



# SOUTH SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Agenda Item Summary

Meeting Date: January 23, 2019

Purpose:  Presentation/Report  Recognition  Discussion/ Possible Action

Closed/Executive Session  Work Session  Discussion Only  Consent

From: Amy Shields, Director of Teaching and Learning

Item Title: Approve the Memorandum of Understanding Between Texas A & M San Antonio and South San Antonio ISD

### Description:

Texas A&M University and South San Antonio Independent School District (SSAISD) will partner in a mutually beneficial research project to evaluate the effectiveness of the Framework for Accelerating Strategic Comprehension of Text (FASCT) program. This project is federally funded by the US Department of Education. The goal of the partnership is to increase student achievement in reading, which aligns with the LSG Goal 3. Per board policy, all MOUs must be approved by the Board of Trustees.

### Recommendation:

Approve the Memorandum of Understanding Between Texas A & M San Antonio and South San Antonio ISD

### District Goal/Strategy:

Goal 3 The percent of students who perform at the Masters Grade Level standard for all grades in state reading exams will increase from 9% to 20% by 2022.

Funding Budget Code and Amount:

CFO Approval

No cost to the district

APPROVED BY:

SIGNATURE

DATE

Chief Officer:

Superintendent:

*[Handwritten signatures]*

*1-7-19*  
*1/19/19*

**Memorandum of Understanding Between  
Texas A&M University and  
South San Antonio Independent School District  
January 7, 2019**

This document represents a memorandum of understanding between the Texas A&M University- (hereafter referenced as “TAMU”) and South San Antonio Independent School District (SSAISD) to participate in a mutually beneficial research project to evaluate the effectiveness of the Framework for Accelerating Strategic Comprehension of Text (FASCT) program. This document clarifies respective roles and responsibilities of TAMU’s evaluation team and school staff and also delineates costs and commitments to sustain this federally funded project for 2019-2021. TAMU and SSAISD are entering into this agreement in good faith and with the expectation that the document will become binding. However, all parties recognize and acknowledge that final execution of the agreement depends on the U.S. Department of Education’s approval.

**BACKGROUND**

The SSAISD will be one of approximately 36 to be included in an evaluation designed to address the following research questions:

Do grade 4 and grade 5 students in high-need schools using the FASCT intervention (teacher-led and computer supported) outperform students in control schools on measures of science reading comprehension (e.g., Texas STAAR Science Test, main idea quality)?

- a. What are the effects of FASCT compared to control for fifth grade students (i.e., Year 1)?
- b. What are the effects of FASCT compared to control for fourth grade students (i.e., Year 2)?

We will also evaluate the effect of the professional development on teacher practices.

This evaluation is authorized by the United States Department of Education under grant U423A180074 to Texas A&M University.

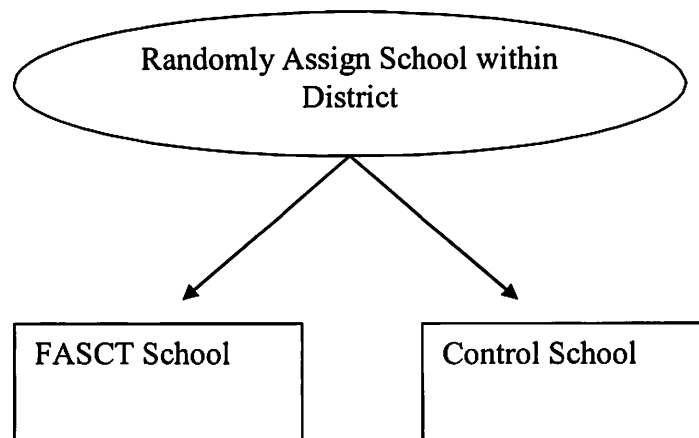
FASCT was developed by Dr. Wijekumar (Texas A&M University) and Dr. Meyer (The Pennsylvania State University) and is a framework including strong teacher and principal professional development and a computer-based intelligent tutoring system designed to improve content area reading comprehension for children in grades 4 and 5. Children learn how to use five text structures (comparison, problem and solution, cause and effect, sequence, and description) to read and understand content area texts. They also learn how to summarize, infer, elaborate, and write. The software should be used as a supplement to your school’s current curricula. Prior to its use, teachers must complete

two days of professional training in order to learn how to use the software and all of its components. TAMU will provide the training as well as follow-up support to ensure that the software works smoothly in the school.

The study will rely on a random assignment design, the strongest possible design for obtaining unbiased and reliable measures of program impacts. Implementing this design requires the random assignment of schools to intervention (i.e., use the FASCT) and the control (i.e., classrooms carry out their business as usual) conditions. TAMU will determine the random assignment procedures and it is critical that teachers and students stay within these conditions throughout the duration of the study. Switching students and teachers after assignment severely undermines the quality of the design. Any modifications must be discussed with the Dr. Wijekumar at TAMU prior to implementation to determine whether or not the school may continue in the project. Please note that the study has budgeted for providing control school teachers with FASCT training and software at the conclusion of the study.

The evaluation of the FASCT will focus on fourth and fifth grade teachers and their students. The study will be conducted during the 2019-2021 academic years. As noted above, the study is occurring simultaneously in multiple schools. We expect the random assignment will allocate schools and all fourth and fifth grade teachers within the school in the following way:

**Figure 1: Illustrative Random Assignment within each school district for the Intelligent Tutoring for the Structure Strategy Evaluation**



TAMU assumes a school will typically have about four teachers available for participation, although this actual number is not required. We will also try, whenever possible, to make sure there are equal numbers of schools per condition per district

A number of steps are required to implement this study. While most of the burden of study implementation falls on TAMU, there are certain responsibilities to be shared by the school staff, effort for which they will be compensated. The following key activities describe the respective roles of the evaluation team and school staff.

1. Protecting the integrity of the design. As Figure 1 shows, each school district will have its own intervention and comparison condition. It is therefore important for school staff to understand that they will have different ways of teaching language arts within the fourth and fifth grades in the school district. Casual contact between intervention and control teachers regarding the study is reasonable and to be expected. It is important however that control teachers are not given access to the software or related training materials until after the study is over.
2. Notification to Parents and Students. TAMU will provide approved consent forms to the schools and work with the school to inform parents, students, community members and other stakeholders of the study. The school will provide contact information for parents/guardians so that they are given a chance to enroll their children in the study by returning the parent consent form. Students removed from the study are not removed from FASCT or control classrooms; however TAMU will not collect data on these students. In addition, students must assent to data collection (completion of the Gray Silent Reading and Text Structure Test pre and posttests). School staff should remain cognizant that students can refuse or stop testing at any time, for any reason and without penalty. The school will offer suggestions for how to promote participation in the study. This may include providing space for posters and notifications in school newspapers.
3. Random Assignment. TAMU will work closely with school staff to implement random assignment. TAMU will make every effort to accommodate concerns, requests or questions including providing information and documentation of the assignment procedure. Control group teachers, and their students will be asked to complete the same surveys as those who are in the program. Again, they may not use FASCT until the study has been completed, as this would impair the study design.
4. Collecting initial (pre-intervention) achievement data. During the fall, TAMU will administer the 70-minute Gray Silent Reading Test and Text Structure Test.
5. Teacher background surveys. A ten-minute survey will be administered at the beginning of the study to learn more about teachers' experience with language arts instruction and use of technology.

6. Accommodate observations of the intervention and control conditions. TAMU will conduct a series of observations (about three per year) to document the use of FASCT and language arts instruction in the control classrooms. TAMU will schedule these meetings in coordination with principals and teachers.
7. Collecting post-intervention data. At the end of the academic year TAMU will administer a posttest using the Gray Silent Reading Test and Text Structure Test with similar conditions as in the pretest.
8. General information. School staff will provide general information about the school and make-up of each classroom and will fill out general consent forms.
9. Tracking. FASCT software use will be tracked by computerized logs stored on a secured network accessible only by permission from the network administrator. As noted above, the software should be used as a supplement to existing curricula for about 60 minutes per week. Although large deviations from this are not anticipated, TAMU will ask school staff to explain them if any are noted.
10. Financial Support for the evaluation will be provided by TAMU to the School. Participating teachers and designated school staff will be provided with two full days of professional development with no cost to the District. Additionally, participating school teachers will be afforded a Texas A&M University Certificate at the conclusion of the online professional development courses. Finally, the top 10% of participating teachers will be eligible to enroll in an online Master's degree also at Texas A&M University. TAMU will pay for costs associated with the FASCT software component as well as site visits to ensure smooth implementation.
11. Confidentiality of Data. Responses to this data collection will be used only for statistical purposes. The reports prepared for this study will summarize findings across the sample and will not associate responses with a specific district or individual. We will not provide information that identifies you or your district to anyone outside the study team, except as required by law.
12. Results from this study will be presented to the school via a letter when the data analysis is completed and approved by the funding agency.

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January \_\_\_\_ 2019

Dr. K. Wijekumar, Houston Endowment Professor & Project Director

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January \_\_\_\_ 2019

Dr. Alexandro M. Flores, Superintendent of South San Antonio Independent School District