

A Hatch Breakthrough Moment Success Story



“At All Different Levels of Ability It’s Working”

How **Hatch Technology** Keeps
Special Education Students Engaged
In El Campo, Texas



The Early Learning Experts

P.O. Box 11927 > Winston-Salem, NC 27116 > 800.624.7968

“At All Different Levels of Ability, It’s Working”

How **Hatch Technology** Keeps Special Education Students Engaged In El Campo, Texas

“There have been several breakthrough moments in which she has seen her students reach **entirely new levels of engagement**.
The kids love it!”

El Campo, Texas

It started as a railroad camp called Prairie Switch, but the Mexican cowboys who brought their herds through the town renamed it simply El Campo. To this day the former switching point for the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway keeps its old cowboy nickname, the Pearl of the Prairie.

Located about 80 miles southwest of Houston and about 50 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, El Campo still reveres its rural roots, with events such as Prairie Days featuring tractor pulls, a livestock show and rodeo, and line dancing to country music. In addition to its Hispanic roots, the community boasts a significant and long-standing Czech community that produced its own Czech-language newspaper in the 1930s.

El Campo’s school system, like the town itself, is diverse in just about every way. Its school system, however, is embracing the future as it gears up with Hatch technology.

Taking Special Needs Seriously

The El Campo community of 12,000 takes the education of its diverse school population very seriously.

The El Campo Independent School District encompasses 445 square miles and serves approximately 3,600 children from Pre-K through 12th grade. In 2011 the district made the decision to invest in Hatch technology for its Special Education programs.

“We first saw the TeachSmart system at the TCASE (Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education) conference in Fort Worth,” recalls Cheryl Roitsch, Special Education Coordinator for the district. “What struck me about it was the use of a SMART board.” Her teachers had been asking for this educational tool in their classrooms, “but then they didn’t know what to do with it once they got it.”

The Hatch TeachSmart system, with its extensive pre-loaded content, made sense. “When I saw the Hatch programs and the

“Children who had been relatively passive learners were hooked. They’re all just sitting **waiting for their turn**; they’re highly engaged.”

way the students can interact with the whiteboard, I realized it’s a good teaching tool, plus a good way to incorporate technology into the classroom.” Engagement was a key consideration. “With TeachSmart, everyone’s involved in the instruction, instead of just sitting and listening.”

The El Campo schools brought the Hatch technology into their classrooms in the fall of 2011, adding both the interactive whiteboard-based TeachSmart system as well as iStartSmart, a Hatch touchscreen computer that offers research-based and scaffolded learning games. After only one semester, the Special Ed teachers are having a hard time imagining teaching without it. “We have gotten a lot of thank-you from teachers,” says Cheryl Roitsch. “They say it has made a big difference in their teaching and given them the opportunity to interact more with the kids and actually see what the students can do, from Pre-K level all the way up to high school life skills classes.” Cheryl said, in addition, it has also proven to be a great intervention tool for RtI.

Engaging Special Needs Students

The El Campo district has an unusual level of commitment to its Special Needs students, and the Hatch system is making a difference for students with a huge range of challenges, from hearing impairment to autism.

Terry Martin, who teaches Special Needs students in the third, fourth and fifth grades at Northside Elementary, says she is already reaping the benefits of the Hatch technology; there have been several breakthrough moments in which she has seen her students reach entirely new levels of engagement. “The kids love it!” she says. “They fight over it!” Children who had been relatively passive learners were hooked. “They’re all just sitting waiting for their turn; they’re highly engaged.”

The El Campo district has seen remarkable benefits in the Hatch system for their students with autism. Terry Martin says one of her students who has benefited most is an autistic child. “Normally he doesn’t interact in class, but the TeachSmart system engages him,” she notes. “He’ll stay up there for five or 10 minutes, and stay focused and engaged.”

“Normally he doesn’t do anything in class, but the **TeachSmart** system engages him. He’ll stay up there for five or ten minutes, and **stay focused and engaged.**”

Angela Wenglar, who teaches life skills at the high school, has had similar success with her autistic students and Hatch’s TeachSmart system. “They love it,” she says. “They both volunteer to get up and use it, even when it’s not their turn, which is rare.” This level of engagement, she says, is new for these students. “Usually in group activities they’re doing their own thing, not paying attention, but when we’re using the Hatch TeachSmart system, they pay attention – they really like it.”

Students with hearing disabilities in El Campo have also benefited from the system. Monica Alamia, the district’s Deaf Education teacher, says the system has made her job much easier, because the students get excited about learning. The iStartSmart system draws them in. A computer that utilizes a touchscreen instead of a mouse (which can be difficult for some students to manipulate), iStartSmart offers the students positive encouragement as they work their way through various teaching games, all designed – through extensive research – to develop needed skills and to be very engaging. “They love the little games, with the bright colors, it’s very visual,” she notes.

The iStartSmart system is particularly helpful, she asserts, for the students with limited hearing. “They have to listen for the sounds. Now they’re utilizing it, and it’s helping tremendously with their auditory skills. It’s really helping to train the ones who have a little bit of hearing.”

Teaching To Different Levels

The two systems – iStartSmart and TeachSmart – work together so that the El Campo teachers can make sure their students are focused on learning the skills they need. The iStartSmart system allows individual students to work on developing specific skills by having an easy student login (the student simply touches his or her picture). This lets the computer track that specific student’s progress and move him or her through the scaffolded learning levels. Thus, the student is always learning new things, and not just repeating activities because they might be fun or easy to do. The iStartSmart computer also produces a comprehensive report that allows the teacher to see where each student is developmentally. The teacher can then target small-group

“I have a pre-K student who just turned 5 in October; he has no problem using the **Hatch technology**. **It’s worked fabulously!**”

activities on the TeachSmart system, which also includes scaffolded activities for varying skill levels, toward those areas of development that will most benefit the participating students.

For Monica Alamia, the Hatch system is a great help with the challenge of having kids at different cognitive levels in her classroom at the same time. “I have kids in Pre-K, kindergarten and fifth grade,” she says. “It definitely makes my job easier.” She also likes how the systems are easy to use, both for her and the students. The children have independent access to the system, so “If I have activities online, and I’m working with students independently or if I have two or three kids, I can put them on an activity and they know what to do.”

The technology is accessible even for her youngest student: “I have a Pre-K student who just turned 5 in October,” she reports. “He has no problem using the Hatch technology. It’s worked fabulously.”

“It’s amazing seeing the kids sit and attend, go up to the TeachSmart board – they can use their hands, they can use tennis balls – their attention span is a lot longer,” says Cheryl Roitsch. “At all different levels of ability, it’s working and the students are feeling the success.”

Building Social Skills

One unexpected bonus for the teachers is the opportunity the Hatch systems present for their students to learn social skills. The children learn to share and wait their turn.

“Only one kid can use the computer at a time,” notes Terry Martin. “It kills them. But we just take turns, and they’ve learned to be patient.” Now, the Hatch technology creates a game-like environment, and its visual and auditory aspects really engage them. They can’t wait for their turn: “I set a timer for 15 minutes. They don’t want to stop.”

But they have learned to wait. “They’re all just sitting waiting for their turn; they’re highly engaged.”

Angela Wenglar says the Hatch technology helps enormously with getting her high school students to work together. “It makes

“When we want to show people what the kids can do, even if they’ve finished their work for the day, **the kids get all excited** to go back and do it again and we all know that repetition is good for learning.”

it much easier to do group activities with my kids; writing on a dry-erase board is just not effective with them,” she says. “My kids are definitely more interested when we’re working together than they were before.”

Independent Access Builds Self-Esteem

Because the technology is so user-friendly, the El Campo teachers have found that even children with significant impairments can figure it out. “I have one little girl who knows how to log in by herself,” says Terry Martin. “The kids are finding stuff I didn’t even know was there.” For these children, being able to show the teachers the way is a whole new experience.

“They’re teaching the adults,” marvels Monica Alamia. When substitute teachers come in, the roles are reversed. “We have subs in here every once in a while, the kids teach them how to use it.”

“My Pre-K student knows how to use it better than anybody. He can’t read or write yet but he can use the TeachSmart board.” One of her students, she says, is intellectually disabled, and her Pre-K student helps him with the Hatch technology. “The little one has to remind him every time, but then he gets it right away, he’ll figure out by looking at the machine what to do.”

Helping The Teachers With Monitoring Progress

The Hatch system has also helped El Campo’s teachers to keep track of their Special Needs students’ progress. “It’s working great,” says Deaf Education teacher Monica Alamia. “I use the TeachSmart interactive whiteboard for everything. I use the calendar almost every day, the emerging math skills, emerging reading skills – we use those constantly. I use the math and the calendar; we do ABC writing, matching caps and lower-case letters – I use it every day.”

Hatch’s built-in progress monitoring and reporting system helps her monitor each child’s efforts. “We get to see what they’ve done. I can tell who’s trying and who’s not, by their level.”

“The parents have really been in awe.”

Perhaps the toughest judges of the system’s success are the parents, who naturally want the best possible outcomes for their children. For them, as with the teachers and administrators, TeachSmart has

“I can see connections being made in their brains.”

been a welcome addition to the classrooms. Sheila Harbor says parents often see the system being used as they drop off or pick up their children. “They’re all always impressed with it,” she notes. Tasha Barnett has had the same experience. “There were lots of times parents would come in to pick up their children and I would be working on different activities with their child using the TeachSmart system,” she says. “The parents, all of them, have really been in awe.”

A New Level Of Excitement About Learning

For Cheryl Roitsch and her teachers, the theme that emerges again and again is engagement. “It’s fun to go in and watch the kids,” she says. She loves showing it to campus visitors. “When we want to show people what the kids can do, even if they’ve finished their work for the day, the kids get all excited to go back and do it again and we all know that repetition is good for learning.”

And as the children interact with the technology, teachers can observe how they learn. “I can see connections being made in their brains,” says Terry Martin.

“I’m just lovin’ it.”

For more information about Hatch technology products, visit www.HatchEarlyChildhood.com.