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**Teachers Explore New Methods For Teaching Literacy In Long Island Schools**

**By Patricia Hawke**

Sachem School District teachers completed another professional development activity thanks to the

University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. The program is called the Strategic Instructional Model (SIM) and looks at how teachers can improve literacy in low performing adolescents

The Strategic Instructional Model

Developed over 25 years of research, SIM works to help teachers recognize what lessons are of greatest importance and target those lessons towards a diverse group of learners. SIM rests on four philosophical principles:

- Low proficiency students can be taught in mainstream classrooms.
- Teacher's aides, or support teachers, should concentrate on helping students develop learning strategies.
- Subject teachers should organize their lessons so that the material can be understood and remembered by low proficiency students.
- The students should be actively involved in deciding how to learn new strategies.

SIM works on two levels, one addressing the needs of the teacher and the other addressing the needs of the student. For teachers, SIM training provides a method for organizing information in ways that are most useful for students, so that they can understand what they learn and then be able to use it to accomplish tasks. For students, academic coaching develops learning strategies that can be applied to what they learn in school. These strategies range from learning ways to approach written texts, including informational readings and math word problems, as well as ways to express information in writing, as is often required on standardized tests.

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Another important element of SIM is the way that it promotes teamwork among teachers, students, and parents. In deciding what content to teach to students, teachers and students work together to determine what information students need and what the best method of delivering that information is. This creates a feeling of comradery in the learning community and helps all stakeholders contribute to the overall success of students.

### What Long Island Teachers are Saying About SIM

Many classroom teachers have welcomed SIM as a concrete approach to meeting the needs of their students. After observing a demonstration writing lesson conducted using the method, teacher Jill Kristoff comments, "The SIM sentence writing strategy is a very useful tool for children, teaching them grammar and sentence structure, as well as improving their writing; and because it is taught in steps, children of all abilities can be successful with it!"

### What Long Island Schools Students are Saying About SIM

Students agree with their teachers that SIM offers them a lot of structure for understanding what they are learning. After observing the demonstration lesson conducted by University of Kansas teacher - trainer Dottie Turner, one student said, "Ms. Turner helped me a lot with sentences. She taught me what a good sentence needs. Now my sentences are much better with details, and they are not boring." Another student also believed that she had benefited from the demonstration lesson and expressed her pride in participating in a professional development experience for her teacher. She commented: "The demo lesson was helpful to my writing. It was also a lot of fun. Teachers were sitting in the back, but they were not watching me. They were watching Ms. Turner. I loved that lesson!"

The Sachem School District community hopes that SIM will help local teachers and students achieve higher statewide assessment scores by including all students in the learning experience. The Strategic Instructional Model meets the guidelines for the No Child Left Behind Act and studies have shown improved academic performance for all students. Long Island schools welcome this added tool for improving the achievement of their students and look forward to implementing it on a broader level for their students.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12 , providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on Long Island schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/New-York/Long-Island/index.html>

## **New Experience For Some San Diego Schools Students And Their Teachers**

**By Patricia Hawke**

This July, Annie Santana, a Spanish teacher at Mission Bay High School, part of the San Diego schools, departed the city and headed for the island of Robinson Crusoe, Chile. In the seventh year of

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her career, Santana joined the Fulbright teacher exchange program.

For one year, Santana will teach English as a second language at a Chilean school on the island; but her students will not be losing her. A Chilean teacher will be replacing Santana at Mission Bay. While both teachers are immersing themselves into their new cultures, the students in both countries also will be exposed through their teachers to a new cultural experience and another country.

Both teachers will have many challenges to face, since there are many differences between the cultures. Chilean classrooms, for example, are smaller in size than those in the San Diego schools. The culture-driven relationships between teacher and student are much closer in Chile, as well.

Santana initiated the contact with the Fulbright teacher exchange program. She believed that she was ready to advance to the next level of cross-cultural experiences by teaching abroad. Santana thoroughly researched the available options. Many did not meet her needs, since she would have to give up her teaching position with the San Diego schools. The Fulbright program best fit her needs, since the exchange is only for one year and an exchange teacher will take her place, allowing her to retain her position with the San Diego schools.

Santana chose Chile, because it is more economically stable than other Latin American countries. To prepare for her trip to Chile, she read the "House of Spirits", by Chilean author Isabel Allende. The book aptly portrays the culture in Chile, which is largely influenced by the many German immigrants over the years.

Before leaving in July, Santana remarked of her interest in experiencing the differences between the cultures of the U.S. and Chile. She also was excited to see how Chile differs from other Latin American cultures, of which she is familiar from her own Mexican heritage. She also was looking forward to seeing how school operations differ from the San Diego schools, as well as societal norms and the general day-to-day routines.

Other differences that Santana and her students back in the San Diego schools will experience are the Chilean customs and the difference between the Spanish known and taught by Santana and Chilean Spanish, which has a different accent, slang and word usage.

Santana is scheduled to return to the United States and the San Diego schools in July 2007. Until then, she plans to communicate with her family, friends, the Chilean teacher, and her San Diego schools' students by way of the Internet. She wants everyone, especially her San Diego schools' students, to enjoy her adventure with her. It is a great opportunity for them to experience life outside San Diego.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. For more information on San Diego schools visit

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