


### SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD

#### Maria Luisa Cardenas

Teaches 4th Grade  
Reading and Math



 Carrillo Elementary School,  
South San Antonio ISD

#### Challenge

Many of Maria's Tier 3 and special education students struggled to pass the STAAR test, often ranking in the bottom 10% of all performers. Traditional six-week STAAR preparation strategies weren't sufficient to meet the students' diverse academic needs throughout the year.

#### Solution

Maria used Sirius year-round to provide targeted interventions, scaffold instruction with materials from other grade levels, and guide lesson planning through pre- and post-assessments, ensuring personalized support for all students.

#### Favorite Sirius Features

- **Pre- and post-assessments**  
to identify gaps in understanding
- **Access to multiple grade levels**  
for scaffolding (grades 3–5)
- **Teacher-driven reteach opportunities**  
for struggling students
- **Rigorous TEKS-based assignments**
- **Alignment with the latest STAAR 2.0**  
tools, updates, and question types

#### Benefits

Sirius made it easy to adjust instruction based on student performance, boosting confidence and focus. Its alignment with STAAR tools ensured students were familiar with the test format, while real-time insights improved accountability and engaged parents in the learning process.

#### Success by the Numbers

Special education and Tier 3 students reached "Approaches Grade Level" for the first time after using Sirius.

STAAR success stories included students who had never passed in previous years, with many expressing joy and pride over their accomplishments.

#### Advice

"For those who haven't gotten Sirius, you'll have a greater chance of passing your students once you do."

## At South San Antonio ISD, special ed and Tier 3 students in grade 4 rise to “Approaches grade level” after never passing STAAR

**Maria Luisa Cardenas** has taught just about every grade at South San Antonio ISD over her 21-year career. Before moving to grade 2 last year, she taught fourth graders, and during that time, she used *Sirius Online* throughout the school year rather than just six weeks before the STAAR test, like most districts.

*“I lived in Sirius,” she says. “The whole point of Sirius for me was to build my kids’ confidence and make them feel more comfortable with what they were going to see on the tests.”*

Cardenas initially used Sirius to assess her entire class, measuring the effectiveness of the TEKS she taught each week. Over time, she adopted a more personalized, scaffolded approach, using STAAR practice with her Tier 1 students and Sirius’s TEKS-based instruction for targeted intervention and reteaching. This method allowed her to focus on each **student’s individual comprehension needs**. The week would start with a pre-assessment on Monday to help guide TEKS instruction for the next few days and then end with a post-assessment on Friday to identify which of her students understood the material enough to move forward.

For Tier 3 interventions, Cardenas actually made use of material from other grades. Her students who hadn’t mastered some lessons from the previous year were assigned third-grade assignments, while gifted and talented students could get started on what fifth-graders worked on.

“I’m fortunate I had access to grade 3 and grade 5 materials,” she says. “If I didn’t, I wouldn’t have been able to scaffold their learning this way.”

### Setting Flexible Parameters for a Whole Year Ahead of Time

While learning was personalized, all students took pre- and post-assessments as a class. Assigning these assessments was very easy for Cardenas. In fact, it only took her two or three weekends in August to determine the scope and sequence for the entire year, leaving a two-week window open in case her kids were ever absent.

Moreover, **Sirius greatly simplified how she prepared her next lesson plan**. “With Sirius, it was able to tell me, for example, that these students weren’t ready for these three particular TEKS this week and to instead focus on foundational TEKS,” Cardenas says.

*“Before Sirius, I never felt like there would ever be a program that could help me meet these standards online.”*

Cardenas set this parameter in Sirius by having it automatically mark certain students with “Reteach” whenever a certain grade threshold wasn’t met.

Sirius’s ability to provide the right selection of TEKS assignments was one of the reasons why her **students preferred Sirius over other solutions**, such as Progress Learning. “Progress Learning has a lot of TEKS in a row, so there was more of a chance for my kids to accidentally click the wrong TEKS assignment,” says Cardenas. “In Sirius, they liked how it only showed the exact assignment they needed. I can’t over-emphasize how easy and beneficial this scheduling functionality was.”

## Increased Teacher Visibility Boosts Student Efficiency and Accountability

The Sirius pre- and post-assessments also allowed Cardenas to see her students' entire thought process, including whether they were using tools incorrectly or putting emojis in answer fields.

*"You can tell when your students don't understand how something works, which is priceless because it helps them become more efficient in what they're doing," she recalls. "This allowed me to start a dialogue with my kids by saying, 'Just because the tools are up there, doesn't mean you have to use it all the time.'"*

Sirius Online allows teachers to track when and how often students use tools such as strikethrough, line reader, notepad, and other STAAR-aligned tools.

This increased visibility also helped Cardenas realize that some of her students purposely misused certain tools. These students initially mistakenly believed that Cardenas couldn't see everything they did in Sirius, but when they learned that she could, they started using them correctly, **ensuring student accountability** in the process. "I would show this information to parents, too, and tell them, 'Your child needs to take this seriously,'" Cardenas says.

## Sirius Always Aligns and Stays Up To Date with Every Iteration of STAAR

**These tools never failed** to fully replicate what appeared on STAAR every year, which also gave Cardenas the ability to prepare students who had never taken the test before more effectively.

"It might sound strange that this could happen in fourth grade, but last year, I had two students who arrived literally one week before STAAR, and neither one of them had taken it in third grade," she remembers. "When they eventually took STAAR in my class, they said, 'Oh my goodness! It's the same thing!' **It really made a difference for them.**"

In fact, Cardenas always appreciated that Sirius made sure their tools were immediately updated to match what would appear that year on the STAAR test. "It was helpful to have the assurance that what I was showing my kids would be exactly what they would see when they took STAAR. I also liked that I could go over a tool extensively without having to use something else instead."

Additionally, the fact that Sirius provides both generic and technical wording helped Cardenas better understand her students' grasp of certain TEKS. "One mode in Sirius simplifies the wording of what's on STAAR, so if my students got answers right when the language was easier but then demonstrated that they didn't understand the question when the vocabulary difficulty increased, it meant that they understood the TEKS, just not the vocabulary," she says.

## Success for Tier 3 and Special Ed Students

Before using Sirius, her special education students in Tier 3 consistently struggled to pass the STAAR exam, often ranking in the bottom 10% of all performers. But with Sirius, these students reached "Approaches Grade Level."

*"After they received their results, I had students who were so happy that they were crying," Cardenas says. "It was especially amazing whenever my special ed students said things like, 'I can't believe it! I passed it this year! I did this!'"*

Cardenas concludes, **"For those who haven't gotten Sirius, you'll have a greater chance of passing your students once you do."**



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