

Investigations

IN NUMBER, DATA, AND SPACE®

Case Study:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina

A Conversation with Barbara Bissell, Pre-K to 5 Math Specialist

In the Summer of 2002 Barbara Bissell's assistant superintendent came to her and said she had some money left over and needed to spend it that week. She also asked what they could do for 3rd grade math, because 3rd grade test scores were 15-20 points lower than 4th and 5th grade. Ms. Bissell had reviewed the end-of-grade tests for the 3rd graders and was 'startled' at what she found. . . "The questions the kids were missing, like *lots* of questions that lots of kids were missing. It was clear it was understanding of the multiplication and division concepts altogether and relationships. It wasn't a timed test on multiplication facts—it was very conceptual."

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), the 20th largest school district in the nation, fully adopted Investigations in the 2009-2010 school year but the phase-in started back in 2000-2001. "We got two units of *Investigations* for every classroom to go with our traditional textbook." according to Ms. Bissell. She said the Investigations units at that time were strictly optional for the teachers. Having been familiar with the *Investigations*' unit "Things That Come in Groups," she decided to use the leftover money to purchase that unit for every 3rd grade. The district held a one-day training for the teachers, and the following summer, TERC came in and did a whole-week training for 3rd grade teachers on another unit—"Fair Share". Additionally during this training, a number of people from various grade levels were trained. "So it was spreading the fingers out into the waters, so to speak."

Ms Bissell stated: "The first end-of-grade test after [implementing] the two Investigations units, our math scores for 3rd grade went up 12% points. That didn't happen in reading or in any other counties around."

In 2004, the district did a dual adoption of a traditional basal and *Investigations*. Trainings were offered and included a "Choice Day" where teachers could receive training on their traditional textbooks or on

Investigations; it was strictly optional for teachers to use Investigations. "I just loved it!" Ms Bissell said. "Some of the [Investigations'] trainers found that instead of 32 teachers who had signed up to come to their training, they had 45 because the teachers would go back and talk to their friends and say: 'You have to get this book!' So that was very successful."

Other successful professional development opportunities included a collaboration with the Center for Math, Science, and Technology Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Additionally, the district developed a cadre of math facilitators in about a dozen schools and utilized them as trainers.

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In order to communicate with parents about the new math curriculum, the CMS used the parent letters that come with *Investigations* and also established a "Parent University". Parents were invited to either an in-person presentation or facilitated videotaped presentation and not only got to hear background information and research on the curriculum, but also got a chance to experience a lesson firsthand. "They got to do three math activities!" When asked about the response from parents, Ms. Bissell says, "There were a handful of parents who called up [with complaints]. They finally said: 'We'll wait this year out, but I'm sure the scores will go down.' But they didn't!" She

continues: “Even the folks at TERC said often after the first year of adoption test scores go down, but ours went up. They’ve been going up, and they continue to go up.”

Ms. Bissell credits the success of their Investigations adoption and implementation to taking the time to lay a strong foundation. “I think people need to take the time to lay the ground work. A slow and steady increase in exposure and use and experience with it really made a lot of difference.” Additionally, Ms. Bissell stated that they got enough people in the district who were interested in it, and they did their homework. “Before we went to the full adoption, I put together a consortium. And we had area assistant superintendents, we had people from exceptional children, gifted, teachers, principals. We talked, read and studied. We had. . . as much diversity as we could get — [we made sure] that we had some balance with our schools in the suburbs and our city schools. . . and Investigations came out on top—way on top.”

Asked about the reactions of students to *Investigations*, Ms. Bissell was quick to state, “That’s all I hear from the teachers is how much the kids like it.” A recent email she received was from one of their schools with a large population of poverty. “The email said: ‘You know, we struggled last year with the first year of *Investigations* and, we stuck to it, but it was a struggle for a lot of our people, and they weren’t sure it was working. They said that kids just couldn’t talk about math. This year, you walk into the classrooms and the teachers are *amazed* at what the children can do compared to what they’re used to getting at the beginning of the school year. All the teachers think they got the high math group.’ I just love that!” Ms. Bissell said.

North Carolina

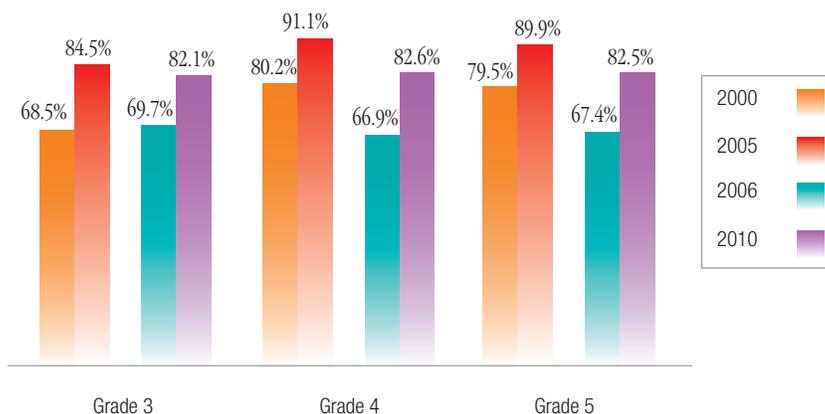
School District:	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Test:	ABCs End-of-Grade Tests
Grades:	3, 4, and 5
Measure:	Percent at Levels 3 and 4
Percent Change:	(2000-2005): Grade 3: +23%; Grade 4: +14%; Grade 5: +13% (2006-2010): Grade 3: +18%; Grade 4: +23%; Grade 5: +22%

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) started a phase-in of **Investigations in Number, Data and Space** in the fall of 2000. In the fall of 2004, CMS completed a dual adoption. In 2009, the district completed a full adoption of **Investigations in Number, Data and Space-2nd edition**. In 2006, a new math assessment was given, therefore scores from 2006 forward cannot be compared to prior scores. All three grade levels through all time periods saw an increase in math assessment scores of double digit gains. Future reports will continue to track the progress of math achievement in CMS.

District Demographics: Total enrollment: 132,632; LEP students: 16%; Ethnic Mix: Asian: 5%; Hispanic: 15%; African American: 42%; Caucasian: 34%; American Indian: 1%; Multi-race: 3%; Free/reduced lunch: 48%; Approximate N of students represented by this graph in '10: 32,984.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina

ABCs End-of-Grade Test Score Gains



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