



Sacramento Students Believe Math is Fun



Last year, the vast majority of students in Doug Wollbrinck's math intervention class increased their scores on the California Standardized Test. Kids voluntarily started coming to class during lunch and after school to work on their skills, and Wollbrinck was hearing two words in the same sentence he never thought he'd hear—'math' and 'fun'.

So what was at the root of this sudden success? Wollbrinck, who teaches 7th and 8th grades at Sam Brannan Middle School in Sacramento Unified School District, attributes it to a software program called iLearn Math. iLearn Math was recently added to the state list of adopted textbooks for math and is winning over teachers, students and parents at a rapid pace.

Wollbrinck spearheaded the search for a more effective method of teaching math after several frustrating years of teaching intervention classes. "There was such a discrepancy in their abilities," he says. Some kids were bored because what I taught was too easy for them and some kids were frustrated because it was too hard for them. I thought there had to be a better way to teach math."

iLearn Math was the first software program considered by the school. They piloted five or six others but ended up going back to iLearn Math. Wollbrinck likes that the answers are not just multiple choice like many of the other programs – the students generate their own answers. In many lessons, they work the problems on paper and then enter the answers into the system. In class, every student solves page after page of handwritten math problems in their notebook; an amount that far exceeds those worked in traditional math classes. It's "mastery-based"; students do

the next chapter until they have mastered the current chapter (scored 80% or higher). "The program doesn't allow them to fail," he says. Most of the grades in his class are now As and Bs.

Wollbrinck has also noticed a big change in attitude. Students are more enthusiastic about learning math; they feel more confident and less frustrated. When they need more attention on a certain topic, Wollbrinck can spend one-on-one time with them to get it right while the rest of the class is working. "iLearn Math breaks things down into very small chunks. I would never have time to do that in class," he says. "I'm dealing with varying abilities and I have to assume they know certain things. This program assumes they don't know how to add $2+2$. They have to prove they know it in order to move on to the next question." The extra time Wollbrinck has opens up opportunities for hands-on attention and additional individual instruction.

One of iLearn Math's most attractive features is its teacher-friendliness. The program keeps in-depth records of each student's progress, which are useful for a variety of things such as student-teacher conferences. Teachers save a considerable amount of time with administrative tasks like grading. If a child spends too long on a certain chapter, the teacher can see that in the report and intervene to help—no student slips through the cracks.

iLearn Math has changed the way the intervention students at Sam Brannan Middle School learn and the way Wollbrinck feels about teaching them. "I actually enjoy teaching intervention classes. I feel like I'm helping the kids that need it the most. It's worth its weight in gold."

