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TUTORING CASE STUDY

Ector County Independent School District

Ector County Independent School District (ECISD), based in Odessa, Texas, launched a district-wide tutoring initiative in the spring of 2021. We spoke with **Lisa Wills**, ECISD's Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction, who's highly optimistic about the program thus far and its promise for advancing student learning in the coming two years. Below, we summarize ECISD's approach to tutoring, as well as their key insights a year in.

ECISD by the Numbers
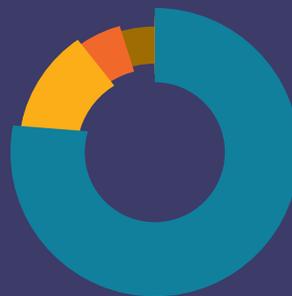
TOTAL POPULATION

31,881 students

44 schools

RACIAL & ETHNIC MAKEUP

- 78% Hispanic
- 15% White
- 4% Black
- 3% Other

% OF STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LEARNERS

18%

FUNDING PER STUDENT

$8,722

% OF STUDENTS WITH FREE AND REDUCED MEALS

59%

Tutoring Program Overview
The Vitals

Model

High-dosage. Participating students receive services three times per week for 30 minutes, or two times per week for 45 minutes; all participants must have at least 30 total hours of tutoring during the year, per TX HB 4545.

Program Type

The program is administered by **three external partners**: FEV, AirTutor, and Amplify. The district approved these three from a larger sample of tutoring providers who bidded; individual schools were then able to select which they preferred to work with (or were free to choose another provider/create an in-house program, but none did so).

Student Group(s) Prioritized

The program **does not target any set/specific student groups**, but decision-making leverages STAAR test data and the input of teachers to determine which students would most benefit.

Grades Served & Subjects Covered

FEV serves grades 3-12, in reading and math; AirTutor, K-12, also reading and math; and Amplify, K-2, reading only. **The initiative has 6,000 total spots for students** (with some students getting both math and reading).

Session Timing

In the 2021-22 school year, elementary tutoring was **during the school day**; middle/high school tutoring was a **mix of during and after school**. After-school tutoring was broadly viewed as less effective. While the district will continue to offer it next year, they plan to both tighten attendance protocols and move as much of the middle/high school tutoring to during-school hours as possible.

Delivery Method

All tutoring is **virtual, in small groups**. Groups are three students or fewer; in some cases, if parents sign off, groups may go up to five students. Tutors work from **grade-level curriculum**, and/or they may bring in **supplemental curriculum**. The district's sole requirement for tutor materials is that they be aligned to the TEKS.

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Program Journey
From Decision-Making to Outcomes-Monitoring

Deciding on Tutoring

ECISD'S decision to launch a tutoring program was motivated by three major factors: the pandemic, a wave of new teachers, and TX state policy. The pandemic deepened their existing challenge to deliver consistently rigorous instruction. As Wills said, "we have a tendency to take it down instead of up," in order to make academic content accessible. In the wake of COVID closures, district leaders viewed tutoring as a means of ensuring grade-level instruction. Second, the district has faced a teacher shortage, and with it, an influx of inexperienced teachers. A tutoring program administered by external providers would be a way of "taking some of the lift off" teachers just getting their bearings. Finally, the district anticipated implementation of TX House Bill 4545, which requires that students who fail the STAAR test receive at least 30 hours of "supplemental instruction." District compliance with HB 4545 is mandatory in SY 2022-23.

Setting Requirements

Wills named three criteria as crucial to choosing tutoring providers: that the provider demonstrate an **understanding of the TEKS**, which are distinctive from many other state standards; that sessions be delivered by a **live tutor**, to answer student questions and walk them through steps (i.e. no tech-driven automation); and that the provider be willing to enter an **outcomes-based contract**. Contracts with providers are structured such that they receive a base pay if students achieve their "projected growth" (i.e. a year of growth) on the NWEA MAP test; a 5% bonus for students outstripping that goal by 5%; and a 10% bonus if students achieve one and a half years of growth or more.

Implementing

Wills identified a number of conditions that have been key to success, focusing especially on earning the buy-in of schools. During program rollout, school principals had a high degree of participation and say in which tutoring provider(s) to use and how to implement on their campuses. Wills remarked that, "The tight part was, you have to do tutoring. The loose part was, you can choose how you're going to do it." This helped school leaders take ownership, and they were highly diligent on the whole in overseeing tutoring. Second, as in other districts we've spoken to, Wills emphasized the importance of a dedicated tutoring coordinator, who's responsible for brass tacks implementation in schools. Finally and relatedly, she described intensive and ongoing district oversight: "We didn't just say to the campuses, here's your tutoring provider, now go get busy with it. It was constant, constant monitoring by us."

Monitoring Outcomes

The district looks at a composite of measures to evaluate program effectiveness: reports from the tutoring providers themselves, based on assessments given during sessions; **results from Istation**, an e-learning program in place district-wide for reading; and, most importantly, the **"conditional growth measure" from the MAP test**, which assesses realized student growth against projected. More informally, district leadership has stayed on top of attendance reports and reviews from students, teachers, and school leaders; in fact, ECISD parted ways with one provider early on due to negative feedback from participants, and they replaced several individual tutors based on student feedback as well.

After a year of the program, the district is very pleased with outcomes, which show that students who participated in tutoring exhibited significantly more academic growth than those who did not. Wills is also generally pleased with qualitative response to the program (gathered mainly via surveys) across stakeholders. She told us, "The students loved it. They really liked that individual attention and the immediate feedback. And the teachers and principals liked it too, especially the fact that they just had to get the providers the list of students and what basic content to work on, and then the tutoring company took over. So they liked it - IF there weren't issues – issues with technology, or with communication with the company – when that's all working, it's great."

"What would you do differently?"
Top Tips from ECISD

FIT AS MANY TUTORING SESSIONS AS POSSIBLE INTO THE SCHOOL DAY i.e. not after school, when attendance was a significant challenge.

PLAN A "SLOW ROLLOUT."

This fall, the tutoring coordinator will launch the program one campus at a time, beginning with the highest-need campuses, rather than launching in multiple simultaneously. Each school-based launch will have a district-level team there for support with logistics and technology.

CONSIDER THE CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL TUTORING FOR THE YOUNGEST STUDENTS.

Based on outcomes, the district is not continuing virtual tutoring for grades K-1, and may pursue in-person tutoring for these students instead. These students often struggled to connect with tutors virtually, and with navigating the technology itself. On the other hand, older students did not struggle with this aspect of the program, as district leadership anticipated they might. Students in middle and high school demonstrated comparable growth even in the tutoring programs that were primarily chat-based rather than video.

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