



IL Districts Embracing KIDS: Morrison

Morrison Teachers Embrace KIDS, Reap Benefits

MORE TIME TO TEACH AND UNDERSTAND EACH STUDENT

Once they overcame initial anxieties about implementing KIDS, Morrison's three kindergarten teachers decided it was time to fully embrace the observational tool to see how it might benefit their classroom set-up, instruction, and students. It was only after that shift that Carisa Swanson, Fran Smith, and Wendy Connelly got excited about the value KIDS quickly brought to their kindergarten classrooms.

Aided by a KIDS coach and the district's curriculum director, the Morrison teachers were surprised to find that the tool did not detract from instructional time. Quite the opposite. Small changes to the way they organized classrooms, structured independent play, and tweaked instruction – all informed by the KIDS data – led to improvements in the way these teaching veterans taught and students learned. To their surprise, once they mastered KIDS, they spent less time pulling students aside for individual assessments, and more time teaching and interacting with groups of children playing. KIDS helped them become keener observers of their kindergartners in natural play environments. Swanson, Smith, and Connelly now use those collected observations to improve the quality of their own instruction. In their conversations with families, KIDS allows them to easily share more detailed, understandable information about each student.

"They're actually kind of excited about using KIDS now as their primary way of assessing where kids are, and then using that information in the classroom," said Cheryl Robinson, Curriculum Director for Morrison Community Unit School District #6.



Kindergarten teachers Swanson, Smith, and Connelly found KIDS helps even veteran educators improve instruction.

Like many districts, Morrison spent a large amount of class time pulling children for individual assessments on various skills, standards, or requirements.

"It was constant," Swanson said. "And I felt like I was always assessing, I was never teaching."

Then the Morrison educators thought, What if we let all the one-on-one pull-outs go? "I think there was some relief there when they knew they could let go of things if the focus was on kids," Robinson said. "KIDS allows you to naturally collect data about your students," Robinson said.

Morrison's teachers reported that KIDS also helped broaden the district's focus from tracking mainly math and literacy to incorporating social and emotional skills. Now a more nuanced and developmentally appropriate profile is created for each kindergarten student, and is even shared at the end of the year with 1st grade teachers to help them plan for the following school year.



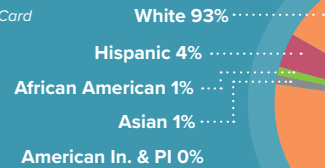
LESSONS FROM MORRISON

- When teachers shifted from a compliance mentality to embracing *KIDS*, it helped them improve their instruction.
- *KIDS* can be a lever to help move districts toward a more developmentally appropriate kindergarten curriculum. It's helpful – even easy – for more isolated, small communities to create professional *KIDS* learning networks with surrounding districts to share tips and strategies.
- *KIDS* allows teachers to reduce the variety of assessments on isolated standards and instead have more time to observe kindergartners in their natural environment.

DISTRICT OVERVIEW 6

Enrollment	1,029	First implemented KIDS	2012
Elementary schools	2	KIDS administrations per year	3
Kindergarten students	74	No. KIDS measures used	29
Low income43%		

Source: 2016 ISBE Report Card & Morrison SD 6



Today, Connelly sets up play centers her classroom in a way that allows her to both notice and promote student growth as children play. “It’s not just, throw the blocks here, and throw the cars here, now go play and I’ll do assessments,” she said. “I’m setting up the kitchen centers so with the materials that are there, I can observe the interactions I want to see. I look for who’s taking the initiative. Maybe Suzy would be the mom every time, and Billy would be the baby all the time, but I can tell Suzy that Billy is never going to be the leader if you always let him have the underdog role.”



Carisa Swanson shares her experience implementing KIDS with teachers from 16 surrounding school districts.

MORRISON CREATES A REGIONAL COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

Although a small, isolated district in largely rural Northwest Illinois, Morrison’s fresh attitude about KIDS also quickly propelled educators there into a leadership role in the region. In February 2017, with help from their local Regional Office of Education, they invited surrounding school districts to become part of a larger learning community of kindergarten teachers to share tips, strategies, and approaches to teaching with KIDS. They expected maybe a dozen would show. Instead, 53 educators turned out from 16 surrounding districts, including Kewanee, Dixon, Creston, Fulton, East Moline, Bradford, and Rockford.

“A big part of the success we’re having is that we are networking with other districts, because we’re small,” Robinson said. “Now they’re not just working alone and isolated; they have a pool of teachers they can share ideas with.”

Over boxed lunches, freebie “KIDS mini-measures” giveaways and a day of speakers, educators deepened their understanding of the power of observational assessment. Swanson, Smith, and Connelly led the group on “scavenger hunts” inside their classrooms to demonstrate how easy it was to collect observations depending on classroom set-up. By the end of the session, participants left with greater confidence in their ability to implement KIDS, a network of colleagues upon whom to call when support is needed, and a promise to gather again.



Morrison convened teachers from neighboring school districts for a day of learning and sharing about KIDS.