

Scores Up for Students—and for Teachers Too

TRUST THE PROCESS.

That is Jared Myracle’s advice for educators using *Eureka Math*® and, not coincidentally, the hashtag he uses on all of his social media posts.

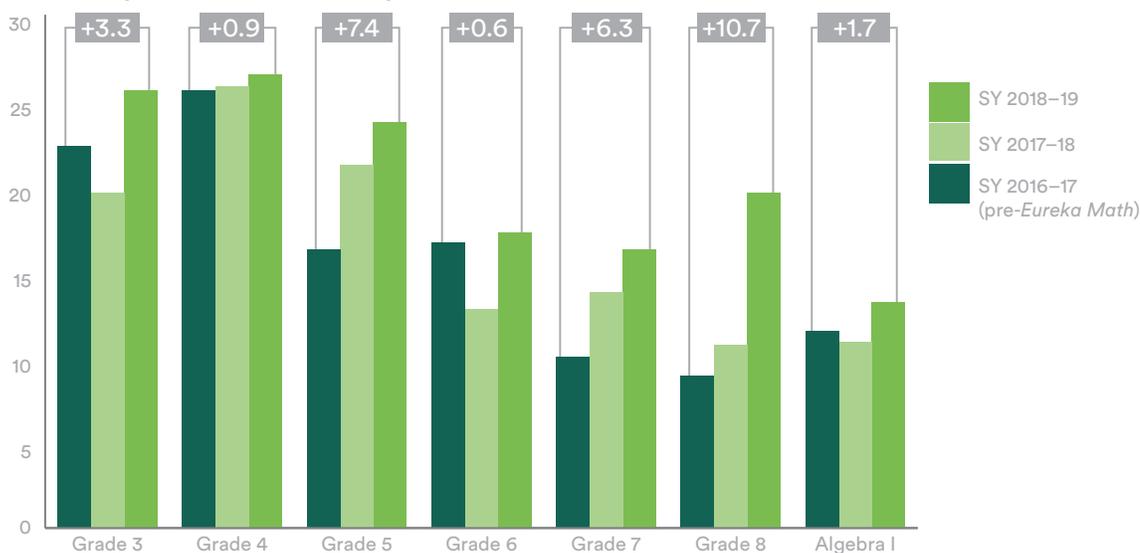
Myracle, the chief academic officer at the Jackson-Madison County school district in west Tennessee, had the district start using *Eureka Math* when he first arrived in the 2017–2018 school year. “We dove right in,” he recalls.

Student achievement gains have been impressive. The percentage of students scoring proficient or above on the TNReady state math test has increased an average 4.4 points in Grades 3–8 and Algebra I. Gains have occurred in all grades. “Less than 25 percent of the state did that well,” says Myracle.

Previous years had seen steady declines in student achievement across the district, enough to put Jackson-Madison schools into “turnaround” status as one of the lowest performing districts in the state. “In terms of growth, we’ve gone from mind-bogglingly low, the second worst of 146 districts in the state, to about 50 spots higher,” says Myracle.



Percentage of students scoring mastery or above on TNReady math test



*The Algebra I data are not grade-specific.

DISTRICT PROFILE

Schools: 23

Students: 12,500

Adopted *Eureka Math* districtwide in School Year 2017–2018

Teacher performance has improved too—up from 36 to 63 percent meeting or exceeding state growth expectations for Grades 3–8 teachers and from 49 to 57 for high school teachers.

CONSISTENCY AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Myracle especially appreciates *Eureka Math*'s focus on what he calls “the Two C’s”—the *cumulative* effect of having *coherent content* across grades. He welcomes the curriculum’s focus on concept development. “It makes sense for kids to focus on the concrete first, then the pictorial, so that they can see the images and then the abstract, like algorithms,” he says.

To reinforce this approach, Myracle has all of his teachers make frequent use of small dry erase boards in every classroom. He says they help students show their work and teachers reinforce the big ideas. (*Eureka Math* uses these boards for fluency activities.)

Grade 7 teacher Jeff Gordon appreciates *Eureka Math*'s emphasis on word problems. “My students are highlighting more in my math class than ever, reading paragraphs, and looking closely for the context clues,” he says. “This is helping our English language arts teachers too, because kids are doing so much reading.”

Grade 5 teacher Kelly Moffitt says *Eureka Math*'s approach is especially beneficial for her striving students. “They can break down the problems, draw area models, use lots of approaches. The math clicks for them,” she says.

MULTIPLE SUPPORTS FOR EDUCATORS

The educators acknowledge that implementation was challenging in the first year. Implementing immediately in all grades meant that older students were playing catch-up from day one, having to learn foundational concepts such as place value that were taught in earlier grades. “That first year was tough,” Moffitt recalls. “It took me a whole year to learn the curriculum myself. I’d take it home at night.” Gordon says he tries to teach the lesson two or three times “inside my head” before instructing his students.

The district supports teachers in several ways: training twice a year from Great Minds®, the company that created *Eureka Math*; weekly planning meetings; an instructional coach in each school; teacher leaders managing cross-district professional learning communities; and stipends so that teachers can participate in after-school training. “We place a real premium on intellectual preparation,” says Myracle.

“It’s no small thing to change a curriculum across a whole district,” he acknowledges. Adults are often reluctant to give up old methods and materials. “But what’s comfortable for the adults may not be what’s best for the kids,” he says.

Creating ownership among teachers is important. So is staying the course. Or, as the hashtag says, “#trusttheprocess.”

The Benefits of a High-Quality Curriculum

Chief Academic Officer Jared Myracle endorsed having a curriculum aligned with standards and implemented systemically in a September 2, 2019, essay for *Education Week*. Excerpt: “I believe that district leadership should provide teachers with strong resources and allow them to utilize their skills and abilities to focus on teaching students, not creating curriculum,” he writes. “Curriculum adoption isn’t the answer to all of the challenges in education. However, it is a vital part of an equation that can’t be solved without it.”