

About the Kiley Prep Alpha Pilot

SEZP schools are constantly trying new things in service of better outcomes for students and to better support the educators working toward those outcomes. That's part of what school-level empowerment is intended to make possible. With so much happening across our schools, we don't typically highlight every individual pilot to the broader community.

One effort getting underway at Kiley Prep this fall is a little different. It draws on elements of the Alpha School model, including the use of artificial intelligence and adaptive learning technology, and we've come to understand that it has generated some natural interest and fair questions. Anything that explores a different role for technology in teaching and learning is likely to do so.

Before the pilot gets underway, we thought it would be helpful to share more about why Kiley Prep chose to explore the model, how the school is adapting it for its students and educators, what the experience will actually look like and, most importantly, what we hope to learn.

Why is Kiley Prep exploring this?

Kiley Prep is piloting an adaptation of a school model developed by Alpha School, which combines technology-enabled, mastery-based academic learning for a small portion of the day and dedicates the rest to hands-on, project-based learning and other experiences. Alpha has been developing an adaptation of its model for public schools, and Kiley Prep is further adapting that approach for its own students, educators and context. Alpha has attracted considerable attention as its model has expanded, primarily through private schools in a growing number of communities, with interest across all income levels.

What caught Kiley Prep's interest, though, was not the attention surrounding Alpha. It was the promising results with students more similar to those we serve. At one Texas school serving a 100% low-income student population, with approximately 40% English learners, students averaged 2.2 times expected annual growth on NWEA MAP last year. Results approaching that level at Kiley Prep would substantially exceed the academic growth we typically see in our middle schools.

Now, those early results do not tell us that the model will work at Kiley Prep. They tell us that it is worth exploring. And that is precisely what this pilot is designed to do.

What is Kiley Prep designing?

This fall, one veteran Kiley Prep teacher, who is deeply excited about the opportunity, will lead the pilot with a single class of sixth-grade students. At its core, the pilot will test two fundamental questions: Can technology help students master academic content more effectively, while allowing an educator to

spend more of their time building relationships, coaching students, providing targeted support and helping young people develop the skills and confidence they need to thrive? And could a different use of an educator's time make the work itself more sustainable and rewarding, helping reduce burnout and keep great educators in the classroom? Importantly, this was a school-based decision. The opportunity to explore the model was first presented to Kiley Prep's principal in early July and, shortly thereafter, to the veteran teacher who would lead the work. Both wanted to pursue it and began thinking about how the approach could be adapted for Kiley Prep students.

That kind of school-level decision making is central to the SEZP model. We want the educators closest to students to have both the authority and responsibility to pursue promising approaches to improving student outcomes. Kiley Prep's leaders and educators chose to pursue this opportunity, and they will play a central role in shaping it as the pilot unfolds.

Parents and caregivers have a choice, too. Kiley Prep is planning information sessions so parents and caregivers can learn more about the pilot and ask questions before it begins. Parents and caregivers may choose to have their child participate in the pilot, and every Kiley Prep student will continue to receive the full range of supports, services and opportunities, regardless of participation.

How is Kiley Prep adapting the Alpha model?

To be clear, Kiley Prep is only adapting elements of the Alpha model for Kiley Prep's students, educators and public-school context. One important adaptation is the role of the educator. Alpha schools use a model built around staff members called Guides. At Kiley Prep, a veteran Kiley Prep teacher will instead lead the classroom and drive the work with students. That is an intentional choice and reflects our belief in the central role educators play in knowing students, understanding their progress and helping them succeed.

Another important adaptation is that the Kiley Prep model is being designed to serve all students, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities. One of the possibilities we are especially interested in exploring is whether more individualized pacing can better meet a wider range of learning needs, providing additional support when students need it and allowing them to move ahead when they are ready.

Alpha will provide consulting and implementation support to the Kiley Prep teacher, including access to people who know the model well and can help think through implementation questions, troubleshoot challenges and make adjustments based on what the teacher and students are experiencing. That support is being provided at no cost to Kiley Prep or SEZP. And the adaptation will continue throughout the pilot. What works for Kiley Prep may look different from what works at Alpha's schools, and that is by design.

What will this look like for students?

Students participating in the pilot will experience a school day that looks different from a traditional schedule, while remaining aligned to Massachusetts sixth-grade standards. Kiley Prep is testing a different way of helping students master that content. For a concentrated portion of the day, students will use adaptive learning platforms that respond to what they know and where they need support. This isn't intended to mean more screen time. In fact, participating students may ultimately spend *less* time on

screens than other middle school students. The aim is more productive, individualized learning, with students moving ahead when ready and getting additional support when needed.

That creates more room for experiences away from screens: working with peers, solving problems, pursuing interests, building relationships and developing habits such as persistence, independence and collaboration. These experiences are structured, not incidental. Students will work through a sequence of hands-on projects and real-world challenges, designed to build specific skills over time, with clear expectations for what strong work looks like and regular opportunities to demonstrate growth to peers, educators and families. An important part of the pilot will be understanding how this works for different learners. Do students feel challenged and supported? And, most importantly, are they learning and growing?

What will this look like for educators?

The educator's role is central to Kiley Prep's adaptation of the Alpha model. We see the technology used in this pilot as an additional tool and support for the educator, helping provide more individualized learning while allowing the teacher to focus more of her time on the work that requires her expertise, judgment and relationships with students. Indeed, during a limited portion of the school day, students will use technology to work through academic content at an individualized pace, with the teacher monitoring progress and providing support. However, for the rest of the day, the educator will lead individual and small-group learning, hands-on and project-based work, coaching and other experiences designed to deepen learning and build students' skills, confidence and independence. The opportunity is to focus more of the educator's time where it can have the greatest impact: knowing students deeply, responding to individual needs, challenging them in different ways and building the relationships that are at the heart of great teaching.

For SEZP, an important question is whether this different use of an educator's time can lead to even greater impact for students. Additionally, it is worth noting that there have been no staffing changes at Kiley Prep as a result of the pilot, and the participating teacher will have the same working conditions as her colleagues.

Finally, as with any technology used in our schools, the tools must comply with student privacy requirements, including the SPS AI policy.

What will we be looking for?

Above all, we will be looking for student growth. We will look carefully at academic progress and mastery, while also paying attention to student engagement, attendance and the experiences of students, families and the educator leading the work. We will also look for evidence that students are building durable habits, with the ability to work through difficulty without giving up, to take on more responsibility as they demonstrate readiness, and to contribute meaningfully to their classroom community. We will be especially interested in how the model works across the range of students Kiley Prep serves, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

We are approaching this as a genuine pilot, not as a predetermined first step toward expansion. Alpha is understandably excited about the possibility that the work could eventually grow to additional cohorts or schools in Springfield. Those plans are well and good, but for SEZP, what comes next will depend on what happens at Kiley Prep. We have always been relentlessly focused on student outcomes and supporting

educators, and we will bring that same standard to this work. We will consider expansion, if we see evidence that the approach is producing meaningful benefits for Kiley Prep students. If the results are as strong as proponents believe they can be, there may well be a fair question about whether we should move faster. But the evidence comes first.

What comes next?

Kiley Prep is preparing to launch the pilot later in September, and we're excited to see what its students and educators teach us.

Over the course of the year, we'll listen to students, families and educators, study the results and continue adapting as we learn. The evidence may tell us to move faster. It may tell us to change course. Some elements may prove more powerful than others. That's the purpose of a pilot: to start with a promising idea, adapt it for Kiley Prep's students and learn from what happens.

We also want the work to be open to questions and observation. Kiley Prep's leadership and the educator leading the pilot have a plan for engaging the broader Kiley Prep staff as the work gets underway, including opportunities to understand the approach, ask questions and learn from the pilot. They have also invited union representatives to visit the classroom and see the work firsthand, and we welcome that engagement.

More broadly, SEZP has always depended on two things that we believe can and should go together: empowering educators and being willing to try new approaches on behalf of students. This pilot is grounded in both. It was chosen and shaped by a school and educator willing to try something different, and it will succeed only if it works for the students they serve.

We look forward to learning alongside them.

Sincerely,

Matt Brunell, Colleen Curran & Kisha Morgan
SEZP Co-Executive Directors