

District Encouraged by Year One Math Gains

Quentina Timoll, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in Louisiana’s East Baton Rouge Parish School System, wasn’t sure what to expect when the district received scores on the state’s spring 2019 math test. *Eureka Math* was adopted district-wide August 2018 and released gradually throughout the 2018-2019 school year. As a result, benchmark scores were uneven.

“We were shocked,” Timoll says, pointing to gains in every grade in the percentage of students scoring mastery or advanced on the state’s LEAP summative assessment. “When we saw the school scores, we said, ‘Oh wow, the kids got it.’”

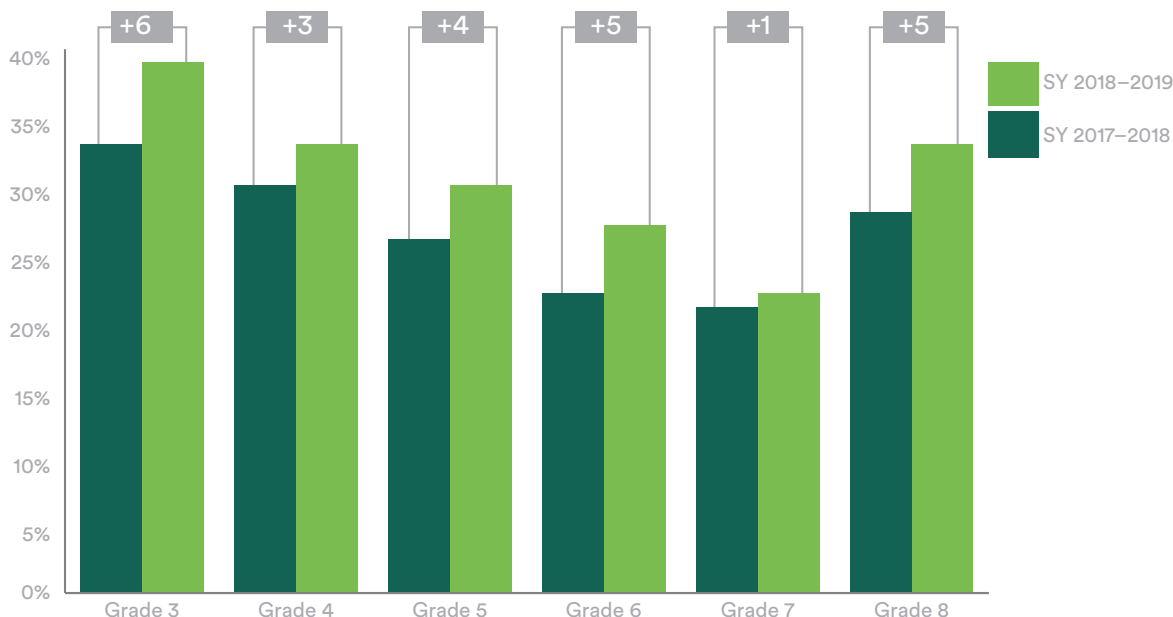
DISTRICT PROFILE

Schools: 83

Students: 41,500

Adopted *Eureka Math* in School Year 2018–2019

Percentage of All Students Achieving Mastery or Advanced on LEAP Math Test



Timoll attributes the district’s encouraging first-year gains to several factors. First, strong teacher buy-in, a lesson she learned from her experiences as the assistant superintendent in St. John the Baptist Parish School District. In East Baton Rouge, a group of 70 educators vetted multiple curricula, met with vendors, and offered three recommendations to their principals. The principals piloted the recommended materials for several weeks, and then selected the materials to use in their schools; all principals chose *Eureka Math*.

GRADUAL PHASE-IN

The district used a thoughtful process for phasing in *Eureka Math* in every school by offering information sessions to teachers throughout the summer. The teachers used Google Hangouts to ask questions and collaboratively plan

lessons online. In addition to having some staff members attend professional development from Great Minds®, the creator of *Eureka Math*, the district used its content leaders to support teachers. After receiving this training, district content leaders trained teacher leaders, who then trained teachers at the school level.

In the first semester, the focus was on access and use. Were teachers using the teacher manual? Were they annotating their lessons and working the problems themselves? Were they starting to shift their instruction to more conceptual understanding? Were they giving students consistent access to the *Eureka Math* materials?

“During the first few months, we were focused on purposeful planning to help teachers make the instructional shifts,” Timoll says.

By January, the district shifted focus to teaching rigor, and providing time for students to talk, model, draw, write, and demonstrate their thinking. To mitigate teachers’ temptations to focus on test prep, the goal was to dedicate at least 70 percent of instructional time to grade-level instruction and the remainder on remediation or other activities to close gaps.

“We started to see and hear students catch on,” Timoll says.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Timoll and her curriculum colleagues were in classrooms every day, observing, modeling and reinforcing the importance of focusing on concept development. “We had to reinforce that we weren’t expecting that students who scored Below Basic were going to move to Mastery right away. But we wanted to give principals and teachers hope, to get students from here to here, and then from here to there,” one step at a time.

“It was hard work,” Timoll says. “*Eureka Math* materials are different from how most of us learned to teach. The standards are more conceptual, with more academic discourse and fewer tricks.”

But the effort was worth it. Timoll says, “The greatest joy was to go into a classroom and see children discussing why they got a certain math answer, explaining different problem-solving strategies using mathematical language, and seeing the students read real books.” (Many classrooms are using *Wit & Wisdom*, the English language arts curriculum also from Great Minds.)

MORE INSTRUCTIONAL RIGOR

Priorities this year are for 80 percent of observed classrooms to use the curriculum as intended, to continue to support principals and other instructional leaders in identifying good instruction, and to make practical suggestions for improvements. Each school requiring a comprehensive intervention now has both a mathematics and an English content leader—classroom teachers who will help support their colleagues.

“The great thing about *Eureka Math* is that it tells you what to teach but not how. Teachers need to own the *how*. We’ve defined the *what* and taken that burden off of teachers,” Timoll says.

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