

A Silicon Valley startup is quietly taking over U.S. classrooms

Silicon Valley is determined to improve education by infusing it with technology. Its latest example is Kiddom, whose personalized learning software has quietly entered classrooms in 70% of U.S. school districts, according to the company.

Bottom line: Education is an obvious target for tech entrepreneurs—it has both mission and [market size](#), especially as schools increasingly invest in tablets and lightweight laptops, amidst growing concerns over the future of work.

The pitch: The promise of "personalized learning" is that students will be more successful if enabled to learn and work at their individual paces, along with regular guidance from teachers. Kiddom helps track each student's progress and can provide customized lesson materials. It also collects information on each student's skill level, learning pace and learning style.

- "I think it's a data problem," says venture capitalist Keith Rabois, who led an investment in Kiddom for Khosla Ventures. He points out that medical records weren't digitized until recently, before which it was more difficult for patients and doctors to get a full understanding of a person's health. "There's a big promise in personalized learning, almost a Holy Grail."
- Although Kiddom isn't currently making any money, CEO Ahsan Rizvi says that revenue generation likely will include charging use fees to school districts for new products (its currently free tools will remain free).
- Kiddom says that once 20% of teachers in a school are using its software tools, it usually takes six to seven months for the rest of the school to adopt.

"Memorizing content is not what makes students successful,"

argues Abby Griffy, an instructional supervisor for Marshall County School District in Kentucky. Griffy's district began using Kiddom earlier this year as part of an effort to overhaul its approach and shift away from its previous focus on standardized tests. It also still uses software from some of Kiddom's competitors.

- One of the district's main goals is to better prepare students for jobs and educational pursuits after high school—to "instill 21st Century skills in them," Griffy says.
- One of Kiddom's most compelling features, for Griffy and Marshall County's school district, is the ability to match student assignments and work to education standards. For this, the company has partnered with a dozen content providers, such as Khan Academy and PBS Learning Media, and uses machine learning to analyze the school work.
- Since it began these efforts, standardized tests scores have dropped, says Griffy, though administrators expected a dip as part of the transition.

But not all experts are convinced yet that tech-enabled personalized learning is an education panacea.

- Personalized learning can require that teachers prepare more assignments and lesson plans, putting a strain on their already busy schedules.
- Some experts are concerned that the heavy use of computers for lessons and assignments can deprive students of skills like group collaboration. Asked for comment, Kiddom tells Axios that it views technology as a way to enhance interactions between the student and teacher, not as a replacement for it.
- The Carpe Diem Collegiate High School and Middle School in Yuma, Ariz. was initially praised for its rows of cubes with computers for each student that produced higher standardized tests scores. However, the school struggled to retain students. Silicon Valley-based AltSchool also

recently said it's scaling back its school operations to instead focus on selling its software.

- Kiddom, which has only raised \$6.5 million in funding, faces several better-capitalized competitors, including Google Classroom, Summit Learning Platform (330 schools in 40 states, backed by Mark Zuckerberg's philanthropic organization), and AltSchool (\$174 million raised).

Go deeper: Mother Jones [recently looked into](#) Summit Learning Platform and its parent company, a network of charter schools founded in 2003.

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