**Shelby County Expands *Eureka Math* District Wide**

***‘I never thought they would get it, but they did.’* – exceeding expectations*.***

Confronted with changes in state mathematics standards, educators in Shelby County Schools, Tennessee’s largest district, leapt at the opportunity to introduce a more rigorous and high quality curriculum. This led them to pilot *Eureka Math* in 18 of the district’s schools during the 2016-2017 academic year. They are taking the curriculum district-wide for the 2017-18 academic year to expand on its success.

As district staff, Thomasena Stuckett, Instructional Support Manager, and Christine Bingham, K-12 Math Curriculum and Instruction, had more than a front row seat to the pilot, they drove the process and could course-correct as needed, giving them invaluable insight to the journey.

**Reach High and Focus on Long-Term Goals**

After merging with the Memphis school system and a shift to the more challenging TNReady test, administration was eager to up their game. “*At the outset, improving overall curriculum rigor was a primary consideration*.” Stuckett elaborates, “*Our superintendent was really intent on, and outspoken about, making sure we had challenging content in front of our students. Part of that is making sure the materials are rigorous, which we believe* Eureka Math *supports*.”

Educators from the district who led the implementation emphasized that it is critical to prepare and customize the curriculum so teachers can best use the material and plan lessons to accommodate these shifts. Stuckett noted that “*Pilot schools didn’t see a significant change in students’ understanding until later in the fall and sometimes not until spring.”*

**Support for Teachers and Parents is Essential**

As they learned from the pilot, a key component to successful implementation was professional development for teachers. During the summer of 2016, Shelby County Schools offered over 800 PD (Professional Development) sessions in the district. The following year, that number jumped to over a thousand. Stuckett advised, “*I suggest really thinking through how you roll out your PD. Focus on what teachers need and when they need it.*” Shelby County participated in “Module Studies” and “Preparation and Customization of Eureka Math Lessons and Modules” PD sessions from Great Minds to refine teachers’ focus and help them decide what to omit. District math coaches provided on-going support for the teachers.

Initially, both teachers and parents were concerned about *Eureka Math*’s unique approach: *It’s not how we learned math*. But the Great Minds teacher–writers facilitated relevant PD, provided online resources, and coached Shelby County teachers to help them understand how to best prepare and deliver the curriculum. And to ease parents’ concerns, the district sent home newsletters, provided [Homework Helpers](https://greatminds.org/store/products/group/homework-helpers-products), and even hosted voluntary *Eureka Math* tutoring sessions for parents.

**Student Engagement and Problem-Solving Skills Improve**

The key shift from teacher-focused to student-focused learning almost immediately improved students’ engagement. Christine Bingham, K-12 Math Curriculum and Instruction, points out, “*This new curriculum’s emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving takes time to reveal the improvement in student learning. Some teachers need to be reassured that it’s fine if students don’t show mastery at first because of* Eureka Math’s *cyclic nature, revisiting topics and concepts. Just because you don’t see the light bulb come on right away doesn’t mean it won’t come on later!*”

Bingham also pointed out that students had additional opportunities to practice writing skills and improve reading comprehension through word problems and concepts such as the “[Read Draw Write](https://greatminds.org/math/blog/eureka/post/read-draw-write-a-better-strategy-for-solving)” strategy for problem-solving.

Students increasingly speak enthusiastically among themselves about strategies to solve the math problems and are more inclined to stick with difficult problems rather than give up.

Stuckett described the leaps forward: “*I started seeing a lot of aha! moments while working with, and observing, teachers. I particularly remember a teacher who taught at a lower performing school and, like some colleagues, feared that her students just couldn’t do it. When asked how they were doing, she said, ‘I never thought they would get it, but they did.’ I love those moments!*”