

Rancho Santa Fe Elementary School:

Teaching the Curriculum with Fidelity Leads to Double-Digit Gains Outside Phoenix

Laura Combs, Principal, Rancho Santa Fe Elementary School, Arizona



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Grade 5 students at Rancho Santa Fe Elementary School west of Phoenix were three times more likely to score “highly proficient” on the annual Arizona state math tests than when they were Grade 3 students just two years before. And they were nearly twice as likely to receive “proficient” or “highly proficient” scores.

SCHOOL PROFILE

1 of 14 schools in Litchfield School District

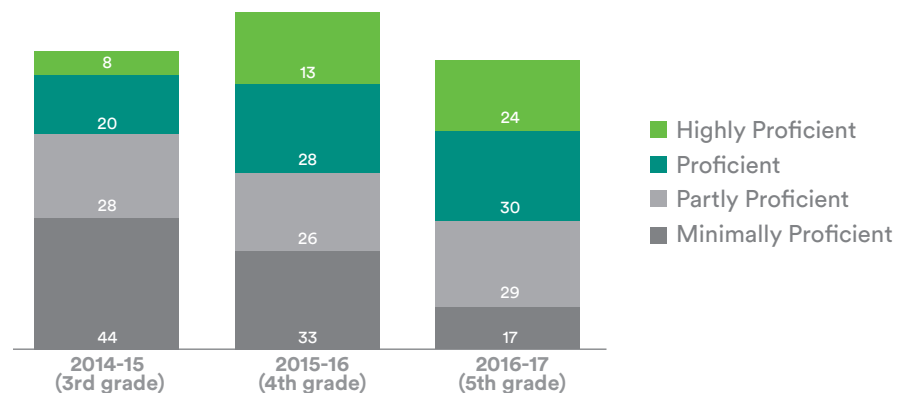
650 students

53% low income

15 English learners

The school’s principal, Laura Combs, says the school’s adoption of *Eureka Math* has a lot to do with the impressive gains. “*Eureka Math has made a significant and lasting impact on students. Between 2016 and 2017, the school showed the highest gains in proficiency in the district for both math and English language arts.*”

MATH SCORES RISE AS STUDENTS PROGRESS



Combs says *Eureka Math* is much more rigorous than the school’s previous math curriculum. “*It’s a different mindset when you give kids multiple strategies to get the same end results. I tell my teachers every year that for the first few months, students will most likely need extra help. By November or December, concepts will start clicking and they can pick up the pace.*”

Staff needed to resist the temptation to require student mastery after every lesson. The curriculum repeats concepts throughout a module, and students are not expected to demonstrate mastery until later in the year. “*It is a challenging curriculum to learn and to teach. It was hard for teachers to see what was really important versus what was just being introduced in a given lesson. They hadn’t yet experienced the whole scope or the curriculum’s cyclic nature. I kept telling them to move forward, that by November and December, they’d start to see light bulbs go on in their students.*”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HELPS

Extensive professional development has helped. After using the EngageNY version of the curriculum for three years, the school purchased *Eureka Math* materials this year. Teachers said the hours of PD videos in the Eureka Digital Suite were especially helpful. *“They could see the gradual release of responsibility sequence: ‘I do it, we do it together, you do it with partners, you do it independently,’”* Combs said.

She added that the *Teach Eureka* videos have also been useful in explaining where teachers should place their focus, helping them distinguish where the curriculum merely introduces a skill and where it introduces key concepts that students must master by the end of the year.

CHANGES IN CLASSROOMS ... AND AT HOME

Changes are also noticeable in how classrooms look and sound because learning with *Eureka Math* is much more cooperative than with other math curricula. Students first work independently and then share their answer and strategy with a partner. *“They think more deeply about math,”* Combs said. *“Students have become more accountable for their answers to problems, discussing how they got their answers and explaining strategies that worked better for them.”*

The more challenging curriculum has forced the school to rethink its homework policy as well. *“We had to start doing homework differently, partly to address parent concerns that they were having a harder time helping their kids,”* Combs said. In response, many teachers now schedule a one-week lag between teaching the lesson and assigning homework. That way, students have a better chance of understanding the concepts and five days to practice the skills in class before doing more practice at home.

The key has been adherence to the curriculum. *“We had to shift our mindset of what we thought kids could do mathematically. I had to keep telling staff to continue teaching the curriculum with fidelity. I told them that at the end of the year, we could evaluate what worked and what didn’t, and if needed, we would then make changes or supplement. What we discovered is that we did not need to do either,”* Combs said.