

# Whittier City School District (CA) Singled Out for Math Excellence

One of only two California school districts with consistent math test gains in 2017

When educational leaders in the Whittier City School District (CA) received their students' state standardized test scores for the 2016–2017 school year last fall, they were a bit disappointed. On average, scores were up only 6 to 7 percent year-on-year across all elementary school grades. “We were hoping for 20 percent,” said Angie Baltierra, Whittier’s curriculum coordinator.

## DISTRICT PROFILE

11 schools

6,300 students

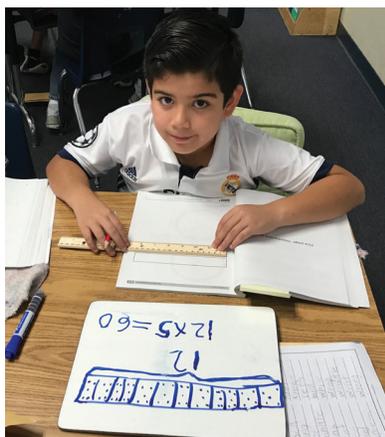
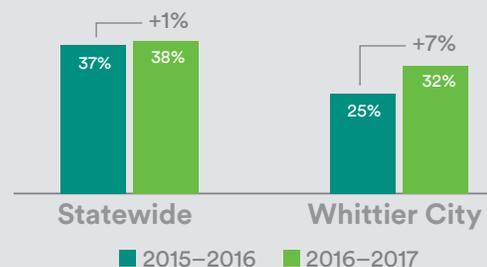
- 72% low-income
- 20% English Language Learners

But WestEd, an educational nonprofit that was working with the district, was very impressed, as was State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, who publicly congratulated the district during an onsite visit in late October. It turns out Whittier was one of only two districts in the state that posted consistent gains in math in every grade (Grades 3–8) last year.

The secret of Whittier’s success? A quality curriculum in *Eureka Math* and a huge, sustained investment in professional development.

Whittier’s success story goes back to the 2014–2015 school year, when a couple of teachers there started dabbling in EngageNY Math (the earliest version of *Eureka Math*) and were excited to see how closely it aligned with California’s new standards for college- and career-readiness. “Teachers really needed something aligned with the Common Core,” Baltierra said. “EngageNY Math/Eureka Math was aligned with the standards and with our beliefs about how kids should learn math. The focus on conceptual understanding spoke to us.”

## Whittier Outpaces State in Math Gains



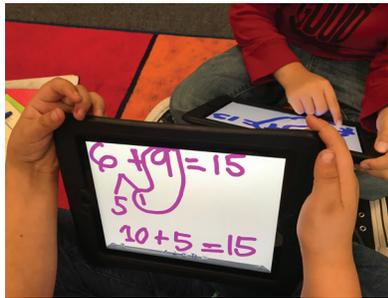
## EXTENSIVE AND SUSTAINED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the first year of *Eureka Math* implementation, some teachers struggled with the curriculum’s new approach to math instruction, especially when it came to pacing lessons, so the district stepped up its professional development. First, Whittier hired instructional coaches in spring 2015. Then, in summer 2016, several coaches and teachers attended a *Eureka Math* PD Institute in northern California, where they learned about tools and pacing techniques—such as omitting or combining lessons and adjusting the End-of-Module Assessments—to help teachers in the district implement the curriculum more effectively.

In summer 2017, the *Eureka Math* team conducted a three-day onsite training on how to customize the curriculum for all teachers in Grades K–5. “*It really helped teachers make sense of the modules,*” Baltierra said.

In addition, the district won a state grant to help pay for lesson planning and study sessions, where teachers in Grades K–2 can delve deeper into specific lessons. This year, all teachers in Grades 3–5 receive two days of PD using the Lesson Study format. Twice a year, all teachers attend daylong lesson study sessions, and grade-level teams are pulled out of classrooms one day a week to spend additional time mastering the curriculum and instructional practices. “*These help them understand the math behind the concepts, the ‘why,’*” said Baltierra.

Teachers also receive ongoing coaching at their schools. In Grades K–5, teachers have data-reflection sessions built into their school day. The current focus has been to look at Exit Tickets,



module assessments, and aligning teaching with the end-of-year assessment. “*We invest a lot in professional development and pedagogy. They’ve been a priority of the superintendent for the last 10 years,*” Baltierra said.

In addition, administrators have been helping teachers evaluate students’ strengths and areas for improvement based on data from the Smarter Balanced state standardized tests, which California students take each spring.

## CLASSROOMS HAVE CHANGED

In Whittier, test scores aren’t the only thing improving thanks to *Eureka Math*. Classrooms are more dynamic. Students use multiple strategies to solve problems, and there is a lot more discussion and small-group instruction, which helps teachers individualize lessons.

Whittier also is making sure to bring parents along. Students are sent home with *Eureka Math* Homework Helpers, which give parents a better understanding of the curriculum’s new approach to learning math. A Whittier teacher hosts a popular YouTube video series, “Mr. Kung Has Problems,” which helps parents and students alike with *Eureka Math* homework.

This year the district is including several lessons on *Eureka Math* during its Parent Academy. Parents seem excited about *Eureka Math*, according to Baltierra. “*If we put Eureka Math on the meeting agenda, parents will come. They want to know,*” she said.

Bottom line: Parents are learning more. Students are learning more. And teachers are enthusiastic. “*After three years of using Eureka Math, teachers know what to anticipate. They know what kids need. They are much more confident,*” Baltierra said.