

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## A Personalized Learning Experience

Kearny High School of International Business, California

March 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College  
Practice: Assess and Intervene

### Highlights

- The principal and a literacy coach at Kearny High School of International Business describe the many ways they assess students and collect information in order to track college-readiness starting in ninth grade.
- Students are given the opportunity to understand their test results and are also given individualized support to catch up in identified areas of need. This focus on the individual and on multiple forms of assessment means no child slips through the cracks.

### About the Site

Kearny High School of International Business

San Diego, CA

### Demographics

47% Hispanic

16% Black

12% White

4% Asian

1% Native American

74% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

30% English Language Learners

12% Special Education

Kearny High School of International Business is a small school serving a diverse population of students, many of whom are English language learners, with a focus on individualizing instruction. Some key features of Kearny's college-preparatory program are:

- Hand-scheduling students so that they become college-ready and are supported in areas of need;
- Using multiple sources of data and assessments to determine student needs;
- Offering before-, after-, and during-school classes, tutorials, and advising to support struggling students;
- Creating a community where academics and achievement are highly valued; and
- Offering extracurricular activities for students to explore careers, get extra help, or receive assistance with college applications.

## Full Transcript

Ana Diaz-Booz: My name is Ana Diaz-Booz, and I am the principal at Kearny High School's School of International Business. Kearny High School had existed in the Linda Vista community for over 60 years, and about seven years ago we decided as a community that the school was not doing very well academically. And we were fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create personalized smaller learning communities. The idea being that each of the schools would offer not only a thematic learning experience, but also a very personalized learning experience where students would be known as individuals and would receive an education that is geared toward their specific needs.

From the get-go, we believed that we would meet the student where they were and create a program for them based on the specific needs that they had. In our school every student is hand-scheduled, which means that there are three people—two counselors and an AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] coordinator—that divide the number of students, so roughly about 150 each. And they actually sit with the student's transcript individually, one at a time, and look at the transcript, which also includes some of the standardized testing and some other assessments. And they are able to create a schedule for that particular student using all the information in the transcript, in the test's data bank, even teacher recommendations that we get either from the middle schools or teacher recommendation from some of our own teachers.

We use some of the typical assessments that are available to us specifically for our eighth-grade students because clearly we haven't had them. And some of those are the California Standards Tests (CST) that are

given every spring. There are also other tests, like the Degrees of Reading Power, that are issued as well as some of the other assessments that are specific to core-content classes, such as the end-of-course exams that are given through the district. And we are also very much in tune with what the teachers recommend from our feeder schools. So we are at a little bit of a disadvantage sometimes with our incoming eighth- to ninth-grade students because we don't know them as individuals yet. So we have to use a lot of what we see on paper, but then once we get them we are able to create some of our own assessments so that we can get to know them as individuals.

I also think it's important to note that our students are made aware of their performance on these assessments. I am always a little shocked at the beginning of ninth grade because we give the students their results from the California Standards Tests that they took in eighth grade, and many, many of them tell me that that is the first time that anybody has ever given them their results. So I am a little shocked at that because students really do want to know how they do and they are very interested in their own progress, but unfortunately they have gone through many, many years of the system where nobody explains to them what they mean. So they just kind of take it as face value and they don't take the tests very seriously, which is another component of what we try and do at this school, is to teach them the importance of the tests and how it really does reflect on them and on the school and the community.

Beth Smith: My name is Beth Smith, and I am the literacy coach at Kearny High's School of International Business (SIB). One of the tests that I go over with my ninth- and tenth-grade students is the DRP, which is the Degrees of Reading Power test, and that test gives students the grade level that they are reading at. And so we go over it and we look at not only the score that they got in the fall of ninth or tenth grade, but also the two previous years, the seventh- and eighth-grade tests. We talk about what it means to be reading at a grade level, what grade level they are reading at, and then we talk about specific strategies to improve their reading level. So I give them books to read, I talk about different reading strategies they can use when they are reading in their content areas, how they need to make notes on main ideas and write a paragraph on sticky notes and stick it in their textbook. Maybe they need to write an academic summary at the end of reading every chapter just to reinforce what they learn, the main points. So there are just different things depending on what level the kid is at, but I always have something to offer them that they can do independently to work on to improve their grade-level reading.

The personalized instruction here at SIB allows students to not be afraid to ask for help, to not be afraid to be a "nerd" and carry a book and to go to tutoring and to come to Saturday CAHSEE [California High School Exit Exam] class. It's actually a prized value here, is somebody who is academic and who cares about their grade and who wants to go to college. And that is something that the personalized instruction has definitely developed here at SIB.

Diaz-Booz: We get many of our students that come back to us, and they come back specifically to thank us for preparing them for the rigor that they encounter. So they are able to tell us not only that we prepared

them academically, but we prepared them also for some of the nuances that they would have learned along the way but in a more difficult fashion. So I think that they are just prepared all around for the college experience.