

# Maximizing Your Most Valuable (and Scarcest) Resource: For Teachers in this Sprawling Texas School District, it's About Time

## Pasadena ISD – Pasadena, TX

Pasadena Independent School District (ISD) is a large urban community that serves more than 56,000 students in 65 schools. Approximately 77.8 percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged. Also, the majority of students—some 86 percent—are Hispanic. That means many classrooms are, by necessity, bilingual.

Over the last two decades, the district has embraced innovative learning initiatives. With strong community and business support, Pasadena ISD has invested heavily in new facilities and renovations designed to promote smaller learning communities and flexible teaching environments. Three years ago, they began rolling out DreamBox Learning® Math to their 36 elementary schools.

We talked to teachers from four different schools and four different grades about their biggest day-to-day challenges, how they use DreamBox in their classrooms, and what advice they might have for fellow teachers. Like most educators, their biggest challenge is time, but they agree finding 10-15 minutes a day for DreamBox is well worth the effort. Here's how they do it and why they think it's valuable.

“What I like about DreamBox is that the kids can log in and start working at their level. Whether they come to class with gaps in their math learning or they have a solid foundation, DreamBox meets them where they are and allows them to build their skills from there.”

— Angie Maldonado  
Grade 3 Teacher  
L.F. Smith Elementary

### Kindergarteners learn by connecting the virtual with the hands-on

Ana Santos teaches Kindergarten bilingual at Gardens Elementary. A teaching veteran of 19 years, she uses DreamBox to show her young students how to set and achieve goals from the get go. She says people think little ones are too young to understand certain concepts, but her kids are not only very receptive, but surprisingly tech-savvy—and they really love DreamBox.

Pasadena ISD is one of several districts in the Houston area that sustained water and structural damages from Hurricane Harvey last year.



That means Ana’s Kindergarteners started the school year with a learning deficit, not only missing the first two weeks of class, but dealing with the aftermath in untold ways.

Fortunately, getting them up to speed on DreamBox took no time at all. After the initial group log in and a brief demo, they were up and running fast, creating personal avatars and playing their first lessons. And, in short order, most kids were able to log on independently or with the help of a buddy.

She requires every single student, no matter what level they’re at, to spend a minimum of 15 minutes a day on DreamBox as part of their math rotation. Sometimes, when the schedule permits, they’ll do two rotations in a day. And, she checks the DreamBox Dashboard weekly to make sure everyone is on track and to see who needs extra help. Ana says the 15 minutes a day are really paying off, and that everyone is astonished at how well her kids do on their assessments.

“I love that they’re making the connection between the manipulatives they’re seeing in DreamBox and what we’re doing physically in the classroom. They’re connecting the virtual with the hands-on—and it’s wonderful.”

### First graders build confidence one goal at a time

Roxanna Salcedo teaches first grade bilingual at Pearl Hall Elementary. Her DreamBox strategy is to use small, incremental wins to build confident and motivated learners.

At the beginning of the school year, Roxanna sets a goal for her students to complete five DreamBox lessons per week. Over time, as her students build skills and confidence, she increases their goals. She also promotes friendly competition with other classrooms to see who can complete the most lessons throughout the school year.

Roxanna keeps her mathematicians motivated by providing one-on-one support as needed, encouraging them to persevere, and keeping math fun. They get a star on the wall when they meet their goals, and they get to have lunch with the teacher. And, every Friday, they get to visit the Arcade. The Arcade is a learning incentive within DreamBox that lets kids spend the virtual tokens they’ve earned while completing their recommended lessons. It’s another opportunity to make small wins go a long way. Roxanna’s advice to fellow educators? “Make time for DreamBox. You’ll really see the growth in your students.”

### Third graders are excited to “level up” and become lifelong learners

Angie Maldonado teaches third grade bilingual at L.F. Smith Elementary. Her goal is to instill a love of math in her students and help them to become better problem solvers and lifelong learners. She says DreamBox helps her get and keep her kids engaged and motivated.

Because each student progresses through DreamBox based on their own self-driven learning path, some kids may start the third grade performing below grade level. Angie begins the school year by walking students through both the familiar DreamBox K-2 learning environment and the new 3-5 environment.

#### PASADENA ISD FAST FACTS

District serves **65 schools:**

**36 elementary**

**22 middle/junior high**

**7 high school**

Enrollment: **56,137**

Grades: **K–12**

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL): **77.8%**

Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL): **28.2%**

Career and Technical: **19.9%**

Gifted and Talented (GT): **5.0%**

Special Education: **9.4%**



In the new environment, kids can choose from a variety of lessons by clicking on any of the icons around their avatar, and they get to “level up” their avatars with borders of bronze, silver, or gold by completing lessons. Angie says her kids get excited when they see the new environment and it motivates them to want to advance to the next level.

She also says she sees a definite correlation between time spent on DreamBox and growth, so she tries to allow her kids the recommended 60-75 minutes a week playing DreamBox. Her students do DreamBox rotations daily. The principal also opens the computer lab for a half an hour before school each day to accommodate students who want to get in extra DreamBox time and may not have a device or Internet access at home. And then, there’s always time on “Fun Fridays” for more DreamBox. Kids have a free period during which they can choose to do anything they want—and more often than not they ask to play DreamBox.

“What I like about DreamBox is that the kids can log in and start working at their level. Whether they come to class with gaps in their math learning or they have a solid foundation, DreamBox meets them where they are and allows them to build their skills from there.”

### Fifth graders close gaps and realize their potential

Hector Del Rio teaches fifth grade math bilingual at Fred Roberts Middle School. He’s also a math department team leader and was recently named Pasadena ISD Teacher of the Year. And, while we’re listing accolades, his class just scored the highest in the district on their math STAAR assessments too.

Hector works with approximately 90 students daily and says DreamBox is helping to not only fill gaps but build confidence. At the beginning of the school year, he was approached by a student who declared, “Mr. Del Rio, I’m not good in math and I’m not going to pass.”

The student came to his fifth-grade class performing at a third-grade level and convinced she was simply incapable of learning math. While Hector coached her through the standard fifth grade curriculum, she was able to use DreamBox to close gaps in those below grade-level topics. By year’s end, the student was proficient in fifth grade math, advancing two complete grade levels—one DreamBox lesson at a time.

On average, Hector’s students play DreamBox for a minimum of two 25-minute sessions weekly. They can also opt to use DreamBox during their Technology Time period—and many do. They find the program fun and engaging, and Hector says the more they play the more they learn. “My students are happy with DreamBox. They love it. With previous programs they would get bored and say, ‘Do we have to do it again?’ Not so with DreamBox...and this year we were number 1 in the district for math. So DreamBox really works!”

“My students are happy with DreamBox. They love it. With previous programs they would get bored and say, ‘Do we have to do it again?’ Not so with DreamBox...and this year we were number 1 in the district for math. So DreamBox really works!”

— Hector Del Rio  
Math Department Team Leader  
Fred Roberts Middle School



For more information, contact Client Success at 877.451.7845, or visit [DreamBox.com](https://www.DreamBox.com).