

PARAGOULD SCHOOL DISTRICT, ARKANSAS

Curriculum, Training, and Persistence Lead to Big Math Gains in Arkansas District

The Paragould School District in Northeast Arkansas made the jump to *Eureka Math*™ in 2014, seeking a curriculum aligned with college- and career-readiness standards that would help students gain deeper conceptual understanding of mathematics. District leaders aren't looking back.

Paragould students are making major strides in math, demonstrated by the results of their ACT Aspire Achievement Test. That's the end-of-year assessment the state has used for the past three years. Proficiency scores rose from 34 percent to 47 percent between spring 2016 and spring 2018. And scores improved not just among the overall student population but also among subgroups of students in Grades K–8, including low-income students and special education students.

PARAGOULD SCHOOL DISTRICT

Number of Schools: 8

Number of Students: 3,140

KEY STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

White: 82%

Minority: 18%

Low Income: 70%

English Language Learners: 4%

Special Education: 14%

PROFICIENCY SCORES, ACT ASPIRE ACHIEVEMENT TEST



TEACHER SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

Superintendent Debbie Smith says those results are encouraging, especially to the classroom teachers who have worked hard to help students transition to a more rigorous curriculum. “Because we’re seeing positive results with our assessment scores, I think the teachers have even more buy-in with *Eureka Math* than they had in the beginning,” Smith says. “They’re seeing that it is working, and students are learning what they need from grade to grade.”

The district brought in members of the *Eureka Math* team early to deliver professional development (PD), and every year it sends teachers to PD Institutes that the *Eureka Math* team conducts around the country. Educators and administrators have also taken important steps to create a strong culture of professional learning internally.

Those efforts have led to teacher growth as well as student growth, says K–12 Math Specialist Matt McGowan. “We’re getting better at understanding where the students are, and our teachers are able to take the curriculum and meet students’ needs. And that’s key,” McGowan says. “They don’t just open up the books and teach a lesson from front to back. I’ve got teachers who, when I walk into a classroom, are highlighting certain questions because

they think that's what their students need the most. That lets me know that they have a better understanding of what they're teaching, that we're moving. We're making progress through the curriculum."

SUCCESS AND ENGAGEMENT FOR ALL

Oak Middle School Principal Donna Singleton says students are much more interested and engaged in math than they were in the past. "They like math," she says. "They get excited about math." And the curriculum is working across the board. "It's exciting for the kids when they see that they can do math. And it's all kids. It's not just our higher-level kids. Some of my special-education kids are embracing the math and even doing better than some of our general-education kids," says Singleton, who adds that the curriculum has lent itself to differentiated instruction by offering multiple methods for solving problems.

Singleton says parents have come around after initially being concerned about the switch to *Eureka Math*, since it was different from previous curricula and so unlike the math instruction they had as kids.

"We had major pushback from parents, usually because they didn't understand the math," she says. But that has subsided. The district provides [parent tip sheets](#) to parents and guardians, and it hosts Family Math Nights to address any questions they might have about the curriculum. Math nights usually feature teachers and students from different grade levels leading interactive mini-lessons.

"Ultimately, I think happy kids equals happy parents," says Jonathan Fulkerson, principal of Woodrow Wilson Elementary School. "Kids are learning, and math is making sense to them. We're providing all the extra remediation and help they need, and they're going home prepared to do their homework."

ADVICE TO PEERS

Superintendent Smith says switching to *Eureka Math* was a great decision, but new users should be prepared to work.

McGowan agrees, noting that it can be challenging for teachers to set the right pacing at first and get through the entire curriculum for each grade the first time they use it. They have to learn what to emphasize and where they can pull back. He says two things are particularly important: to offer training and to help teachers understand that the pacing of *Eureka Math* is different from other curricula. "I think we're pretty settled on our pacing now," he says, "and teachers are making it through."

McGowan also advises school and district leaders to encourage a positive mindset and to be persistent. "Stay with the curriculum," he says. "Don't give up on it because you'll start seeing growth from grade to grade to grade if everybody's on the same page."

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