

Sirius Education Solutions helps United ISD to a 91% districtwide passing rate on the Algebra I STAAR Exam.

Ramiro Garza is in charge of the secondary math curriculum for United ISD in Laredo, Texas. Laredo is highly diverse, like many regions in Texas. As the High School Math Coordinator for the district, his job is to find solutions to ongoing, nagging problems. When Garza became the math coordinator in January of 2014, he had his hands full.



THE SITUATION.

In 2013, the United ISD districtwide passing rate was 65% for the STAAR Algebra I assessment. At risk populations had a passing rate of 51%. And United ISD's diversity was growing rapidly due to the expanding populations of many colonias, or extremely low income housing areas along the Texas/Mexico border. According to a regional study* as of the year 2000, United ISD was gaining 1,500 students per year.

The greatest challenge faced by United ISD, according to Garza, was the broad range of diversity within the district. The southern part of the district, where the colonias are located, are considerably more disadvantaged than the northern part of the district. Conditions of some of the colonias are well under expectations for a

community in the United States: no running water or sewage, unpaved streets, and poor quality housing. And no explanation is necessary that students living in such impoverished conditions will struggle to perform to their academic potential.

"Part of our student population live in those conditions. If there's bad weather, they can't get to school, our school buses can't get in there to get them. Some of these kids get on the bus around 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning just to get to school on time," said Garza. "The same plan that works for the north side, the more affluent neighborhood campuses, isn't necessarily going to work for the less affluent south side."

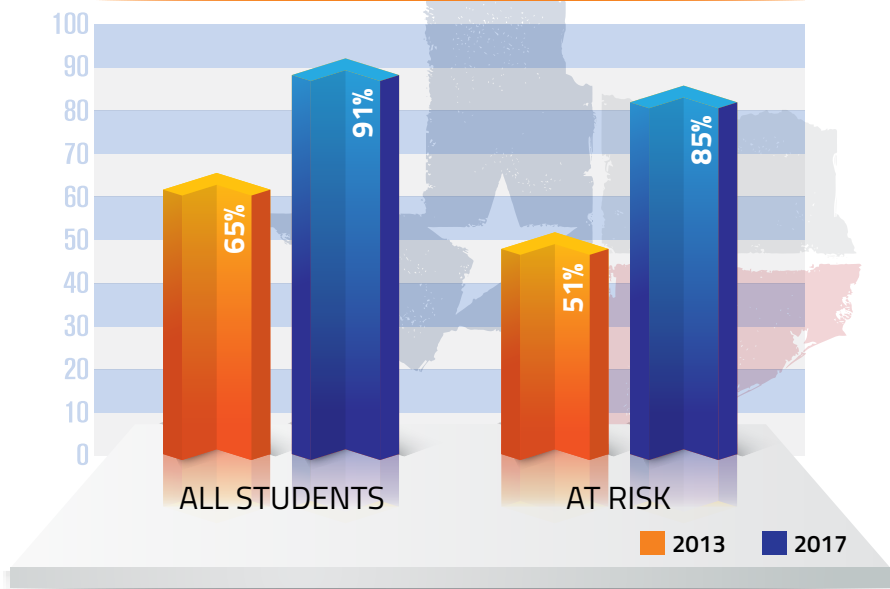
THE SOLUTION.

United ISD initially began using Sirius's Algebra I EOC: STAAR Readiness Review and Practice for summer school in 2015.

"We had just switched TEKS and were looking for materials that had the feel and the rigor, the item type that resembled the exam. I did a comparison, everyone was trying to sell their products as ones that addressed the new TEKS, and as I compared them I only found one or two products that did so. Sirius was definitely the better one," said Garza. "We analyzed why Sirius was a better product than the other workbooks, and ultimately it turned a focus on rigor, style, and format."

The results came quickly. By 2017, the overall passing rate in Algebra I for all student populations at United climbed dramatically to 91%. Even more notable was the passing

ALGEBRA 1 PASSING RATES, UNITED ISD



rate for every student population rose. Students classified as being “at risk” had a passing rate of 85% in 2017.

Even advanced students saw test score increases from using Algebra I EOC. But perhaps the most notable result is that the scores from the most disadvantaged schools, those in the southern part of the district, came within 3 percentage points of the more advantaged northern schools.

“The lowest performing campus, my LBJ campus, the one that houses many of the most disadvantaged students in South Laredo, their passing percentage rose to 91%. And my north campus, where the more

affluent students were housed, they were at 94%. So when you have only a 3% difference between your lowest campus and your highest campus, and your lowest campus is above 90%, then something is working,” said Garza.

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**SIRIUS IS DIFFERENT.
SIRIUS IS EFFECTIVE.**

“You look at the released problems and then you look at different products... and time and time again Sirius distinguished themselves.

“We don’t find anything out there that’s set up the same way, written the same way....the Sirius workbook is extremely overt in style and purpose and the way it presents the material.”

— **Ramiro Garza, United ISD**

Sirius STAAR readiness workbooks are different and effective. They are built using released STAAR tests so they really match the test. Workbooks include TEKS instruction plus STAAR practice. Instruction is adaptable to long or short time frames, so they’re perfect for test preparation, retesting, and summer school. Sirius publishes STAAR prep in all subjects and from Grades 3 through end-of-course.

About the Educator

Ramiro Garza II is the High School Math Coordinator for Curriculum and Instruction at United ISD, Laredo, Texas. He has held that role since January 2014.

A classroom and administrative educator since 1989, Garza has taught high school math at United South High School, and has also taught middle school English. In addition, he was a teacher and academic coach at Laredo ISD. Much of his focus has been troubleshooting struggling and at risk populations.

About United Independent School District

Founded in 1961, United ISD’s mission is to “inspire all students to become responsible world citizens by pursuing excellence through lifelong learning.” As their website states, their intent is to continually seek ways to improve and to provide consistent, quality instruction for all students in a positive learning environment.

United ISD serves Laredo, the cities of El Cenizo and Rio Bravo, and several unincorporated areas in Webb County. The area’s growing population transformed the district into a large school system. United ISD now serves 44,300 students with 42 campuses. United ISD is the second largest district in Region One and the 24th largest in the state of Texas.