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SUCCESS STORY

StudySync Fills Tall Order for School Short on Technology

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name
Sci Academy
High School

Location
New Orleans, Louisiana

Enrollment
442

A Common Problem

Sci Academy is the founding school in the Collegiate Academies charter school network. The three-school network is part of the Recovery School District of Louisiana (RSD), the first all-charter school district in the United States, which serves approximately 40,000 students. RSD was formed after Hurricane Katrina devastated the area and has been tasked with an unprecedented challenge and opportunity: to transform chronically under-performing schools.

Sci Academy serves students, referred to as "scholars," in grades 9 through 12. As a part of the Collegiate Academies network, Sci Academy's focus is to advance incoming ninth graders to college-level performance by graduation.

89%
African American

8%
Asian/ Pacific Islander

3%
Hispanic

ENROLLMENT

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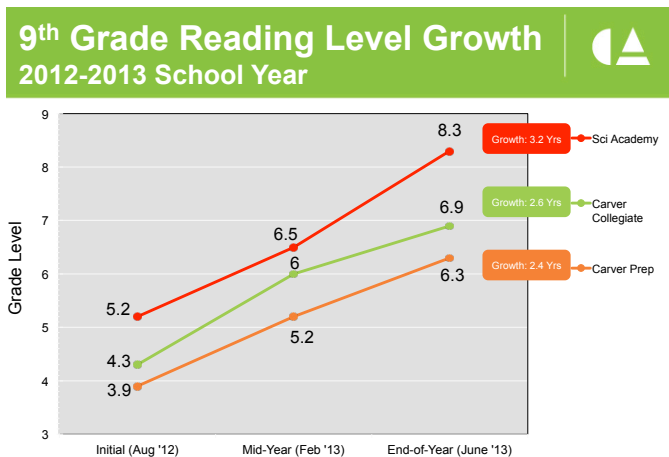A McGraw-Hill Education Partnership

Meeting the Challenges

Sci Academy, along with the other Collegiate Academies schools, is centered on creating an environment that not only prepares scholars for college, but enables them to excel once there. This vision is challenged routinely by the reality that a ninth-grader beginning at Sci Academy is, on average, reading at the sixth-grade level.

Lisa Shea, Collegiate Academies' Director of Literacy, has been working with undeserved populations in education for nearly 15 years.

"We're committed to helping 100 percent of our scholars succeed in high school and get through college," she says. "We have scholars coming into ninth grade at less than a first-grade reading level. Our teachers work endless hours to get students where they need to be."

The initiatives of Sci Academy and the other Collegiate Academies to promote reading growth pay off as evidenced in the single year of scholars' advancement in the 2012-2013 school year shown below:

9th Grade Reading Level Growth
2012-2013 School Year

9th Grade Reading Level Growth (2012-2013 School Year)

Operating in a district marked by high poverty, under-performance and resource challenges, Sci Academy teachers work diligently to help their scholars dramatically improve over the course of four years.

The school has sought out tools that will engage and inspire students with relatable and diverse resources. That's one of the reasons Lisa Shea looked to *StudySync*—the platform has helped teachers tremendously in accessing resources more quickly, saving valuable time in lesson planning and offering students engaging content.

A Digital Solution in a Low-Tech Environment

StudySync is a comprehensive English Language Arts curriculum that provides a digital library of hundreds of texts, text excerpts, and Common Core State Standards-formatted instruction in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Differentiation resources and assessment tools are also included to ensure scholars' readiness for key high-stakes tests.

While Sci Academy's classrooms are considered low-tech environments, teachers have found a great resource in *StudySync*, which Sci Academy started using in 2012. Prior to using *StudySync* resources, teachers spent countless hours searching the Web to plan their lessons and find rigorous and relevant materials to support students' understanding of texts.

Shea explains, "Although we are not able to use the digital platform as regularly as we would like for all students, teachers can rely on *StudySync* to help them build their curriculum themes and objectives, as well as to identify secondary materials that match the appropriate reading level of their students. This time-saving element has been incredible for the teachers and the students."

Lynsay Mills, who teaches ninth-grade writing and serves as the Dean of English at Sci Academy, notes, "*StudySync* has enabled me to do more quickly what the best educator in me wants to do. I am able to plan with more ease, which frees up my time so that I can focus on my instruction and work with my scholars individually to meet their learning needs."

StudySync's content is available 24/7 from desktop, tablet, and mobile device, meaning scholars and teachers can access the materials whenever and wherever works best for them.

To learn more about *StudySync*, visit **mheonline.com/studysync**

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Rigor Helps Sci Academy in Achieving Exceptional Goals

Mills' students have been able to use *StudySync's* digital platform a few times a month on average, based on when she is able to reserve a computer cart for her students. Even when they are not able to access the online tools at school, the students benefit from *StudySync* features, such as *SyncTV*, which Mills uses with a projector in her classroom.

"However, when the students are able to use the online features, they respond well to it," Mills says.

"The students are finding the instant peer-to-peer review extremely helpful," notes Mills. "They can type in their assignments and collaborate in real time with their classmates. This engagement reinforces understanding and confidence when diving into complex texts. My students also love that the reviews are anonymous. This eases any apprehensions about writing authentic reviews."

Both Shea and Mills compliment *StudySync* for its rigor.

"Our teachers are guided by a commitment to ensure that 100 percent of our students go to college and succeed while there," Shea says. "While the determination drives us, we understand it's often an incredible undertaking for a scholar to catch up to the appropriate level. However, with *StudySync's* rigorous curriculum and its ability to differentiate instruction and accurately match students' reading levels, the task becomes a bit easier."

Mills also finds the *Blasts* feature on *StudySync* very effective.

"*Blasts* have helped students greatly with making the read-write connection on timely, relevant, and real-world issues," she says. "With *Blasts*, students are challenged to think critically and voice informed opinions on topics that matter."

StudySync's digital library is extensive and ever expanding. It offers teachers the ability to customize lesson plans that fit the levels and complexity required by their students. Texts also are sorted by grade level, Lexile® level, Common Core recommendations, genre, title, author, or keyword.

Shea notes that "Common Core State Standards can be vague and hard to understand, so it helps that *StudySync* incorporates the standards into its platform."

Mills adds that StudySync has made assessing texts for rigor and complexity easier. "The rich curriculum and library allows me to focus on addressing the deficits in my students' learning instead of focusing most of my attention on finding texts that are Common Core aligned," she says.

Shea agrees. "Overall, *StudySync* has helped us increase rigor in our low-tech classroom environment, as well as arm our teachers with resources to help our students make great strides in their education," she says. "We'd absolutely recommend it to other schools and districts."

Highlights from Sci Academy

- With the *StudySync* platform and curricula, students have built great confidence in tackling complex texts.
- *StudySync* saves teachers "valuable and countless" hours in planning and accessing needed resources.
- Rigor and differentiation help teachers get students on track to college readiness.
- *StudySync Blasts* effectively helps students make real-world, read-write connections and voice informed opinions on topics that matter.