

## Math in Common Evaluation



Math in Common® is a seven-year initiative (2013–20) funded by the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation that currently supports 10 diverse California school districts as they implement the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (CCSS-M) across grades K–8. Math in Common grants have been awarded to the school districts of Dinuba, Elk Grove, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Oakland, Oceanside, Sacramento City, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana. Collectively, these districts serve almost 300,000 K–8 schoolchildren and serve 9 percent more low-income students and 6 percent more English learner students than the average for schools statewide. In addition to supporting each district’s unique initiative for implementing the standards, the grants support the districts’ participation in a cross-district community of practice through which participants learn with and from each other and from experts in the field. As explained in more detail below, WestEd’s role in working with this community of practice includes identifying, distilling, and sharing lessons learned about effective implementation.



## What Are Some Early Lessons About CCSS-M Implementation?

WestEd's frequent [formative evaluation reports](#) on trends and challenges in the participating districts provide valuable information to the Math in Common community, its funders, and a wider audience of policymakers across the state. Report topics have included choices in the sequencing of math courses, the increasing use of site-specific professional learning structures for teachers, the role of principals as instructional leaders, and the adaptation and adoption of instructional materials. Collectively, district efforts and experiences highlighted in these reports suggest several factors that appear to be particularly useful in their standards implementation efforts:

Districts' shift toward greater support for site-specific professional learning allows for tailored capacity-building based on school needs. Professional learning that occurs at a teacher's school during or after the school day, that focuses on lessons, and that includes coaching as well as ongoing collaboration with peers is more likely to generate classroom change than one-time, centralized, and decontextualized trainings.

Support that is embedded in the classroom can deepen teacher, coach, and principal understanding and mastery of math content and high-leverage instructional practices (e.g., use of high-cognitive-demand tasks to facilitate rigorous student academic discourse). Whether through coaching or through group observation, embedded support enables site-based educators to engage in shared reflection about instruction. By doing so, it serves as a lever for change at the classroom and school levels.

Principals are vital instructional managers and agents for change. These school leaders are learning the key elements needed to support effective CCSS-M instruction and to build their own site-specific learning community focused on standards implementation. Site leader effectiveness is enhanced through professional learning supports that include developing their ability to recognize standards in classroom practice.

Coaches are important drivers of success. They augment principals' leadership at sites and support teachers in planning, modeling lessons, and co-teaching — while also helping establish expectations for results.

Aligned curricula and instructional materials are essential but not sufficient for shifting instruction. Educators need supports and guidance to use these resources effectively.

Subsequent Math in Common reports will continue to follow the progress of the initiative and participating districts.

## How Does Math in Common Work?

Designed by [California Education Partners](#), the Math in Common community of practice supports each member district in developing, updating, and executing its continuous improvement plan for implementation of the CCSS-M in grades K–8.

Grounded in the latest research on mathematics education and education improvement, the initiative aims to build leadership capacity within each district and to support the broad Math in Common community of practice as its members discuss effective strategies, address common challenges, and exchange tools and lessons learned about standards implementation.

The following strategies are used both to support professional learning in each district and to facilitate cross-district sharing of ideas:

Two-day convenings, held three times each year, engage four to eight key participants from each district, including assistant superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, district-level math staff, and school principals. The work is strengthened and sustained by the participation of a stable team from each district, with that team's membership representing both top decision-making authority and boots-on-the-ground implementation experience.

Workshops, led by expert presenters and the districts themselves, focus on common problems of practice (e.g., lesson study, principal training, strategies for improving high-quality student mathematical discourse, using state assessment data for improvement). Workshops frequently involve opportunities for districts to visit each other, with hosting districts showcasing their implementation activities.

Summer professional development sessions are offered to develop the instructional leadership capacity of site-based educators, including principals, assistant principals, and mathematics coaching staff. These sessions share what has been learned through the cross-district community of practice with a broader audience from each district.

Expert technical assistance is provided by request to each district leadership team to help with unique questions and challenges and to solve local problems of practice.

While Math in Common was designed to support each district's unique implementation strategies, the collective work carried out through the community of practice has moved participating districts toward some common approaches to continuous improvement, including:

**Adopting a systems lens.** The California math standards demand deep and broad shifts in classroom instruction. Math in Common districts have come to see that to enact these deep shifts, teachers need a coherent system of supports provided by many different people and structures in the district. Individually and together, members of the Math in Common community of practice often focus on mapping their district systems and structures (including professional development for teachers and principals; coaching programs; supports for special populations of students, such as English learners; and curriculum) and realigning them to work coherently toward a shared vision of effective mathematics education.

**Building a culture of learning and improvement.** Efforts to strengthen systems tap into the talents of teachers, principals, and district administrators, building confidence and engagement in ongoing learning. In their improvement work, districts are testing theories of change, using data to inform decision-making, examining relationships between district programs and policies and student outcomes, and capturing and applying learning across schools.