One-in-Five

The Story of Fresno County's Move Towards Instructional Coherence Through Adoption and Implementation Support

The High-Quality Instructional Materials Learning Partners Coalition (HQIM-LPC)

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Executive Summary

Nearly one in five Fresno County students is a designated English learner. So when California released its new list of math materials, Math Coordinator Meagan Thompson made centering multilingual learners (MLLs) in math adoptions "a non-negotiable." Historically, when adoption periods came about, county offices hosted an open-house curriculum fair for educators to browse through the options. She replaced this typical one-off curriculum fair with a two-year, grant-funded plan for 18 districts. UnboundEd facilitated the series, with a full-day session from the English Learners Success Forum, which culminated with a more structured curriculum fair and continued past adoption into implementation.

In Year 1, districts trained first and went to the curriculum fair last. They built teams that included MLL specialists, wrote vision statements, and used ELSF's Math Must-Haves to set specific MLL criteria before meeting publishers. In Year 2, implementation networks are keeping that focus in classrooms through Integrity Walks and deliberate practice with the Math Language Routines.

All participating districts now have a research-based math vision and clear review criteria. Early classroom observations show more student discourse. The lesson for county offices: coherence happens when everyone sings from the same songbook, and in Fresno that song is that every student can do rigorous math.

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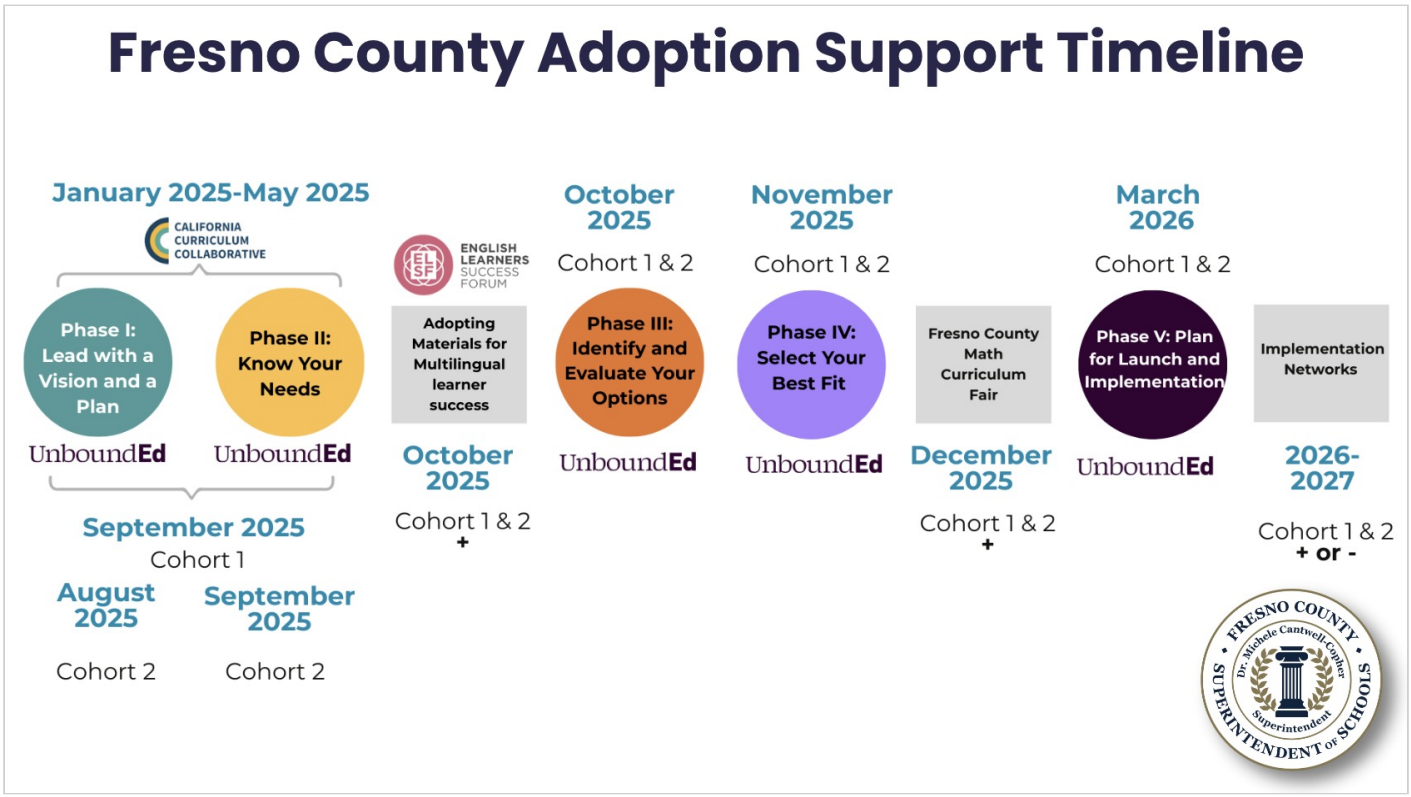
One-in-Five: The Story of Fresno County's Move Towards Instructional Coherence Through Adoption and Implementation Support

One in five is a figure that looms large in the mind of Meagan Thompson, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools' Math Coordinator. With the sixth highest concentration of multilingual learners out of counties in the state, approximately 18% of Fresno County students are classified as English Learners, and just as many are proficient in English and speak another language at home. With such a large population of multilingual learners (MLLs), Thompson knew she needed to center MLLs when planning how the county office would support local districts to adopt and implement new math curricula aligned to the California Mathematics Framework, "Our multilingual learner students need to be in our district visions from the beginning, not an afterthought, and our districts need support to understand what this looks like in high-quality instructional materials." She wanted to do more than just host a curriculum fair at the county office; she wanted to build the capacity of district leaders to select, adopt, and implement high-quality instructional materials that met the needs of all learners. This case study tells the story of a multi-year collaboration with UnboundEd including workshops facilitated by the English Learners Success Forum (ELSF), and half the districts in Fresno County as they worked to build a coherent educational system that aligned state priorities with local needs to support multilingual learners' mathematics education.

Curriculum adoption is a good time to consider instructional coherence - the idea that all parts of the education systems, from state standards and guidance to professional learning, curricula, and assessment, are all aligned to maximize student learning. Indeed, when systems are not aligned, educators are left trying to meet competing, and sometimes conflicting, mandates (Instruction Partners, 2025). As UnboundEd's Shannah Estep, who led the cohort process in partnership with Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, put it, instructional coherence looks like "everyone singing from the same songbook," and the song is "each and every one of our students is capable of doing this work." Estep went on, "We are asking students to talk about math and write about math in a way that a lot of instruction hasn't been happening in the last 15 years or more. Language is at the core of that. We can't talk about math or write about math unless we have the language to do that. So when we're talking about coherence, what are all the pieces that work together to ensure our multilingual learners, and all of our students, have the language to engage in the math in the way that we envision?" A new curriculum can act as a catalyst for change across a system.

Phase 1: Adoption

"We want a systems approach," Thompson said when describing her two-year plan to support districts. The plan grew out of a clear need in the county. When she sent a last-minute email invitation to attend a CalCurriculum workshop in the spring of 2025, nearly 100 people, representing half the county's districts, showed up and asked for more support. Seeing this huge initial interest, Thompson set out to form a more systematic, county-wide Adoption Support Timeline structured in two phases: curriculum adoption was the focus for the 2025-2026 academic year and implementation is the focus for 2026-2027. In the fall of 2025, 18 districts began meeting regularly to develop an adoption plan. Through external funding, Fresno was able to contract with UnboundEd and ELSF to facilitate these workshops.



A Timeline of Phase 1: Adoption

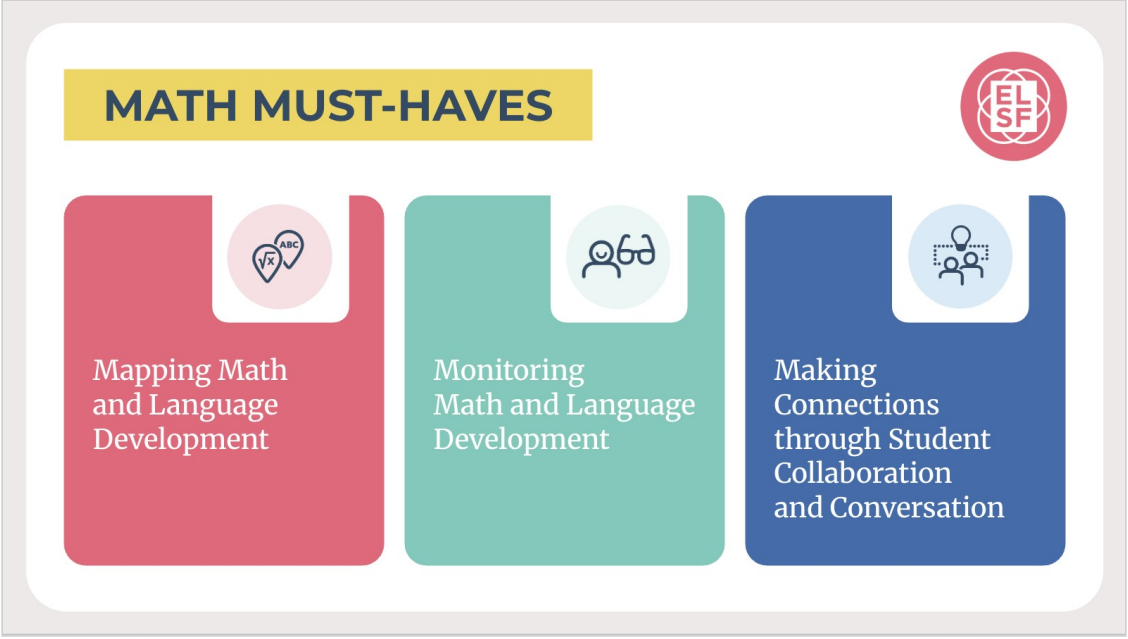
Crafting a Vision

The first two sessions helped district leaders recruit a diverse team, develop a shared vision, and analyze student data to determine local needs. Teams were encouraged to build adoption teams that included MLL specialists to ensure that multilingual learners would always have a voice at the table. The teams then wrote a vision statement for mathematics learning in their district guided by the California Math Framework. For Liz Gamino of Fowler Unified School District, their vision was closely tied to the needs of Fowler's MLLs. After looking at district data, "We talked about a lack of differentiation, insufficient scaffolds and support, accessibility. We talked about what they needed as far as supports such as visual aids, manipulatives, scaffolds. We also talked about translations and the use of sentence frames, all those instructional strategies. We talked about culturally responsive materials being a part of that."

Centering Multilingual Learners from the Start

For the third session, Thompson brought the English Learners Success Forum to Fresno for a full-day, in-person training with the district leaders in service of centering MLLs in investigating materials. In this session, ELSF shared the Criteria for Review of Instructional Materials' Success in Addressing MLL Linguistic and Instructional Needs and ELSF's Math Must-Haves. The Math Must-Haves are three non-negotiable features every math curriculum must include to truly serve all students:

- Mapping of both math concepts and language demands across every grade.
- Robust, actionable teacher supports for monitoring student growth, language, and math.
- Meaningful, sustained structures for student-to-student math conversation, not just standalone activities.



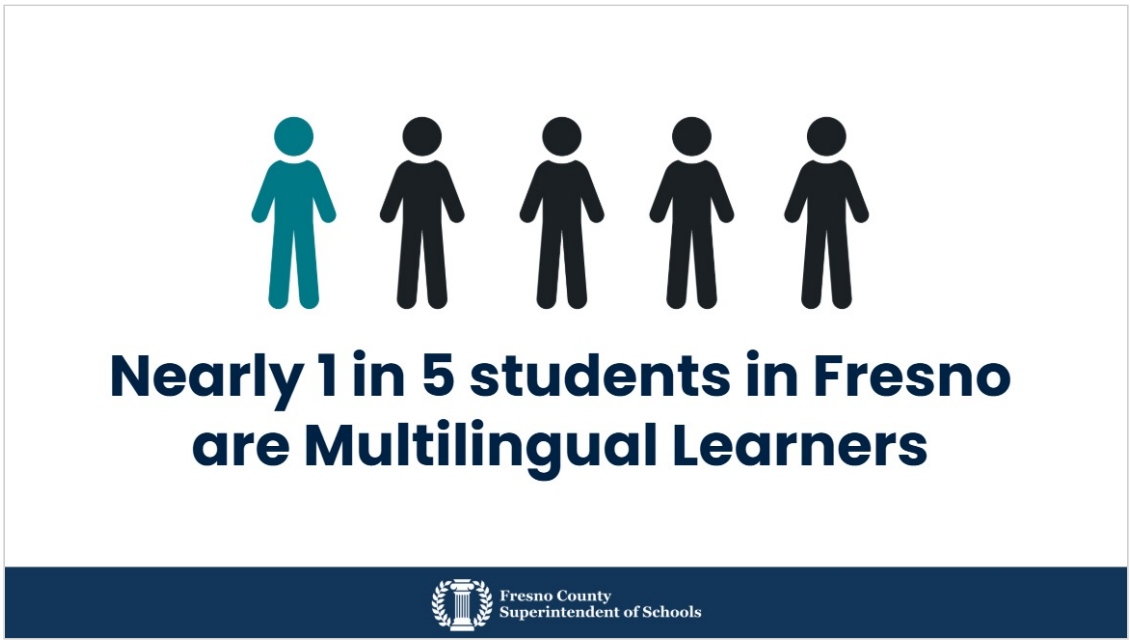
At the conclusion of the day, 96% of participants agreed with the statement: I plan to advocate for the "Math Must-Haves" when engaging with math publishers and/or district leaders to support math adoption in my district. Thompson commented, "That day was a turning point for our Fresno County math team. It's when we realized this needed to be a throughline for every district we work with."

Developing District-Specific, Research-Backed Criteria

In the following two sessions, districts built specific criteria and winnowed their options from the lengthy state adoption list. At this point in the process, district leaders were all starting to sing from the same 'songbook.' "Districts were able to pull directly from the ELSF session to populate their review rubrics with 3 to 6 specific multilingual learner indicators. It made tool development much easier, and many district teams even went back and refined their overall vision of instruction to explicitly address all students. Based on the survey feedback, district teams felt much more empowered and confident in building rubrics and leading review committees beyond just asking for generic "supports for MLLs." They gained clarity on specific elements to evaluate, such as language goals in lessons and assessments," Estep reported.

The Curriculum Fair

Everything came together for a curriculum fair at the county office in December 2025. Unlike traditional curriculum fairs in which educators might wander between publishers, perhaps to be charmed by a particularly persuasive sales pitch, Fresno County educators had a clear mission. District teams arrived with a booklet created by the county office that included their vision statements, non-negotiables, and MLL-focused questions that Thompson borrowed from ELSF's Adoption Toolkit. Thompson welcomed everyone with a brief speech while standing in front of a slide reminding district leaders that "Nearly 1 in 5 students in Fresno are multilingual learners."

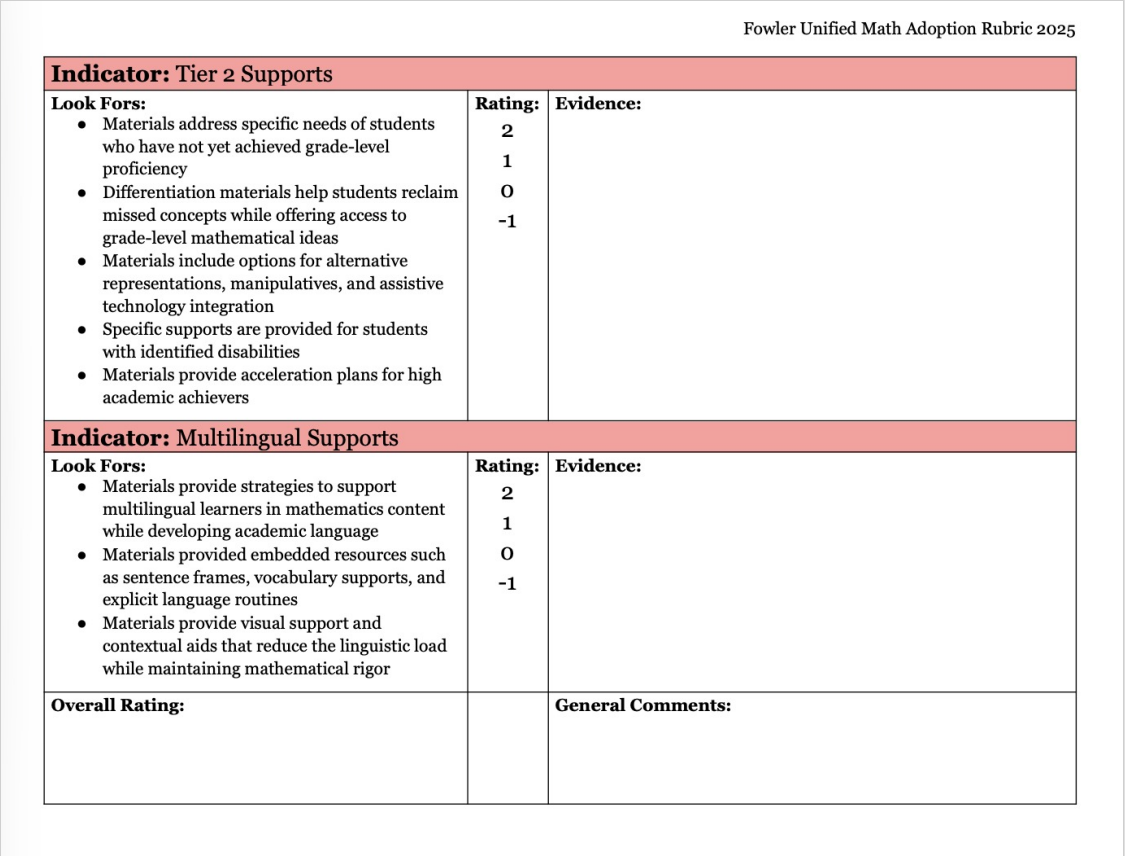


Selecting Curricula

The district teams used their lists of non-negotiables to winnow the options down to 8-10 curricula that they wanted to look at further. They then looked at approximately 4 curricula more carefully using the specific criteria they created in the sessions. Fowler Unified School District's criteria, for example, contained explicit items aimed at improving instruction for MLLs such as language routines and sentence frames. They also surveyed students and families to ensure they had included all voices.

Fowler Unified Math Adoption Rubric 2025

Priority: Instructional Supports		
Look For Rating Scale:	**2** – Strong; **1** – Adequate; **0** – Some; **-1** – Minimal / Absent	
Indicator: Mathematical Routines		
Look Fors: • Materials include explicit language routines to support all learners • Materials include explicit numeracy routines to build number sense • Materials provide embedded time for facilitating student questioning, productive struggle, problem solving, reasoning, and communication • Materials model how to use math talks, games, and collaborative learning to support problem-solving and mathematical communication	**Rating:** 2 1 0 -1	**Evidence:**
Indicator: Tier 1 Supports		



Fowler Unified Math Adoption Rubric 2025

Indicator: Tier 2 Supports		
Look Fors: • Materials address specific needs of students who have not yet achieved grade-level proficiency • Differentiation materials help students reclaim missed concepts while offering access to grade-level mathematical ideas • Materials include options for alternative representations, manipulatives, and assistive technology integration • Specific supports are provided for students with identified disabilities • Materials provide acceleration plans for high academic achievers	**Rating:** 2 1 0 -1	**Evidence:**
Indicator: Multilingual Supports		
Look Fors: • Materials provide strategies to support multilingual learners in mathematics content while developing academic language • Materials provided embedded resources such as sentence frames, vocabulary supports, and explicit language routines • Materials provide visual support and contextual aids that reduce the linguistic load while maintaining mathematical rigor	**Rating:** 2 1 0 -1	**Evidence:**
Overall Rating:		**General Comments:**

Pages from Fowler Unified School District's Math Adoption Rubric

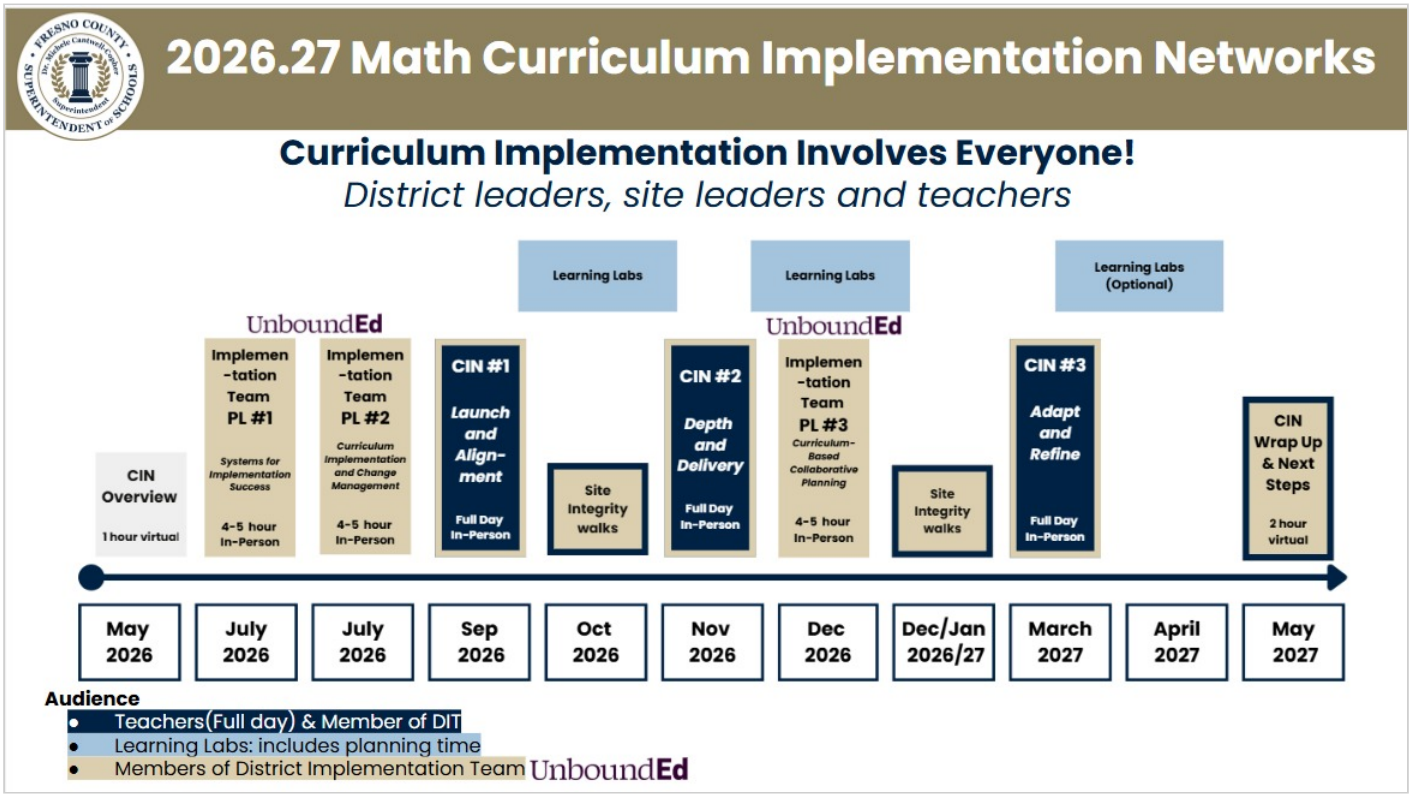
By the end of the first year with UnboundEd and ELSF, 100% of the participating school districts reported having "a math vision statement that is anchored in evidence-based ideas of how students learn math," "a formal process for engaging diverse stakeholders in reviewing and providing feedback on potential titles," and "clear criteria for assessing potential titles that goes beyond standards alignment." Ten districts had a plan for implementation.

Phase 2: Implementation

Thompson says that Fresno has "a system-wide approach to support implementation, because implementation doesn't just lie on the teacher's shoulders." The goal is implementation with integrity, which for Thompson means, "flexibility that honors the curriculum's purpose and rigor. The goal is not fidelity, which means to follow the curriculum word for word like a script. We need to respond to the needs of our students and utilize the curriculum's embedded guidance." High-quality instructional materials cannot support MLLs' learning if teachers are not using them. In a coherent instructional system, district leaders, site leaders, and teachers work harmoniously with the same belief that all students, including MLLs, can learn rigorous mathematics.

For the second year of Fresno County's adoption support plan, Thompson has created multiple networks to support implementation of newly-adopted materials and keep the focus on multilingual learners. "There's so many layers to this. It's exciting," she enthused. Eight districts, including Fowler Unified, are participating in some or all of the networks designed for district leads, site administrators and coaches, and teachers. With further grant support,

UnboundEd is again supporting district leaders' learning through Implementation Teams which are composed of district leaders, site administrators, coaches, lead teachers and MLL specialists. Thompson is also organizing Teacher Networks for Curriculum-Based Professional Development.



A Timeline of Phase 2: Implementation

Implementation Teams

In July, district and site leaders met to learn and plan for system-wide approaches that would keep the districts' visions for mathematics instruction front and center. In September, UnboundEd supported the Fresno County Math team to learn the Integrity Walk protocol, which they then used with all of the district teams. The teams practiced using the walkthrough protocol that centers student thinking and discourse. They visited an elementary and a middle school to conduct these "Integrity Walks." They studied a lesson before entering a classroom, then observed the lesson in action, noting where instruction supported students in meeting content and language objectives. After the observation, the team met to discuss strength-based trends and areas needing additional support. From these, they determined that teachers will need support with academic discourse. Thompson explained that teachers were "inviting kids to talk, but they're not making connections with student thinking, and that's the difference. And so we need more of that to happen." According to Thompson, the trends they observed on the Integrity Walks all tied back to teachers using the embedded guidance in the curriculum such as questioning stems and being intentional about using student work as a base for academic discourse.

Teacher Learning Networks

To support teachers in using the instructional routines - especially the Math Language Routines - in the high-quality curricula their districts have adopted, Fresno also has a network for teachers - the Curriculum Implementation Network. Teachers are divided into grade bands, and each band participates in a full day of learning. In the first meeting, the teachers were introduced to a lesson internalization protocol that is meant to support them in making

sense of the lesson plans. The tool especially focuses on finding supports for language development and for multilingual learners. The tool itself is curriculum-agnostic, so Thompson's team can use it to support a teacher in any district. Luckily, Thompson noted, many curricula use similar structures such as the Math Language Routines, so teachers across the county can learn together, even if they are using different curricula. The teachers analyzed their curriculum to find repeated routines and structures, then rated their knowledge and comfort using each. They then role-played a routine with a fellow teacher, engaging in deliberate practice to improve their pedagogical skills. Thompson plans to use the data from the September meeting to inform the focus for the next network meeting. The Math Language Routines will be a throughline. "One of our main goals is to ensure that teachers feel comfortable with implementing their curriculum. We are collecting mindset data centered on confidence with implementing their curriculum and also the embedded curriculum strategies at each of the three network meetings. I am eager to see the data at the end of the school year," Thompson concluded.

> The High-Quality Instructional Materials Learning Partners Coalition has published a guide for implementing Curriculum-Based Professional Learning (CBPL). It describes how CBPL is most effective when it is ongoing, embedded within collaborative implementation systems, and supported by leaders who align coaching, feedback, and continuous improvement around a shared instructional vision.

Sustained Support Throughout the System

The plan for the rest of the year is an elegant dance between the big picture and the small, between district-level decision-making and Learning Labs for teachers. The California Mathematics Framework gave strong guidance on how to shift mathematics education for all students, and now it's up to leaders like Meagan Thompson to help realize its vision. Her work is already paying off. Liz Gamino says that she is seeing Fowler Unified's students "being engaged and really building a conceptual understanding and being able to work with others and have that mathematical discourse. I'm seeing some of our teachers really become facilitators of learning and not the sage on the stage. I'm also seeing a couple of our teachers who are getting a little bit more comfortable with this productive struggle instead of going in and rescuing their students." Changing students' experiences in mathematics classrooms is a process of continuous improvement, and time will tell how these changes show up in student outcome data.

Challenges and Bright Spots

A perennial challenge is funding at the county office level. Thompson is currently supporting her ELA counterpart as they prepare for an upcoming adoption without grant funding. The county will likely host a curriculum fair without the year-long support for districts. At the district level, Fowler USD is working hard to overcome systemic challenges to vertical articulation. Communication between primary and secondary teachers is limited, and Fowler's vision for student success is not yet consistently implemented across the grade levels.

For Thompson, a bright spot in this work has been her team of eight at the county office. "My team has really aligned for multilingual learners. We're using the same slides, and we all have this throughline. Yes, we have these curriculum implementation networks, but we also have all of these other contracts, and when we sit down and discuss our contracts, everybody is doing Math Language Routines. Everybody is using that 1 in 5 slide, making sure that the importance of supporting all of our students is at the forefront."

Lessons for County Offices

Instructional coherence is possible, and county education leaders have an important role to play in this work. Here are some lessons learned and advice for others.

- **Lean into your role as a regional organizer.** Meagan Thompson learned that so many district leaders in her county needed support with adoption when she sent a last-minute email inviting them to a workshop. She then acted fast to design a plan to meet that need.
- **Bring specialists to the table.** At both the county and district levels, MLL specialists were part of planning conversations and adoption teams alongside content-area experts and instructional leaders.
- **Turn generic criteria such as "supports for MLLs" into specific Look-Fors.** Through structured opportunities to build and revise their own criteria, nearly every participating district included specific criteria that described exactly the kinds of supports they needed for teachers and students.
- **Collaborate with organizations.** Educational organizations like UnboundEd and ELSF can provide essential expert support. County leaders don't need to be experts in everything. Thompson said, "We have eight trainings with our UnboundEd facilitator just for my team, so my team can learn what does implementation look like? What's the process we should take districts through? What do we need to focus in on? All of that is really good learning for us, because it's new to us."
- **Talk to your role-alike peers**. Meagan Thompson especially noted the importance of her conversations with county office math coordinators around the state. Sharing ideas and resources is essential to this work.
- **Consider all aspects of a comprehensive rollout**. The Fresno County work is effective because they are working at all levels of the system. Curriculum, professional learning, site leadership, and district guidance are all taken into consideration. Professional learning is tied to curricula.
- **Keep your songbook front and center**. In order for the whole system to act in harmony, everyone must understand and embrace the guiding belief that all students can learn. For Fresno, like so many counties, serving multilingual learners is the throughline. Thompson keeps it at the forefront, and in her slide deck, in every interaction with educators.

Intentional change management efforts start with looking at student data and creating a vision. This early work can really make the difference for students in the classroom.

1. Fowler USD analyzed their data and crafted a vision that clearly stated *all* students deserve rigorous mathematics. They identified MLLs as a group they needed to plan around from the beginning.
2. Fowler USD added MLL-focused Must-Haves to their curriculum review criteria.
3. Fresno County Superintendent of Schools hosted a curriculum fair and provided a guidebook for districts that highlighted their visions and focused attention on MLLs.
4. Fowler USD analyzed a subset of curricula using their review criteria.
5. Leaders did Integrity Walks and learned that students are talking more in class and teachers need more support connecting student ideas to the math content.
6. County-provided Teacher Networks support deliberate practice with the Math Language Routines.