

# Santa Maria-Bonita School District

responds to needs of students with thoughtful curriculum adoption

by MSM Staff

**O**n California's central coast lies the picturesque Santa Maria Valley, spanning from the Santa Lucia Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Just off the Pacific Coast Highway, rolling hills give way to fields of strawberries, wine vineyards, and expanses of crops like celery, lettuce, and broccoli. In a state with substantial agriculture, it's one of the most productive regions, employing many of Santa Maria's residents. The largely multi-lingual children of these laborers will likely

attend schools within the K-8 Santa Maria-Bonita School District, the largest in Santa Barbara County, with about 17,500 students in 21 schools.

Having struggled with math proficiency—about 26% of students tested proficient on recent state tests—the district knew it needed a different approach to math instruction. The urgency was so great that the district opted to adopt off-cycle, allowing them to work towards getting new instructional materials immediately instead of waiting for the new California Math Framework to be published. After a lengthy vetting

process and a semester-long pilot, Core Curriculum™ by MidSchoolMath was chosen to serve the district's students in 6th to 8th grade.

MidSchoolMath recently visited math classrooms at several Santa Maria-Bonita schools to gain insight into the district's implementation progress. We also had the opportunity to speak with Ryan Hubbard, a Teacher on Special Assignment who served on the steering committee which led the adoption process. **MidSchoolMath: Why did you feel the need to make a change in your math curriculum before**



**the California Framework was published?**

Ryan Hubbard: One of the things that was unique to our adoption is that we decided to go off-cycle. The State of California typically approves instruction materials and then school districts need to adopt off of their approved list. But the list wasn't created yet because we were waiting on a new edition of our California Math Framework. We knew that our math materials were inadequate and we didn't want to wait to get new materials. We wanted to get them immediately. There is a provision

in state law that allows for off cycle adoption as long as you meet certain criteria. And one of the criteria was to use some other source to justify and vet the program that you want to adopt to make sure it's high quality.

**“We knew that our math materials were inadequate and we didn't want to wait to get new materials.”**

**MSM: What was involved in your process to select a new curriculum?**

RH: Our math adoption process was pretty lengthy and significant. We started off by creating a steering committee team, which consisted of several Teachers on Special Assignment like myself, district level administrators, and classroom teachers. We went through a learning series together with a group called California Curriculum Collaborative which is partnered with EdReports and Pivot Learning. We learned from them what good math curriculum is supposed to look like, what good



math instruction should include, and what was a good procedure for evaluating and adopting new materials. Then we opened up an extended semester-long pilot to all of our teachers. Anybody who teaches math was welcome to join the pilot.

**MSM: How many teachers participated in the pilot?**

We had 17 of our 6th-8th grade teachers volunteer across the district. The pilot was a big commitment because you have to stay after school

for trainings and meetings and you have to try out different curriculum in your room. We started with a paper screening process where we looked through the books, the student materials, the online materials, everything that the curriculum had to offer. Everyone scored the various curricula using an in-house created rubric.

**MSM: What were the things you and your team were looking for in a new curriculum?**

RH: We were looking for upgraded instruction on mathematical practices and student ownership pieces where the students are really doing more thinking and figuring and collaborating and justifying their answers and explaining the reasoning behind their answers, that kind of thing. We wanted to get away from the rote learning of the algorithmic steps. We ultimately want students to understand the conceptual ideas in math and be open to multiple solutions, and be able to choose tools to figure out how to solve the math problem without being told they need to do it a certain way. We want them to understand that there's lots of different ways to solve math problems.

**“MidSchoolMath was the one that came out on top as it got significantly higher scores.”**



**MSM: How was Core Curriculum™ by MidSchoolMath eventually chosen for adoption?**

RH: The top two with the highest scores were chosen for a classroom field test. And so those 17 teachers tried each curricula in their classrooms for six weeks with their students. After the classroom experience, it was clear that our pilot teachers preferred MidSchoolMath. It scored about 20 percentage points higher than the second choice.

**MSM: Besides high scores, were there any other positives teachers noted after piloting MidSchoolMath?**

RH: The teachers who piloted MidSchoolMath really were impressed by the increase in student discourse. That was one of the things we were looking for. We want students to collaborate and talk to each other. And with the story problems, the context of the story that comes out through the Math Simulator, it gives kids something to talk about. We have some quotes the teachers shared and they were saying, “I’ve never seen my kids talk so much about math before,”



and things like that. And so that was a really positive outcome of the pilot.

**MSM: We’ve been really excited about what we’ve witnessed in classrooms this week. There has been student collaboration in all of these classes. What are you most excited about?**

RH: I think the same thing. What we are looking for is kids having ownership of their learning, wanting to learn and wanting to help each other learn. So seeing that

collaboration, that was honestly one of the things we were really excited about: getting the kids to talk. We have many multilingual students. And one of the ways you master a new language is by practicing, you need to be speaking in that new language. When students talk about math, it’s supporting their language development along with their math development. So that’s a real positive for us.

