

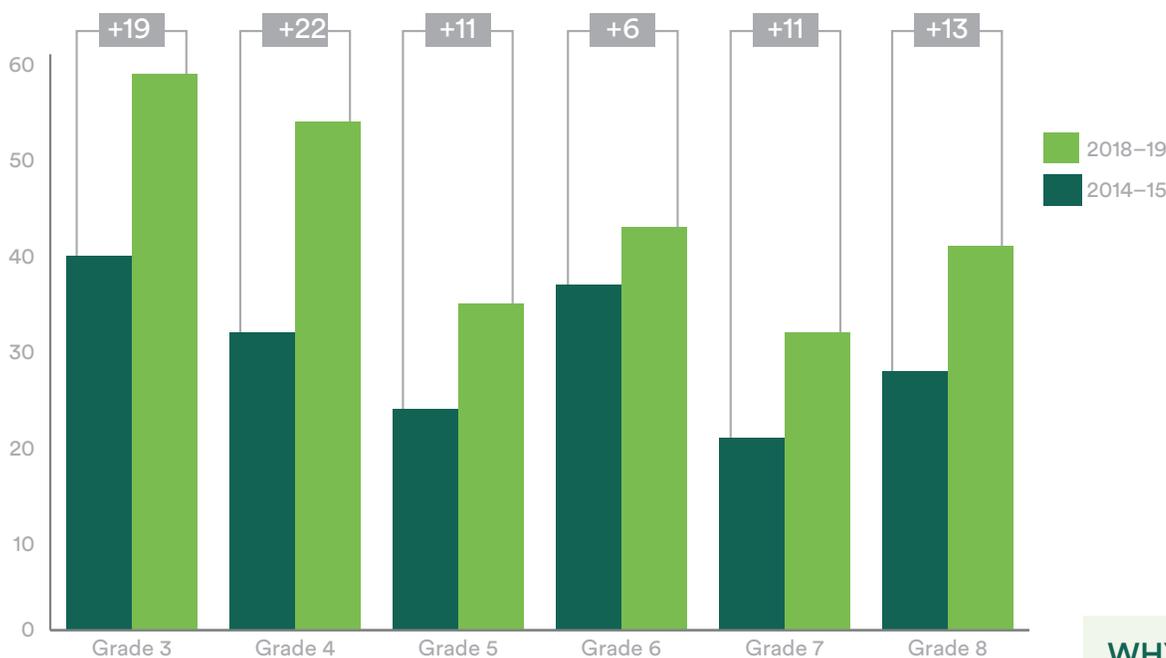
Schools Average 13.6 Percent Math Gains Over Four Years

Public schools in St. James Parish (LA) have made major gains in math achievement since the district began using *Eureka Math*[®] for Grades K–8 during the 2014–2015 school year. Current Grade 5 students have learned math only the way *Eureka Math* presents it.

Scores on the state’s standardized test demonstrate the dramatic improvements in student math performance. The percentage of Grades 3–8 students scoring mastery or advanced on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) exam has risen an average of 13.6 percentage points in the past five years. The largest gains (22 percentage points) occurred in Grade 4.

Four Years of Significant Gains

Percentage of students scoring mastery or advanced on LEAP



Danette Becnel, one of the district’s elementary curriculum supervisors, thinks a strong curriculum like *Eureka Math*, combined with improved instruction and committed teachers, have played key roles. She cites four reasons the district chose what was in 2014 a relatively new curriculum:

- its focus on concept development;

DISTRICT PROFILE

6 schools

– 2 PK-3

– 2 4-6

– 2 7-12

3,626 students

WHY THEY CHOSE EUREKA MATH

- Concept development
- Student engagement
- Depth
- Teacher-written

- the level of student engagement;
- its depth; and
- the centrality of teachers in the development process, written by teachers for teachers.

TEACHERS CITE BENEFITS

Teachers say *Eureka Math*'s rigor, focus on concept development, and attention to fluency distinguish the curriculum from other math programs. "*Eureka Math* prepares our students to be thinkers and problem solvers, to really understand math," says Vickie Weber, a Grade 4 teacher at Gramercy Elementary School. "It prepares our students for the real world and requires strong problem-solving skills. In the past, we taught traditional math using math facts and memorization of formulas."

"*Eureka Math* is more in depth and challenges the students to explain their thinking process. It helps the student know *why* the answer is correct or incorrect," says Tiffany St. Germain, who teaches Grade 3 at Paulina Elementary School.

Teachers of older students appreciate how the lessons build on themselves throughout the grades. "When the program came to St. James Parish, I was teaching first grade, and the students had trouble completing Sprints and learning signals for fluency drills. As the year went by and we started continually doing those activities, the students begged for more. I noticed their fluency in math getting stronger and quicker. Now that I'm teaching fifth grade, I can see the strengths in math from the students who were first introduced to *Eureka Math* [in earlier grades]," says Lakeisha Johnson, a Grade 5 teacher at Gramercy Elementary School.

Her colleague, Abby Baker, adds, "After teaching *Eureka Math* in third grade for three years, I moved to fifth grade. I can see the connections! I love being able to say, 'Remember when we did that in third grade?'"

COMMON CHALLENGES

Some striving learners, especially Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in the Response to Intervention system, benefit from additional support, teachers say.

"The challenge with *Eureka Math* is with the students who have large gaps in learning. Many of these students did not begin with the *Eureka Math* curriculum, so they are not used to being critical thinkers and problem solvers. They are used to learning a direct process or steps to follow instead of realizing that true learning takes place during the process: thinking, discovering, struggling and not just achieving answers," says Marci James, a Grade 7 teacher at Lutchter High School.

Wanda Eubanks, also a Grade 7 teacher at Lutchter, says: "*Eureka Math* is a great Tier 1 curriculum that will push students to higher levels." But she, too, is less sure how to use *Eureka Math* resources for remediation.

Others say *Eureka Math* resources have helped them gain expertise and confidence over the years. "The first two years it was challenging for me as a teacher because of the teaching style," says St. Germain, "but after watching all the support videos *Eureka Math* provides, I've had smooth sailing."

Tricia Miller, an implementation success manager at *Eureka Math*, says the curriculum was developed by teachers

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to address priorities such as Eubanks'. "We wanted to make mathematics accessible to all learners, including those needing remediation," she says. "*Eureka Math's* use of concrete and pictorial models before moving to more abstract ideas can help. And consistently using the same models and problem-solving strategies can lead to deeper understanding of concepts."

She adds that Great Minds®, the company that produces *Eureka Math* and two other curricula, offers several [webinars](#) and is developing a new professional development session on using the Universal Design Learning guidelines and supports to customize the curriculum's lessons to meet various student learning needs.

SIGNIFICANT PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators have taken advantage of the many opportunities for professional development related to *Eureka Math*. Some have attended regional [Great Minds Institutes](#). Others have attended state-sponsored professional development. Coaches have attended professional development sessions that review techniques to prepare and customize the curriculum's lessons to fit time constraints and meet student needs and have redelivered the training to teachers during the district's summer summit. Educators have access to [Eureka Digital Suite's](#) Teach Eureka video series. Additionally, the district's elementary schools support job-embedded professional development.

CONNECTING WITH PARENTS

Parent outreach, especially in the early years, helped address concerns and pushback, which is common when a school or district introduces any new curriculum. Schools host family math nights, provide parent study guides, and encourage parents to use the many [parent resources](#) that Great Minds and the school district offer. Curriculum supervisor Becnel says she hears far fewer concerns now than during the early years of implementation. "Now that parents have seen their older children succeed with *Eureka Math*, they tend to be more comfortable."

LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE

For districts and schools just starting with *Eureka Math*, Becnel offers several pieces of advice. One is to stay the course, especially in the face of initial opposition from some teachers and parents. "Be flexible, patient, and open minded. *Eureka Math* is quite different from how math was taught previously," she says.

For St. James, expecting everyone to stick with the curriculum and providing extensive support have been essential. Sustained student progress has also helped build confidence. Helen Martinez, a Grade 6 teacher at Gramercy Elementary School, points to five reasons for the school's recent success:

- Educators teach *Eureka Math* with fidelity. They use it as the main instructional tool, follow its scope and sequence, use the strategies taught, and allow students to solve a variety of types of problems.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about the state's expectations for students and have those same expectations in the classroom.
- Teachers allow their classrooms to evolve into learning environments that encourage discussion and arguments with evidence rather than teaching "I do, we do, you do" lessons.
- Teachers receive encouragement from administrators and support staff.

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Elementary Curriculum
Supervisor

- Teachers host after-school tutoring programs to help striving learners.

Becnel has also experienced the power of *Eureka Math* in her own family. Her daughter served as a counselor in a STEM camp, working with district students in Grades 5, 10, and 11. “She came home one day and said, ‘Mom, you won’t believe what these fifth graders can do,’” Becnel said. “They know and understand math better than the eleventh graders.”

Indeed, the *Eureka Math* experience has been so positive overall that the district piloted Great Minds’ *Wit & Wisdom* ELA curriculum for Grades K–2 in one elementary school last year and began implementation in a second school this school year.