



Efficacy Study

California School Districts Raise Their ELA SBAC Scores With The Help Of *StudySync*®

Overview

In a study of 7th and 8th-graders from two schools in Northern California, students showed statistically significant gains in the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment after using *StudySync*.

The purpose of the analysis was to determine the effectiveness of *StudySync*'s English language arts curriculum in participating California school districts during the 2016–2017 school year.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) Summative Assessment score data for students enrolled in grades 7 and 8 were provided for analysis by district administrators. Test score data included results for the year prior to *StudySync* implementation (2015–2016) and for the first year of *StudySync* implementation (2016–2017). Six teachers and 504 students participated in the study.

The first district represented in the study, referred to as “District 1” with five teachers participating, is an urban school district located in Sacramento County, California. The district includes 10 schools, three of which are at the middle school level. The 7th and 8th-grade students in the district come from all backgrounds and speak more than 40 languages.

The second district, referred to as “District 2” with one teacher included, is a suburban school district located east of San Francisco. The district serves more than 23,500 students with elementary schools serving students in grades K–8, and high schools for grades 9–12. There are no middle schools or junior high schools in the district.

Demographics

Table 1 displays detailed demographic information for students whose data was provided for analysis. Students' scores on the SBAC from the prior school year (2015–2016) were also provided by the districts.

Table 1. Student Demographics

Demographic	Count	Percentage
Number of Participating Students		
District 1	460	91.3%
District 2	44	8.7%
Grade		
7	285	56.5%
8	219	43.5%
Sex		
Female	242	48.0%
Male	257	51.0%
Missing	5	1.0%
Ethnicity		
Asian/Pacific Islander	64	12.7%
Black or African-American	68	13.5%
Hispanic or Latino	130	25.8%
White	231	45.8%
Other	11	2.2%
Primary Home Language		
English	326	64.7%
Not English	174	34.5%
Missing	4	0.8%
English Learners		
Yes	37	7.4%
No	463	91.9%
Missing	4	0.8%
Free/Reduced Lunch Status		
Eligible	280	55.6%
Not Eligible	177	35.1%
Missing	47	9.3%
IEP Status		
Eligible	63	12.5%
Not Eligible	393	78.0%
Missing	48	9.5%

Study Design

A cohort approach was used for the analysis, which is the preferred approach for the state of California. For instance, 7th-grade scores were compared to the scores of the exact same group of students when they were in 6th grade. If a student was missing a score from one of the grade levels, that student was not included in the analysis.

A series of *t*-tests was used to determine if student scores significantly increased from the 2015–2016 school year to the 2016–2017 school year. A statistically significant *t*-test result is one in which a difference is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Implementation

Teachers who participated in the study used the core ELA program, *StudySync*, in five or more classes during the 2016–2017 school year. All but one followed the Core Thematic Unit closely, while one preferred to pick and choose resources from the *StudySync* library.

About StudySync

StudySync is a core English language arts solution for grades 6–12 with over a thousand texts and text excerpts, dynamic video and multimedia lessons designed to inspire and advance reading, writing, critical thinking, speaking, and listening skills to prepare students for college and careers. *StudySync* provides both digital instruction and print resources.

Measures

Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment

The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are comprehensive, end-of-year assessments in English language arts/literacy (ELA) that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

All students in grades 3–8 and grade 11 take these assessments, except those students who have an individualized education program that designates the use of an alternate assessment. The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are administered when at least 66 percent of the instructional year has been completed.

Key Findings

Students in classes that used *StudySync* saw increased scores on the ELA SBAC. All gains in student performance are statistically significant.

- Student scores on the ELA SBAC increased by an average of 24 points from 2015–2016 to 2016–2017.
- On average, student scores for the 8th-grade 2016–2017 cohort increased from “Standard Nearly Met” in 2015–2016 to “Standard Met” in 2016–2017.
- Student growth on ELA SBAC did not vary by ethnicity, sex, primary home language, free/reduced lunch status, or English learner status.

Score Improvement Overall And By Grade

Table 2. SBAC Score Ranges for ELA in California

In California, students receive an SBAC score for each subject, ranging from 2,000 to 3,000. Overall scores are reported within one of four levels: Standard Exceeded, Standard Met, Standard Nearly Met, and Standard Not Met.

Grade	Standard Not Met	Standard Nearly Met	Standard Met	Standard Exceeded
6	2210–2456	2457–2530	2531–2617	2618–2724
7	2258–2478	2479–2551	2552–2648	2649–2745
8	2288–2486	2487–2566	2567–2667	2668–2769

Overall, results showed that scores for students in classes using *StudySync* increased 24 points from 2015–2016 ($M=2535.5$) to 2016–2017 ($M=2559.5$), on average, $t=9.75$, $p<.001$ (Table 3).

On average, student scores for the 8th grade 2016–2017 cohort using *StudySync* increased from “Standard Nearly Met” in 2015–2016 to “Standard Met” in 2016–2017.

Table 3. SBAC Score Gains: 2015–2016 to 2016–2017

Grade 2016–2017	<i>n</i>	2015–2016 Mean	2015–2016 SD	2016–2017 Mean	2016–2017 SD	Gain Mean	Gain SD
7	248	2526.7	79.2	2546.4	81.3	19.7***	52.5
8	206	2546.1	84.0	2575.2	82.9	29.1***	52.0
Overall	454	2535.5	81.9	2559.5	83.2	24.0***	52.4

*** Statistically significant, $p < .001$

Teacher Survey Results

Teachers participating in the study were asked to respond to a survey at the end of the school year.

On average, teachers had a positive opinion of *StudySync*. Most followed the Core Thematic Unit closely and found it effective. Teachers appreciated the fact that *StudySync* is always evolving and improving in response to student needs and their feedback.

Teachers were especially positive about the following elements of *StudySync*:

- It’s an ever-growing platform that gives teachers guidance and freedom at the same time.
- *StudySync* does not carry the “legacy and tradition” of other programs. It is new, dynamic, and designed around standards.
- What doesn’t work gets fixed. Teachers can offer suggestions for improvement, and they are heard.

- Blasts, *StudySync*’s social media-like writing assignments, are an amazing tool that can be used to meet the needs of every student in the room.
- *StudySync* allows students to practice for assessments without taking a full practice test. Students become very familiar with the format and expectations of state testing.

“I love that StudySync better aligns with the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress and Professional Testing*, so that my students are better prepared.”

–Study Participant and 7th-grade English teacher

*For California customers, *StudySync*’s platform is specifically aligned to the CA CCSS.

Conclusion

Overall, teachers who used *StudySync* were positive about the effectiveness of the program. Student scores on the ELA SBAC increased by an average of 24 points from 2015–2016 to 2016–2017.

Note that students in *StudySync* classes were all at different levels of learning, and yet they all showed statistically significant growth. The results of this analysis suggest that *StudySync* can be effective for all types of learners, regardless of how the teacher chooses to use the resources at their disposal.

