

Sahuarita Unified School District Makes Learning Leaps in Just One Year with *Ready*[®] *Mathematics*

“Through that productive struggle, both of our students and our staff, that hard work—that first year of going over initial expected and anticipated hurdles—has paid off.”



Brett Bonner,
Assistant
Superintendent at
Sahuarita Unified
School District

Brett Bonner, an administrator at Arizona’s Sahuarita Unified School District (SUSD), had wanted a districtwide K–8 core math program since he became the Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services in 2013. “When I started this position, our schools were doing great things,” he said. “However, they were really working in isolation. What I mean by that is, that our arrows—as far as district initiatives, alignment with best practices, professional development, and methodology for teaching—they weren’t pointing in the same direction.”

Like many school districts in Arizona, Sahuarita’s funding had been extremely tight since the 2008 downturn. The district’s financial constraints meant SUSD didn’t have a cohesive program that reflected the rigor of the new state standards that had been introduced in 2016.

When funding for a core math resource finally came through, Bonner, a third-generation educator, knew he wanted a program that would set his students up for success. After waiting for so long, he believed SUSD needed something “transformative”: a standards-aligned program that would systematize curriculums, enable personalized learning, and connect data to instruction.

Following a thorough vetting process, SUSD educators chose *Ready Mathematics*, Curriculum Associates’ rigorous teacher-led instruction program, and *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*, a program of online personalized lessons and learning games, as the district’s core math



Sahuarita Unified School District
Sahuarita and Green Valley, Arizona

K–12 Enrollment: **6,500**

Title I: **38%**

Number of Schools: **9**



program. At the same time, they switched from the assessment program they had been using to *i-Ready Assessment*, which, unlike SUSD's old program, provides easy-to-use actionable data about students' strengths and weaknesses and connects seamlessly to online lessons (in this case, *i-Ready Personalized Instruction*).

Ready Mathematics and *i-Ready* were implemented in Grades K–8 for the 2018–2019 school year. Bonner recognized that overhauling SUSD's curriculum and assessment programs would be an enormous undertaking—one that would ask a lot of educators and take time before teachers saw significant growth and performance improvements. SUSD committed itself to following implementation best practices. All grades (K–8) experienced tremendous growth—as measured by their performance on the end-of-year *i-Ready Diagnostic*—within the first year of implementation.

Choosing a Partner and “Aligning Arrows”

Located 35 miles south of Tucson, SUSD covers an area of just larger than 600 square miles. Bonner was charged with finding a new core math program for the 4,242 students at SUSD's seven elementary and middle schools.

In January 2018, Bonner and the core math adoption committee he assembled began a methodical and thorough vetting process. More than 20 individuals made up the adoption committee, which included teachers, principals, parents, and a town council member, among others. The group heard proposals from six different education technology companies, reviewed books and technology, and evaluated programs using a detailed rubric. Members were asked to read EdReports.org reviews, evaluate lesson plans for focus, rigor, and usability, and, of course, draw from their professional experience to rate each program.

When it came time to choose a program, the decision was unanimous: SUSD would adopt *Ready Mathematics*. “We knew clearly after hearing and vetting through the different publishers and companies what we were looking for,” Bonner said. “*Ready Mathematics* was so strong and so effective—and the research was there to support the investment—that we felt it would be the best curriculum for K–8 mathematics.”

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SUSD Superintendent Dr. Manuel Valenzuela visits with a math class.

Implementation

In addition to the challenges most districts face when they implement a new core math program, SUSD had to contend with a technology shortage. “One of my concerns from day one was our technology ratio in the district,” SUSD Director of Academic Pathways Jamie Nelson said. “We are by no means a one-to-one district, and probably won’t be for many years to come.”

It wasn’t easy, but SUSD’s Year 1 implementation succeeded because the district’s educators and administrators worked together and deliberately.

Set (and Share) a Vision

Bonner and other school leaders were proactive about sharing information related to choosing and implementing a districtwide core math program. This openness led to increased buy-in from educators and created a failure-is-not-an-option mindset among the SUSD community.

Foster a Positive Learning Community

Though many SUSD educators were excited about *i-Ready* and *Ready Mathematics* from the get-go, there were some who felt overwhelmed by the change. As SUSD’s Director of Professional Development, MJ Boyter, put it: not everyone was “on the bus” at the same time.

But Curriculum Associates’ support, professional development sessions, positive reinforcement from district leaders, and students’ learning improvements have helped foster belief in and enthusiasm for the new curriculum. “Our teachers have bought into this adoption—struggle and all,” Bonner said.

Manage Pacing and Develop Instructional Practice

The district was able to build upon an already robust professional development program (the Sahuarita Professional Learning Institute offered more than 100 different courses in 2019–2020) when it came time to train school leaders, teachers, and administrators in using *i-Ready* and *Ready Mathematics*.

During the first year of implementation, SUSD carefully spread sessions out so educators didn’t get overwhelmed. In addition, Boyter regularly shared best practices and laudable results in email newsletters and meetings so teachers could inspire and learn from one another.

Use Data with Purpose

Through trainings and meetings with school leaders and Curriculum Associates, teachers have learned how to get good data from the *i-Ready Diagnostic* and use it effectively in the classroom.

SUSD is using data to personalize instruction and identify where students are struggling, but they also use it to identify student milestones or “glow moments.” “It’s rare when you look at data to not see that there’s a glow moment for every student, even if they’re below grade level,” said Darlene Robinson, Principal of SUSD’s Anza Trail School.

Establish Schedule and Structures

The district determined Diagnostic Windows at the beginning of the school year, but each school had freedom to create their own schedules within the district-mandated parameters. Administrators, teachers, and computer lab technicians all worked together to plan and execute timetables that fit their school’s needs and resources.

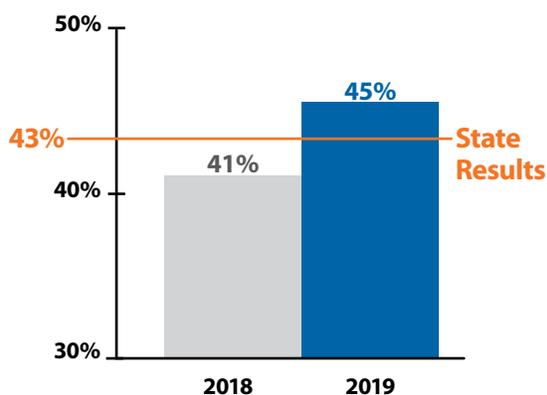


Results and a Viable Curriculum

After just one year of using *i-Ready* and *Ready Mathematics*, SUSD saw higher proficiency rates on Arizona's 2019 state mathematics assessment in several grades. Grades 3 and 6 dipped slightly from 2018 (as did proficiency rates for these grades across the state). Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8, however, all increased their proficiency rates from 2018. Grade 8 had a particularly noteworthy performance: its 2019 proficiency rate was 23 percentage points higher than 2018.

"We could not have gone down this journey without having such an effective, strong partnership [with Curriculum Associates]," Bonner said. "It has been so successful, and that's helped with our whole transition from no curriculum to just targeting standards to now having clearly defined standards in a viable curriculum that has really transformed those objectives of rigor, coherence, usability, and productive struggle."

Sahuarita and Arizona Grades 3–8 State Assessment Mathematics Scores 2018 vs. 2019



After just one year of using *i-Ready* and *Ready Mathematics*, SUSD's Grades 3–8 proficiency rate on Arizona's 2019 state mathematics assessment was higher than 2018. Several grades also had higher 2019 rates. Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8 all increased their proficiency rates from 2018. Grade 8 had a particularly noteworthy performance: its 2019 proficiency rate was 23 percentage points higher than 2018.

“I've seen firsthand a true shift . . . to fostering a deep conceptual knowledge of mathematics. And for me as a mathematics learner [when I was] a student, I always knew how to do something, but I didn't understand the 'why' behind it Being able to equip students with the 'how' and the 'why' has really made each student feel like they're truly mathematicians.”



—Darlene Robinson,
Principal,
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