

## POMPTON LAKES SCHOOL DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

# Eureka Math Ramps Up the Rigor

When New Jersey moved to adopt more rigorous college and career readiness standards about six years ago, northern New Jersey's Pompton Lakes School District got to work looking for curricular resources that would align with those standards. Grades K–5 math specialist for the district's Lincoln School, Caitlin Thomas, remembers *Eureka Math* standing out after other resources fell short.

*"We adopted a program in the fall of 2012, and about halfway through the year, we realized that the program, despite its claims, was not aligned with the standards to the degree that we had hoped,"* Thomas says.

In the fall of 2013, Pompton Lakes piloted *EngageNY Math*, an early version of *Eureka Math* developed in partnership with the New York State Education Department. Now, the district is in its third year of full *Eureka Math* adoption for Grades K–5.

### DISTRICT PROFILE

4 schools

1,570 students

21% special education

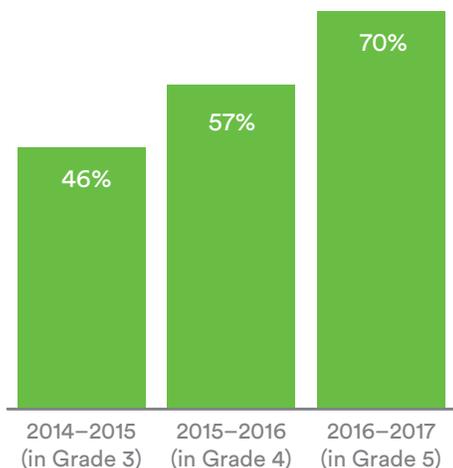
3% English learners

### PROFICIENCY RISING

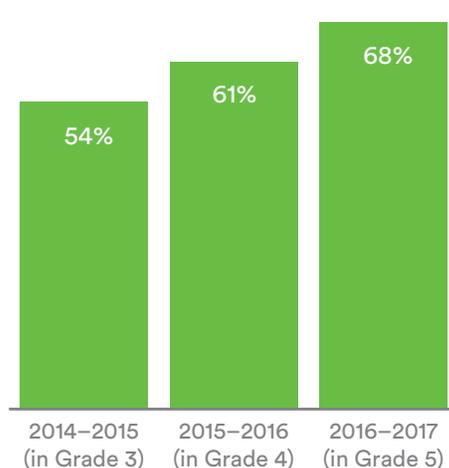
Students who were in Grade 3 in the district's two elementary schools, Lenox Elementary and Lincoln Elementary, in 2014–2015 and have been using *Eureka Math* since then are making significant gains in math. Each year, the percentage of students in that cohort reaching the proficiency mark on the end-of-year PARCC math assessment has risen — up 24 percentage points at Lenox and 14 at Lincoln.

These graphs represent the progress of a cohort of students who were in Grade 3 in the 2014–2015 school year. The data show that each year, as students move through Grade 5, more and more of them scored as proficient on the end-of-year PARCC math assessment.

**LENOX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
Cohort Math Proficiency 2014–16



**LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
Cohort Math Proficiency 2014–16



More students are now also hitting the highest level—Level 5—on the PARCC test. *“By the time students get to fifth grade, the math scores on the state test are pretty high,”* Thomas says. *“The amount of Level 5 scores that we’re achieving now has really increased since we’ve adopted the curriculum.”*

Thomas notes that because *Eureka Math* has students working at the highest level of rigor every day in class, they aren’t surprised by the problems they find on the standardized test. Rather, they think to themselves, *“No big deal; we’ve been doing this all along.”*

She says that classrooms even sound different after the switch to *Eureka Math*. Student conversations about math are much more dynamic, and the instructional styles of teachers are a lot more engaging. *“It’s not so much like, ‘Here’s a worksheet; show me what you know,’”* she says. It’s more like, *“Draw me a picture, turn and talk to your shoulder partner, and talk about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it.”*

## THE JOURNEY TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Thomas says that, while support for the curriculum is high today, the transition took patience and persistence. *“Change is difficult, especially if you’ve been in the same room in the same building for 40 years. The hardest part was getting teachers to rethink how they teach math, how they model it, how they talk about it, and then what the kids are doing with it,”* she says.

To prepare for adoption, she adds, teachers needed to study the curriculum and participate in professional development. *“We started taking a module at a time, planning the module, and then sitting down and saying, ‘Okay. What tools do you need? How do you need to reevaluate what you know so you’re successful at teaching this?’ And we gave them time to do that,”* she says.

Lincoln School is also looking forward to utilizing *Affirm*, the *Eureka Math* digital assessments and practice tool, for the 2018-2019 school year in order to enhance its data collection and to inform instruction even more effectively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EUREKA MATH ADOPTERS

Asked what advice she has for others now trying *Eureka Math*, Thomas suggests teachers use the curriculum as a guide not a script. *“When my teachers got the curriculum, they thought, ‘How will we ever do this in a math period?’”* she recalls. *“But you don’t have to read every single line. You don’t have to be scripted, and you don’t have to do every single problem.”*

She also says teachers must prepare and collaborate to deliver their lessons. *“The first time through, you can’t wing it,”* she says, adding that meeting as a group and studying each module helped teachers tremendously. She also recommends that administrators consider giving students and teachers at least an hour a day for math if possible. She says the subject needs and deserves that level of attention.

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— Caitlin Thomas,  
Grades K–5 math specialist