

Profiles in Success

Gulfport School District MISSISSIPPI

Developing Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills for All Students

Gulfport School District faces the unique challenge of educating some of the city's wealthiest and poorest areas. In recent years, changing state standards caused the small but diverse district to take a fresh look at how they were serving their students. The new standards stressed critical thinking and problem solving skills that would translate to real-world success. So, educators were on the lookout for new programs that could be implemented across a wide range of schools and student populations.

"Trying to develop conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills with traditional pencil and paper tutoring was not working," says Lea Bellon, Gulfport's Director of Instructional Programs. "Our old practices alone were not getting us there. We were looking for something to fill the void. That's where ST Math came in."

More Than an Intervention Solution

Changing state standards had caused the district to look into various intervention methods for struggling students, but Gulfport Superintendent Glen East wanted something that would inspire deeper learning in all the district's students.

"We wanted to see real-world problem solving in our students, with children being able to sit down and figure things out on their own," says East. "I expected ST Math's focus on conceptual and spatial learning to be effective with students of every ability level."

Gulfport implemented ST Math in their K-6 schools in 2013, with the middle schools joining in a year later. Teachers were initially skeptical, some expressing misgivings about the lack of written directions for students to follow. "Once teachers saw the program in action and saw their students'



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Math can be hard to teach, but ST Math's spatial learning provides a path for everyone to succeed.

- Glen East, Superintendent

confidence growing, they completely bought in," says Bellon. "They saw the value and the way that ST Math helped make math relevant for students."

"It also helped inspire perseverance and motivated students to keep trying," says Carol Ladner, Math Curriculum Specialist. "With paper-and-pencil work, students have a tendency to try it once and just come up with an answer. With ST Math, students stay engaged far longer. Plus, when you speak to the students, you can see that they're making connections and relating the concepts to the real world."

Gulfport School District

MISSISSIPPI



District Facts

District Type: medium, public
Number of Schools in District: 11
District Grade Levels: K-12
District Enrollment: 6,300



Demographic Breakdown

African American: 53%
Caucasian: 42%
Hispanic: 4%
Asian: 1%
Multi-Racial: <5%
Pacific Islander: <5%
Diverse Learners (SPED): 11%
FRL: 73%
ELL: 0.01%



ST Math Implementation

Grades using ST Math: K-8
Type of ST Math instruction:
Labs and in-class rotation

ST Math students performed 15.5% better

than non-ST Math students in reaching the top levels of math proficiency.

From a three-year study including all elementary schools in the Gulfport District.



Increased Math Perseverance, Progress and Improvement

Since implementing ST Math, Gulfport students have enjoyed consistent progress and improvement across all grade levels. "We're really impressed by how engaged the students are, because the information is in a format they can relate to. We find that students challenge themselves, set their own goals, and push themselves to the next level," says Bellon.

West Elementary School Principal, Joshua Lindsey, appreciates that ST Math allows students to progress at their own pace. For instance, inspired by Jiji (the program's loveable animated penguin) a handful of West Elementary first graders once completed their entire grade-level syllabus before the school year was half way through. The students were so engaged that they continued on to higher grade levels.

Lindsey was surprised by how motivating ST Math could be. His school's success earned them a campus visit from Jiji, who played and took photos with the students. Lindsey expected the younger children to be excited, but even the fourth and fifth graders were excited and super-motivated by the visit.

For many teachers, the most appealing thing is that the program completely eliminates the language barrier, especially when supporting their English language learners. "Any student can jump right in and start learning," says Lindsey. "ST Math helps all students realize that math is the universal language."