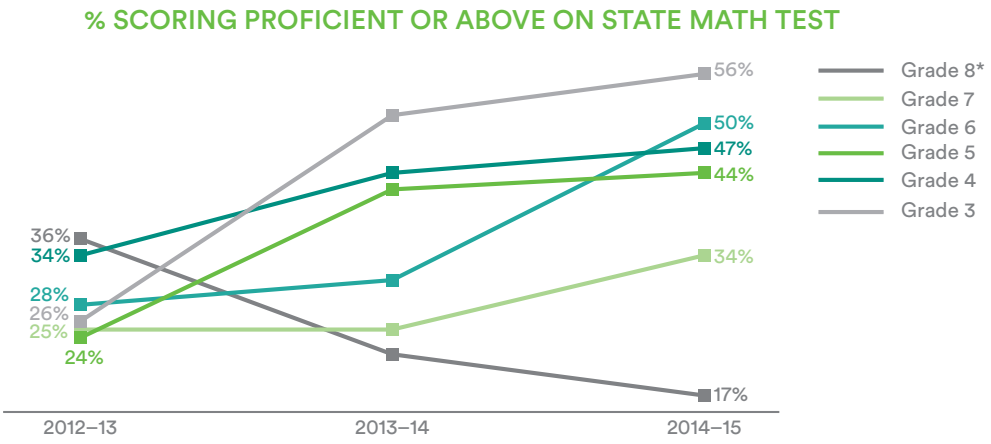
# Ongoing Commitment to Learning Helps Deer Park, NY Make Steady Progress

A phased-in approach, intense module study, and a strong commitment to professional development have helped Deer Park, NY successfully implement *Eureka Math.* The results: steep student gains in grades 3–7, more student engagement, and greater teacher knowledge and confidence.




*Since 2013–14, most of the higher-performing 8th grade students take the state's Algebra Regents exam instead of the 8th grade math test, which helps explain the decline in scores.

The 4,300-student district was one of the first to use the curriculum materials originally developed by Great Minds for EngageNY under contract with the New York State Education Department. With supportive leadership, district leaders participated in the first Network Training Institute (NTI) in Summer 2011 and continued participation in each institute training through 2014.

"We did intense professional development in Summer 2013 and really unpacked the elementary school modules, looked at exit tickets and priority lessons. That helped us realize what we didn't know," said Danielle Sheridan, District Administrator, Elementary Curriculum and Instruction. The district focused on developing a cadre of teachers as experts who shared best practices back in their schools and classrooms.

As with many first-year implementers, teachers were especially concerned about the pacing, unable to cover the entire curriculum in the recommended time. Conversations with Great Minds consultants helped them think about the lessons in three tiers: "must-do" problems, "may-do" problems" and enrichment. Sheridan said the major emphases documents, which detail the most important content work of the grade, were especially helpful. In response to some parent confusion, teachers also scaled back and carefully selected homework questions that went home.

After the Summer 2014 NTI, Deer Park pooled resources with colleagues from neighboring districts to have teacher-writers from Great Minds provide more intensive support throughout the school year. They had about three sessions per grade level (through grade 8), each attended by 30-80 teachers. The other districts included Lynbrook, Long Beach, East Meadow, and Mineola.

"The sessions were very hands-on, walking teachers through each lesson, having them try it out, sitting with other teachers, and answering questions," said Sheridan.

At the middle and high school levels, a top priority has been to adapt the lessons to fit into the district's 40-minute periods.

Word is spreading. Teachers from various districts are comparing notes, including at local nail salons. "You overhear these conversations. They say they need more than the trainings. So, they're visiting our classrooms to see it and they also need a chance to work with the materials," says Sheridan. "There's a real collegiality."

During the 2014–15 school year, the district experienced a culture shift. As teachers became more well-versed in the content, they could focus more on differentiating lessons and engaging students in their own learning.

"The first two years, we really focused on understanding the content, how to approach different skills and strategies. Then we could be more thoughtful about student engagement," Sheridan said. "Would love it if we could have done it all at once, but teachers first need to know and understand what they're teaching."

The district is now providing more training in the upper grades, which have been using the *Eureka Math* modules for only one (high school) or two (middle school) years. Performance in grades 6 and 7 has risen steadily, but Grade 8 has declined. "Part of that is because the highest-performing 8th grade students often take the Algebra Common Core Regents Exam," said John Watson, Curriculum Associate for Mathematics and Business, Grades 6–12.

In response, the district extended instructional time for Geometry and Algebra 2: students have a double period every other day. Next year, all Regents-level courses will have double periods of math every other day. "The new standards are supposed to be an inch wide and a mile deep, but we're finding the curriculum is actually a mile wide and a mile deep," said Watson.