

Even after Initial Gains, Elementary School Leaders Increase Investments in Professional Development

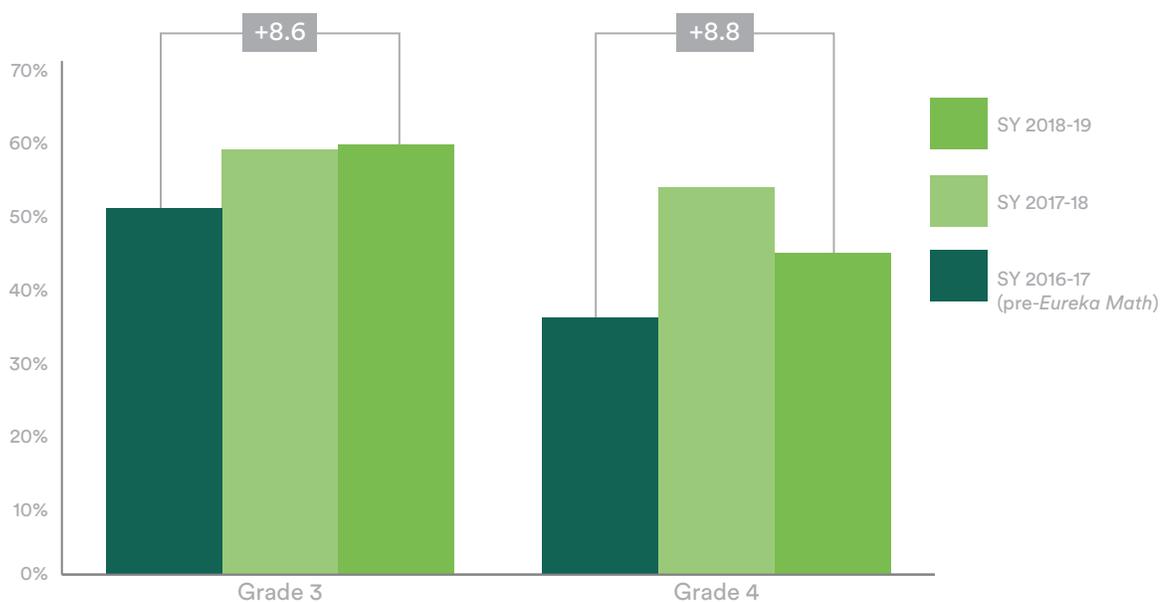
Students in this 1,320-student public charter school in Greenville, SC, posted impressive gains on the state achievement test after the first year the school implemented *Eureka Math*® in Grades 3 and 4: increases of 8 points and almost 18 points, respectively. (Scores on the 2019 test were mixed: continued gains in Grade 3, but a decline in Grade 4.)

SCHOOL PROFILE

1,320 students

Grades K–5 adopted *Eureka Math* in School Year 2017–18

Percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on SC state test, school years 2017–2019



But leaders had hoped for even better results. By scrutinizing classroom practices, they pinpointed the problem: not enough professional development for teachers and school leaders. And then they attacked the problem with a vengeance.

The school has taken advantage of all the training that Great Minds® offers—from workshops on everything from lesson preparation and customization to fluency. The educators use the *Eureka Math* Digital Suite of online tools. Instructional coaches regularly observe lessons and offer feedback. “A major piece for us was building teachers’ own conceptual understanding,” says Assistant Principal Eyvette Schrimmer. “For many of us, teachers and administrators alike, math was a foreign language,” adds Principal Kyle Kovach.

A UNIQUE COTEACHING MODEL

This year, a new organizational structure gives teachers in Grades 3 and 4 two periods a day to plan lessons, review student work, and strengthen their own conceptual understanding of math. Many schools use a coteaching model with two teachers per classroom. Legacy has tweaked the model to ensure that all Grades 3 and 4 classes have two mathematics teachers and two English language arts teachers.

“We found it’s better to have two people who know the curriculum thoroughly instead of having an ELA teacher support a math teacher,” says Kovach. The teachers jointly teach a Grade 3 class and then switch to Grade 4. The approach allows more time for scaffolding, interventions, and personalized instruction.

The school can provide the extended planning time for two primary reasons. First, it has a longer school day (until 4 p.m.). Second, all students have two “special periods” a day when they have a physical education or music class, use the media lab, or work on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) projects. During those 45-minute periods, math teachers and other core content specialists can plan. School leaders restructured the school day based on an extensive review of the practices of high-performing schools serving students like Legacy’s.

Overall, Kovach and Schrimmer say professional development is focused on the “what” and the “how”—the learning standards at each grade level and the specific “teacher moves” needed to help students reach those standards..

MORE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Legacy is also focusing much more attention on empowering students to engage more actively in their own learning. “Under the so-called ‘gradual release model (I Do, We Do, You Do),’ we were seeing a lot of ‘I Do, I Do, I Do, and We Do, but not much You Do,’” says Kovach. “We’re shifting the ratio so that teachers are facilitating the lessons, with much more You Do, You Do, You Do,” he adds.

Students frequently engage in Turn and Talk routines, in which they explain their reasoning to peers using math vocabulary. “Kids love it. They enjoy talking. And this helps take the risk out of having an incorrect answer,” Schrimmer says.

The emphasis on continuous improvement corresponds with the school’s ambitious aspirations: to ensure students not only graduate and enroll in college but succeed when they get there. “When we were looking for a curriculum, we found high-performing schools that were serving similar kids to ours and asked what curriculum they were using. They said, ‘*Eureka Math*,’ and we were hooked,” says Kovach, pointing out that success in college-level math starts with a strong foundation in the earliest grades. “*Eureka Math* is designed to make students successful in Algebra I, and the research shows that’s the path to success in college math,” he adds.

School leaders say major investments in professional development, teaching the curriculum with fidelity, and building teachers’ understanding of and commitment to more conceptual instructional approaches are essential. “Sometimes getting teachers out of old habits is hard to do,” says Kovach. “Professional development is the key. Once they’ve bought in and they see what their students can do, it has a flywheel effect. Other teachers say, ‘I want that for my kids too.’”

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— Kyle Kovach, Principal,
Legacy Early College
Charter School