
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

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Lipscomb Elementary School
Williamson County Public Schools
Brentwood, Tennessee

Audio: Engaging Students and Supporting Educators with a School-wide Math Plan

Michelle Contich: My name is Michelle Contich, and I am the principal of Lipscomb Elementary School.

We typically were doing really well in reading, but our math scores lagged behind. So we looked at what we were doing in reading and translated that into our math strategies. We adopted the "Daily Three", which was math with the student, math with the teacher, and math with a peer.

We hired really great math staff, including an assistant principal with a strong math background, differentiation coaches, and math coaches, and we charged them with creating a math plan that would be consistently followed in all grades.

Hailey Kornman: My name is Hailey Kornman and I teach 3rd Grade at Lipscomb Elementary.

So having a math plan really allowed the entire staff to stay focused. I was a new teacher when this initiative started and it really gave me just a layout of what I needed to do and the clear expectations that I was meant to follow.

Our math units start out with pre-testing which is really important just to see where the students are and allows us to do differentiated activities. We clearly communicate the learning targets that allow students to know what they're learning and where we're going. We also just have a lot of different outlets for them to learn and express math, whether that's journaling, whether it's working with a peer or technology. We just always want to encourage that risk taking and the willingness to try.

JAM's, or journaling about math really allows students to show their thinking. We want students to be able to explain math not just come up with the solution. It allows them to draw; in earlier grades we paste things into the journal, in later grades we use different formulas but it just allows them to access information in new ways.

Linda Kirby: I'm Linda Kirby, the differentiation coach and gifted teacher. I came into the building, met with the team, and the math coach and I, would go into every classroom at least once a week and co-teach with the teachers. We worked together to provide challenge for every child, regardless of ability or skill level.

We had to overcome a few obstacles along the way. When children were finishing the math lesson, they thought they were finished with math, they'd learned all there was to learn about math, and would get

out a book and just read for pleasure, and didn't realize that math can be fun and engaging. We wanted them to stay engaged in math during the block time. So we started making challenge folders for every child in the building that was differentiated for each child, so that they had contextual math problems to read and think about math and to learn at their own pace. And once they had the challenge folders, they were eager to finish the lesson but, instead of reading a book, get out that challenge folder that was designed specifically for them.

Some of our teachers also needed to start thinking differently about math. They had been taught with standard algorithms and we were using new approaches where children were encouraged to think about math in, many different ways and use multiple strategies. I did have a teacher come up to me during a PD session and say, "if I had been taught math this way, maybe I would have known then that I was good at math. And now I feel like I can go in and get my children excited about math."

I think, early on, if I could get one teacher per grade level to let me into the class and see that I was not there to judge them, I was there to work alongside them. We were a team. And I think they felt safe being vulnerable, saying "I've never, taught long division with partial quotients. I've never taught multiplication with distributive property. I've just not seen that before and so can you help me so that I can teach in the same way?"

Carol Cortez: I'm Carol Cortez, I'm the assistant principal of Lipscomb, and here's a little bit of advice I'd like to give teachers and leaders about how to make a difference in math. First, you must be all in. Top down, bottom up, have the right staff members to create that math momentum in your building. Second, we learned that we needed to have more cross-grade level conversations to look for trends such as gaps in understanding and how we need to work intentionally to fill those gaps in our instruction. Third, you really need to value and use your school's data throughout the year to monitor the progress of individual students, at class level and at grade levels. And finally, there must be a commitment to the process of enriching every single student. Supporting our lower students through intervention math tutors, keeping our on-grade level students engaged and challenging our high achieving students.

We really made a commitment to a five-year plan to get teachers and students thinking and working like mathematicians. We had different emphases at different points. We might have focused on really looking at making sure we're meeting with every student every day. Maybe for some classes it was making sure we looked at those struggling students and then maybe, push out groups differently for the rest of the week. It really depended on how our teacher pulled that plan into their own thinking and their own planning and making it work with their kids.

Achieving blue ribbon status, it feels like we've won a marathon, that it took a long time to get there but we're just, we're so thrilled for our teachers to have achieved that level.

Hailey Kornman: As a teacher, we can say like, "We're a blue ribbon school." It's just something that's really exciting and we know how much has gone into it. The teachers are so well supported by admin, by coaches, by our teaching peers. If we don't know how to do something there is 50 people that are willing to help us. And so I think that's just been a huge part in building community around this math plan and knowing that someone is there to help you.