



INSPIRING STORIES

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John's Story: Working with Teachers

Marlborough Public Schools offered several First Steps Number teacher courses that involved approximately 70 staff in June 2008. This initiative was a result of renewed curriculum work and a desire for professional development in mathematics for teachers, particularly in the primary grades. First Steps Number seemed like a logical "next step" for Marlborough, bringing both professional development and formative assessment to teachers. Members of the math committee took the initial 3-day training, and then three sessions were offered in June, funded through our Title I grant.

While we took this initial step, our next question was, "How do we continue this initiative?" The district chose to train 4 staff as facilitators (1 from each building) in the fall 2008 and hosted the training in Marlborough. Following the training, the four facilitators were interested in moving forward in two directions: support for those who had been trained ; and initial training for additional staff. Unfortunately it was not a priority for the 2008-2009 school year.

During the facilitator training, several teachers created recording sheets for the tasks they were "practicing" with students. I started to think of the usefulness of this to teachers (when we could start our training) and began to make a recording sheet for each of the tasks in First Steps Number.

What's Happened Since the Initial Training?

In the spring of 2009 as I wrote our Title I ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Grant), we included provisions to pick up First Steps Number training - looking at moving in two directions. We had about 70 teachers trained a year ago. With no support it was our sense, and later confirmed, that teachers were not implementing First Steps. So we planned a full day training, First Steps Number: Review and Implementation, for staff who had been trained. Kalliope Pantazopoulos, a facilitator from another school, joined the initiative and together we finalized the recording sheets to go with each of the tasks. In addition to a review, we wanted to help teachers create a toolkit with assessment task materials, recording sheets, and manipulatives. We wanted teachers to be able to use their assessments the very next day. Our other direction was providing the initial 3-day training for staff who had not been trained previously. Despite the lapse of a year in moving ahead, an opportunity came along with a grant to support the First Steps Number initiative that had been started.

In October 2009, two First Steps Number Review and Implementation sessions were scheduled. About 25 teachers participated. Kalliope and I worked to "package " the assessment recording sheets and any activity sheet(s) needed for the individual tasks. I had attended the First Steps 2009 Summer Institute in Newport, Rhode Island, and we were able to use similar activities to review First Steps materials. The handout listing of the First Steps Number Tasks / Key Understanding/ Typical Grade Range complimented our assessment recording sheets. I adapted the Introduction in the new publication, *Revealing What Students Think: Diagnostic Tasks for Fractional Numbers*, to First Steps Number, and this was used as part of our review. Funding in our grant allowed purchase of crates for each teacher, folders, hanging folders and some manipulatives that would be useful in conducting the tasks. We also found odds and ends of unused math materials that could be included in a materials kit. Ice Cream Task sheets were printed in color for all participants. Some resources were printed on oaktag and participants could then laminate and then cut out the cards needed for the activity. Index cards and round color coding labels were used to create the cards for The More Game.

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She left so excited about what this information gave her and how she can plan instructional activities for him to help his mathematical thinking.

After a morning of review, teachers spent the afternoon putting together their assessment kit. Some teachers got right to work and put off lunch until later. Some teachers in the building who did not participate in the first day training poked their heads in the room and then called to see if they could get into the second training day. Evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and teachers left the workshop knowing they were ready

to go the next day. As I am writing this article, a kindergarten teacher who took the review class and made her toolkit came into my office wanting to show me what she found out. She had used the Counting Principles task with a special needs student who had repeated kindergarten. She was so excited to see not only what he could do, but where he had difficulty. He could count. But he



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How Patience Paid Off....

So despite the delay in getting started, we got off to a good start with our approach to review and support for teachers so they could implement First Steps Number diagnostic tasks. In the primary grades we know so much about reading and literacy, but not as much about math. We talk about 3-Tier reading, intervention and RTI in literacy, but we need to do the same in math. First Steps in helping to move us further in the right direction.

Our next activity will be conducting initial training for First Steps Number which will start after the first of the new year 2010. We are both excited and feel that the review sessions with the construction of a toolkit will be a motivation for others to participate in the initial First Steps Number training..."I want to know and be able to do what they are doing." We have additional funding for another review session and hope to schedule that as well. Our ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds are really helping to reinvest in our teachers.

Want to know more about more my story?

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Want to know more about STEPS Courses?

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