Special needs students find success.

ILLINOIS STUDENTS SHOW ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT AFTER LAB ADDED.

State science test scores were above average at Carl Sandburg Junior High School a few years ago, but they weren't where teachers and administrators at the Blue Ribbon school believed they should be, especially for the school's special needs students.

In an effort to improve science background knowledge at this Rolling Meadows, Illinois, school, a Synergistic Systems science lab was implemented and all students were required to take the course.

"I looked at the standards we covered in the regular seventh and eighth grade science curriculum and chose Modules that would cover what we missed," science instructor and lab facilitator Mark Tobin said about the process of selecting just the right mix of Synergistic curriculum.

While the Synergistic System has helped his school continue its academic excellence, Tobin says the numbers that most impress him are those for at-risk students. Students with learning and behavioral disorders saw their numbers go from 54 percent meeting or exceeding state science standards in 2000 to 66.7 percent in 2002. Math scores for this classification of students went from 28 percent meeting or exceeding state standards in 2000 to 43.3 percent in 2002.

STUDENTS WITH LEARNING AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS SAW THEIR NUMBERS GO FROM 54 PERCENT IN 2000...TO 66.7 PERCENT IN 2002.

"The numbers that jump out at me are those for the at-risk kids," Tobin said. "One of the goals for our school and district is to have 90 percent of students meet or exceed on the state tests with no significant difference between groups. The labs are helping to close that gap."

"The only curriculum change from 2000 to 2001 was the installation of the science tech lab," said Tobin, who noted that Principal Barbara Karll was particularly pleased with students' improved performance.

Sandburg also has an industrial technology Synergistic Systems lab, which has been in operation for eight years and served as the inspiration for implementing Synergistic science.

"We observed how engaged students were in the industrial tech lab, so we thought it would help our science program," Tobin said.

And help it has. "Synergistic Systems is more effective in delivery because it puts the students in charge of their own learning," Tobin explained. "It also helps the students that learn in different ways. All students see, hear, and perform hands-on activities related to their topics. It doesn't matter if they are not a strong reader. They are hearing what they are supposed to do. Any level of student can have some level of success on a daily basis."

A traditional science teacher for eight years prior to teaching Synergistic Systems, Tobin enjoys his new found freedoms in the lab.

"I am not just a teacher anymore. I am a facilitator," he says. "I have the freedom to move around and interact with the students on a more one-on-one level and not have to worry what the rest of the class is doing because they are so engaged."

view the statistics, next page>

Carl Sandburg Junior High IEP students who meet or exceed state standards

ILLINOIS STANDARDS ACHIEVEMENT TEST

The chart below depicts increased scores on the Illinois Standard Achievement tests by seventh- and eighth-grade IEP students at Carl Sandburg Junior High in Rolling Meadows, Ill. In the spring of each school year, seventh-grade students complete state assessments in science, while eighth-graders complete assessments in math, reading, and writing. A Synergistic Systems science curriculum was implemented in 2001 with no significant changes to other core curriculum. Carl Sandburg Junior High is an ethnically diverse Blue Ribbon school in suburban Chicago.