs to be called more." Capturing teachers in real-time classroom interactions provides the truest picture of their work.

A Comprehensive Platform for Using Video

Cypress-Fairbanks teachers were already trying to use limited resources to record their teaching sessions. Ms. Levandoski knew of "one campus that was already videotaping with their phones." When that campus' principal heard Sibme's presentation, "she saw that this platform could allow her to go deeper and richer" with features like time-stamped commenting and collaborative sharing.

The CIA team also saw exciting possibilities for sharing best practices. Ms. Mock noticed multiple campuses working on similar goals, but without an easy way to share and collaborate. "I have campuses working on rigorous questioning and I see a teacher who's very effective with her questioning. Without video, the only way to demonstrate is to have someone get a sub and go to another campus to watch that teacher in action." The ease and efficiency of video sharing could promote collaboration without disrupting multiple schedules.

The Pilot: Nine Campuses Adopt Sibme

After attending the Sibme presentation, Cypress-Fairbanks principals were given the option to try it on their campuses. "We are firm believers in pilots," states Dr. Macias. "We are a large district and we need to work out the kinks." Nine campuses asked to be part of the first pilot.

Flexibility First

During the pilot phase, the CIA team committed to giving every campus maximum flexibility and autonomy, allowing principals and teachers to determine how to begin using Sibme. Each campus decided for themselves, "how much time do we give teachers to get comfortable with the system by viewing themselves? At what point do we say it's time to share and get feedback?"

Once campuses completed their pilots and reported their various uses of Sibme software—including engaging in video coaching, giving teachers a safe space for private self-reflection, and building shared video libraries—the CIA team used their experience and feedback to develop a set of models.

The Framework: Customized Models for Every Campus

Now, Cypress-Fairbanks campuses can choose among four Sibme models their CIA team designed. Each model focuses on one aspect of teacher growth, with enough flexibility to adapt to diverse sets of needs across campuses and grade levels. "We run the gamut of how to use the models," Dr. Macias explains. "It's really a campus initiative." The framework models include:

Team Collaboration Model

Teachers work in teams to share best practices, develop and grow a video library, give each other feedback, and meet regularly in huddles--private spaces in the Sibme platform where groups can collaborate online.

Teacher Self-Reflection Model

Teachers are invited to video themselves in the classroom and review their own recordings, providing self-reflection and self-feedback. While administrators track analytics, only seeing data that videos are recorded and viewed, teachers can get used to being on camera and watching their performances and choose to share only when they are ready.

Collegial Partnership Model

In pairs, teachers review videos of each other's teaching sessions and offer peer feedback and collaboration toward growth. Teachers self-select pairs and establish an ongoing partnership for supportive improvement.
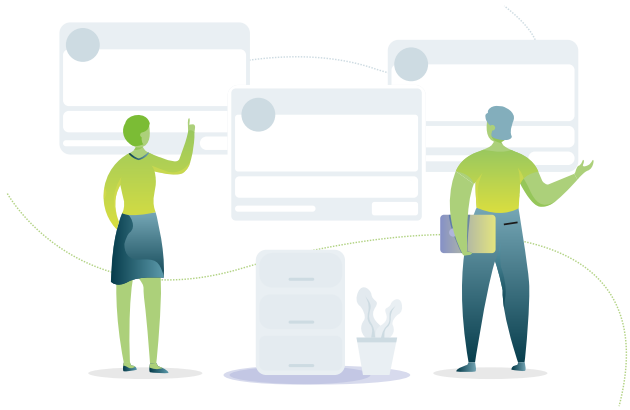
Video Coaching Model

Teachers are assigned individual coaches to work with one-on-one, reviewing videos of their teaching session and addressing their individual questions, concerns, and plans for improvement. Without ever serving in an evaluative role, coaches provide ongoing mentorship and support.

Ongoing Flexibility and Customization

This four-model framework aims to balance standardization with flexibility. Ms. Levandoski works with elementary campuses that each decide "if they want to start with everyone or one grade level team." She has seen "one campus just start with their fourth grade team and build it from there." Dr. Macias emphasizes that the CIA team has "standardized the models campuses choose, but how the model is used is site-based. It's a campus decision. Most campuses have all teachers involved, but at different levels. It really is a campus initiative."

The Results: Impacting Teachers, Administrators, and Students

When describing Sibme's results, the team notes that "it helps with every aspect of teaching." Teachers widely report "wishing they had something like this earlier in their career." The CIA team has gathered feedback on campus changes, and seen some of it for themselves.

Improved Accuracy

At Cypress-Fairbanks, teacher appraisal is done through in-person classroom observations as per the Texas state evaluation system. "With instructional walks, you're scripting what you're seeing," remarks Dr. Macias. And the evaluations often involve "teachers disputing what happened. But you can't dispute a video. There's a huge difference between the two." More supportive and impactful feedback comes from having access to a true and complete picture of classroom dynamics.

Increased Collaboration

Rather than feeling self-conscious or inhibited, the CIA team has found teachers quite willing and eager to share their teaching sessions. Lana Mock describes one middle school where teachers were only asked to self-reflect privately, but quickly took it upon themselves to "reach out to colleagues asking for feedback on their videos." Moreover, teachers are reaching out to collaborate in new ways. Ms. Mock describes teachers looking beyond their own teams and engaging more with district curriculum coaches, even going to other campuses "asking others who teach their same content to view their videos." Given the opportunity to see themselves in action, teachers are initiating more and new kinds of collaboration.

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> *Teachers are reaching out to collaborate in new ways. [They are] looking beyond their own teams and engaging more with district curriculum coaches, even going to other campuses.*

Lana Mock
Director of Middle School
Curriculum & Instruction

Teacher-Led Growth

Granted the freedom to choose their own areas for improvement, Ms. Mock is seeing teachers "focus on one specific area, grow in that area, feel they have a handle on that, then say, here's my next goal." Targeting teachers' self-identified needs, issues, and instructional strategies has resulted in "teachers adding to their toolbelt and coming back for more."

Modeling with Greater Reach

On campuses that use video sharing to model best practices, Ms. Levandoski has noticed teachers once again sharing out and benefitting beyond their local teams. After viewing a teaching coach modeling a lesson, teachers can record and share themselves giving that same lesson, providing colleagues with a wealth of modeling resources. "Even if they're not working with a coach, because those videos are now in the library, teachers can go and view a great lesson. They feel like they're really building their skills."

At one campus, the administrators showed their true commitment to modeling by "videotaping themselves in front of teachers during faculty meetings." Teachers witnessed first-hand how their school leaders found opportunities to grow, change their behavior, and model expectations.

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Barbara Levandoski
Director Elementary Curriculum & Instruction

Deeper Self-Awareness

Finding ways to grow depends on knowing what's really happening in the classroom. The CIA team has seen results ranging from teachers becoming "cognizant of their location in the classroom" to "changing their style of teaching" after seeing evidence that they teach differently than they had perceived.

Impacting Student Achievement

When the CIA team examined student achievement, they found that "every campus in the program last year met all standards set by the state of Texas. These are all campuses with a Title I designation, and they've met all state standards. Sibme is a part of this."

The Future: Scaling Sibme Across a District

After successful pilots on nine campuses, Cypress-Fairbanks implemented Sibme across roughly forty campuses over the next two years, with plans for steady and continual growth. Currently, the district uses Title I funds and is able to provide the platform to every campus that requests it. As they move forward, their plans for growth are strategic.

Eliminating Barriers

For seamless onboarding, the CIA team proactively eliminates "excuses about why they couldn't do the videos or why they didn't have the right equipment." They use a few simple purchases, like individual sound systems and clips to secure a phone or tablet to a desktop computer, to ensure that interested campuses can easily provide teachers with tools to participate.

Spreading the Word

Already, word of mouth has been the most effective means of scaling Sibme. The team has found that "if it's an awesome product, principals will start talking. We've grown it by campuses themselves advocating for it."

Additionally, they invite Sibme to present at an annual Cypress-Fairbanks conference, reaching over 1,300 attendees from inside and outside the district. From there, campus leaders request the software and agree to come to the training. The CIA team is ready to expand its offering to "any campus that comes forward and asks to be a part of Sibme."

What's Next for Cypress-Fairbanks?

In addition to increasing the number of campuses using Sibme, the CIA team believes "there is still more we would like to do" with the software platform, from "coaching on the district level to the collaborative planning classroom." With several campuses well-established in the platform now, the team is "working on enhancing what we're doing and ready to delve into what else Sibme has to offer."

When principals using the platform identify a need or make specific requests, Ms. Levandoski "immediately contacts Dave and his team, and they get it." Through a live webinar, each campus is given the opportunity to provide feedback or make request directly to Sibme. The CIA team has noticed that "if there's anything we see that needs to be tweaked, they're on it. They're very responsive."

The district also plans to continue using the data Sibme sends monthly, receiving support on time-sensitive issues that arise during the school year, and collaborating with the Sibme team on planning and training.

Conclusion: Best Practices and Experienced Advice

From the beginning, the Cypress-Fairbanks CIA team knew certain best practices were imperative to teacher success, comfort, and growth. They approached the Sibme software platform with a combination of experience and openness to learning from challenges. "Our process has evolved," reflects Dr. Macias. The team offers some practical advice for any district considering Sibme.

Separate Coaching from Evaluation

The single most important commitment and assurance the CIA team made to its campuses was that coaching would remain completely separate from teacher evaluation. Video sharing and feedback were never linked to evaluation, nor was coaching ever done by an evaluator.

Removing evaluation entirely means ensuring that teachers see using video is "truly a tool for growth, and that it's okay to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. This is to build teacher capacity and improve learning and teaching." Their aim was to have teachers see Sibme as an aid to "increase their capacity as instructors in the classroom."

Ms. Mock describes how some administrators truly committed to this mentality of growth and improvement. "I have campuses whose administrators will stay out of Sibme totally. They lay out the initiative and goals and expectations, then purposely remove themselves—other than to track who's using it." The message they hoped to send was that "failure leads to feedback" and is not evaluative or putative.

Offer a Safe Space for Teachers to See Themselves

Knowing that watching yourself teach on video takes some getting used to, Dr. Macias advises districts to "make sure you allow time for teachers to develop comfort with being videoed." Cypress-Fairbanks moved slowly, initially keeping teaching videos completely private. "The first step is teachers videoing a couple of lessons and giving themselves feedback with nobody else seeing it." With increased comfort and confidence, teachers then invite a colleague of their choice to view their teaching video and give feedback.

Relationships, Buy-in, and Messaging

Implementing any new system, Ms. Mock says, "is all about relationships." Principals are key to setting the tone and establishing trust. They do this by making sure their purpose is clear and communicating clearly that Sibme is not part of the evaluation process, especially when teachers feel hesitant or self-conscious. She adds that "we do a lot of training for campus coaches on how to offer feedback and create buy-in."

At the elementary level, Ms. Levandoski has seen principals use various approaches. One new principal impressed from the beginning "how Sibme is going to help every teacher grow, how it's going to be beneficial to everyone." Other principals implemented it across the board by strategically picking a campus pilot team. Once their first group of teachers started talking and spreading the word, they knew they could expand Sibme's use.

Knowing how much the success of a pilot rests on campus leadership, the team emphasizes that "the campus leader has to truly believe this tool is for teacher growth, and that has to be the universal message."

Make Training Structured and Team Focused

Lana Mock describes learning from experience how best to set up and complete training. "Two years ago, we offered the training and put it out there with different times to come, with a variety of sessions on different days. We learned from that experience because we didn't have the right people at the table at the same time."

Now, Cypress-Fairbanks has a streamlined system for onboarding campuses to Sibme. "This year," says Ms. Mock, "we think we got it right. We send an email telling campuses who needs to attend the training, and that they must attend this training as a team, because that's how it's going to be implemented best on the campuses."

Together, the district and Sibme approach training collaboratively, with early and frequent communication. "We all meet with Dave [Wakefield] to talk about what the training is going to look like, when a follow-up will occur to make sure everybody is on board. We set up the parameters, Sibme does the training, and we share what the expectations are from the district—because we are using federal funds, we do have to have expectations set up that we can monitor."

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> *Because the district's size makes it impossible to have a coach at every campus, Ms. Levandoski now relies on Sibme to facilitate [planning sessions]. The team's goal is to provide this kind of support across many more campuses.*

Sibme is Not Just for Teachers

Cypress-Fairbanks has found ways for their coordinators and curriculum coaches to use the video platform as well. Ms. Mock describes how "a campus might send a planning video for the coordinator to view and give feedback on." Because the district's size makes it impossible to have a coach at every campus, Ms. Levandoski now relies on Sibme to facilitate scenarios like this one: "Our Language Arts Coordinator can view a video of the 5th grade planning session at Campus A and provide feedback on their meeting with a time stamp." The team's goal is to provide this kind of support across many more campuses.

In the three short years since their Sibme pilot, the Cypress-Fairbanks CIA team has learned a great deal about implementing and scaling a new technology across their district. Dr. Macias notes that her team is continuously adapting to best serve teachers and students. Research, experience, and an unwavering commitment to collaboration, responsiveness, structure, and flexibility, has helped this district respond to needs, provide support, and facilitate growth in teachers, administrators, and students alike.

sibme

Sibme is a video coaching and collaboration platform designed to improve teaching and learning. Keep videos, resources, feedback and discussions organized across teams, schools, districts, teacher preparation programs, and education-related organizations.

To learn more about what Sibme can do, please visit *www.sibme.com* or email us at *info@sibme.com*.