

A photograph of a diverse group of elementary school children and a teacher, all smiling and looking towards the camera. The image is partially covered by a teal banner at the bottom which contains the title text.

#SAMSuccess story: Palm Springs USD STEAM Success

When the [Palm Springs Unified School District](#) wanted to implement a STEAM program into their elementary curriculum, they turned to SAM Labs to help them get started. The program has been a smashing success with both teachers and students. We sat down with Jessica Whiteman, Palm Springs USD's Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, to learn more about the district's experience using SAM Labs.

The decision to implement a STEAM program

"Our goal was to get our younger age students introduced to STEAM concepts, right? Because we saw that that was something important," Whiteman said. "It was something that was lacking within our district."

Elementary school teachers of Palm Springs USD negotiated an additional 50-minute prep period into their week, bringing the total from three to four. While the district acknowledged that it was important for teachers to have quality planning time, it couldn't be at the expense of valuable instructional time for students.

Palm Springs USD now had the perfect opportunity to add a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) class into the elementary school curriculum. The district's instructional technology program began researching different programs and presenting them to the Curriculum and Instruction team. Eventually, Whiteman and her team decided to move forward with SAM Labs.

SAM Labs stood out with age-appropriate lessons in multiple languages

When asked why her team ultimately landed on SAM Labs, Whiteman said: "We liked that it was broken down by grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade. Some programs just do grade level span."

This was important because every elementary student in the Palm Springs Unified School District would be attending their STEAM class once a week from kindergarten through fifth grade. Whiteman and her team wanted to be sure that students would receive lessons that were developmentally appropriate for their grade level. This would mean that students would be introduced to new STEAM concepts and projects each year rather than repeating the same lessons year after year.

SAM Labs also stood out because it offered Spanish and English programs. The Palm Springs Unified School District offers a Spanish dual-immersion program aimed at “[preparing] kindergarten through fifth-grade students to excel academically in Spanish and English, to develop a lifelong love of learning, and to become bilingual, biliterate, and multiculturally competent leaders.” The ability to offer SAM Labs curriculum in both English and Spanish helped further the mission of the dual-immersion program.

SAM Labs engages students

When measuring the success of the SAM Lab’s program, Ms. Whiteman looks directly to the students: “I’ll just ask them: how do you like STEAM? I mean, it’s always a positive response.”

From observing STEAM classes in her schools, Whiteman has seen firsthand how much students enjoy them. She calls the engagement and interest the classes elicit “obvious.” Students get excited about what they are learning, and some even talk about doing STEAM work at home during their free time. Whiteman credits the interactive and collaborative elements of the SAM Lab’s program for fostering such high levels of student enthusiasm.

By the end of 2022-2023 school year, Whiteman and her colleagues hope to gather data on student responses more formally via a student survey.

Going beyond elementary school

Before the introduction of the SAM Lab’s programs in the elementary schools, students in the Palm Springs Unified School District did not have universal access to STEAM programs until middle and high school students.

While some students’ families may have been able to afford extracurricular STEAM programs or STEAM summer camps at a younger age, there was an opportunity gap between students.

Students who had early exposure to STEAM programs were more likely to take coding, robotics, and other STEAM classes during their secondary schooling years. Students without previous experience were more hesitant. This could lead to students with a potential passion or talent for these subjects never discovering this opportunity. By offering STEAM to all students starting in kindergarten, it gives all Palm Springs USD students a chance to discover a passion for STEAM.

Whiteman predicts that Palm Springs USD will soon be able to expand the STEAM offerings in its middle and high schools. Before launching the SAM Labs program, students in middle school were entering with little to no STEAM experience.

Now, students will start sixth grade with five to six years of STEAM education. To keep up with skill levels and interests, Palm Springs middle and high schools will need to offer a wider variety of more advanced STEAM classes.

Helping students and instructors thrive

For any academic program to benefit students, their teachers must also receive support. Whiteman recommends that any school considering implanting a STEAM program like SAM Labs create a lead teacher or support person for the entire STEAM program.

Palm Springs USD has found it incredibly helpful to bring all of their STEAM teachers across schools together monthly to collaborate and offer each other support.

SAM Labs also provides a variety of [curriculum resources](#) and [ongoing customer support](#) to make sure educators and students get the best experience possible.

Partnering with SAM Labs

SAM Labs is the ideal STEAM solution for schools looking to implement STEAM in their elementary and middle school curriculum. Its hands-on approach, interactive activities, and diverse range of subject areas provide students with a comprehensive and engaging STEAM education.

Whiteman explains, with SAM Labs, “I think that we're just opening opportunities for each and every student for them to find their passion or something that engages them and creates an opportunity for them.”

SAM Labs Solutions are the perfect way for schools to bring STEAM education to life and prepare students for a bright and successful future.

[See SAM Labs in action](#) to learn more about how it can benefit your students.

