



School boards, legislatures, taxpayers, and the community increasingly want more educational returns on their financial investment. They want to be shown that schools are doing what works.

The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) developed by the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas is one research-validated instructional model that achieves measurable results by reversing the downward spiral through which so many at-risk and special education students go.

Many state special education departments, thousands of school districts, and 400 colleges and universities use SIM.

SIM integrates two kinds of interventions designed to address the gap between what students are expected to do and what students are able to do.

Using a “how to learn” approach, SIM’s *student-focused interventions*, including

specific Learning Strategies, enable students to generalize from one task and situation to others. SIM includes tactics and skills that can be used to gain information from texts efficiently, to perform more accurately on tests, to write more clearly, to present written work more attractively, to spell more accurately, and to perform math operations more efficiently; in short, SIM enables students to deal more effectively with the process of learning.

SIM’s *teacher-focused interventions*, called Content Enhancement Routines, include methods that encourage teachers to teach more effectively by helping them think about, adapt, and present their most important content in learner-friendly fashion.

To date, more than 40 specific instructional programs have been validated through numerous research studies and developed into instructional materials appropriate for teacher use in the classroom.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. How do curriculum standards fit with SIM interventions?

A. Documented research shows SIM has had a positive effect on achievement scores. For example, 94 percent of students using SIM strategies in a large urban high school in Michigan passed the state writing assessment; students from schools with a comparable socio-economic status had a 74.5 percent success rate on the same test. Vocabulary performance, another key demand on competency tests, has been shown to be greatly enhanced by the use of SIM interventions. National standards, too, emphasize higher-order problem-solving and thinking skills, both of which are at the heart of SIM.

Q. How does SIM respond to current education laws?

A. Not only are schools now required to show student gains, they also have to prove that they use teaching methods grounded in research. Evidence-based practices are key features in recent education legislation, including the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, State Standards, Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Q. Does it require more staff?

A. No additional staff is required.

“I’m sold on the SIM strategies. I’m aware of a lot of programs, but none have lasted like this and have had the impact that this program has had. It’s thoroughly field tested and re-tested. It’s a complete program, because you teach the student the specific strategies and then you teach the student how to generalize in the mainstream setting when they’re competing with other student peers. It’s also cost-effective. You can back up your effectiveness in using the strategies with real, clean, statistical data. If you’re an administrator and you’re going to spend a lot of money, you need to be accountable for that money. You have to make sure that whatever you use is effective. The Center is very willing to help you with that.”
 —Administrator,
 Minnesota

Q. Which schools have used SIM?

A. More than 3,500 school districts have adopted SIM components. SIM has been implemented through state projects and federal grants in multiple states (e.g., California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia). Additional information and stories of success can be found at <http://sim.kucrl.org/administrators>

Q. Are SIM interventions only for students who have learning disabilities?

A. Although the first Learning Strategies were designed for students with learning disabilities, subsequent research has shown that all students — including general education students, at-risk students, juvenile offenders, and students with sensory disabilities — can benefit from strategies, depending on their needs. CRL also has developed Content Enhancement Routines, which can be woven into general classroom study content for all students and used in combination with strategies. All of the routines promote direct, explicit instruction, which helps students who are struggling but also facilitates problem-solving and critical thinking skills for students who are doing well in class.

Q. How long does it take for students to master Learning Strategies?

A. Typically, a SIM Learning Strategy can be taught to mastery in three or four weeks (about 30 to 60 minutes of instruction per day). Teachers follow a research-based eight-stage instructional process to promote mastery and generalization. The time required to complete the process varies, depending on the strategy, teacher skill, and learner characteristics.

Q. What kind of progress will students make in their overall schoolwork?

A. The Center for Research on Learning only supports Learning Strategies that consistently produce gains large enough to move students who were previously receiving failing grades into the “C” range or better in standard school subjects. By learning ways to effectively acquire, integrate, store, retrieve, and express information, students increase their ability to succeed in school and life.

Q. How does a teacher learn how to teach SIM interventions?

A. Certified instructors typically teach one intervention during a three-hour training session and provide follow-up support. After the session, teachers return to the classroom and include the newly learned strategy or routine in their instruction. During the course of one academic year, a teacher can effectively master three to four strategies or routines.

Q. How does a school become more “strategic” oriented?

A. Experience shows that for students to succeed, they must have access to instruction in multiple instructional procedures (Learning Strategies or Content Enhancement Routines), from multiple teachers, across multiple schools and grades, and in multiple instructional areas. Opportunities to practice, sustained instruction, ample teacher planning time and collaboration, and a supportive administration are key ingredients.

Q. How much does this cost?

A. Certified SIM Professional Developers offer a variety of instructional and implementation packages that can be individualized for your school. Overall costs depend on the professional developer’s fee, manuals used (average price about \$15), and district expenses needed to hold workshops.