



TEACHER VIGNETTE



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*The District Vignette focuses primarily on the experiences of the leaders involved in making decisions and managing the curriculum selection and implementation process. While the leader perspective is critical, our work has shown that the leaders who really try to put themselves in the shoes of the teachers are the ones who have the most success. To that end, the purpose of this Teacher Vignette is to illustrate how a teacher in InstructUP School District experienced the selection and implementation of a new math curriculum. It highlights the strengths and gaps in ISD's approach, and we hope, will help prompt leaders to consider more deeply how they can best engage teachers in the curriculum implementation process.*



# CHAPTER

# 1



## Background

Ms. Cole teaches 2nd grade at an elementary school in InstructUP School District (ISD). She has seven years of total teaching experience and has taught 2nd grade for the past three years. When Ms. Cole's principal asked her how she felt about the district's math curriculum, she said it was fine, but that she often created her own materials or found resources online to supplement the curriculum. She told her principal that the most challenging part of the current curriculum was that it wasn't engaging to her students. She also noted that it didn't always align to state standards.

When Ms. Cole received an email from the superintendent announcing that ISD was beginning the process of adopting a new math curriculum, she was curious and hopeful. Having new materials that were more engaging, aligned to standards, and that included resources for a wider range of learners could save her a lot of time. If she didn't have to spend time making lesson materials, she might finally have time for the other things that had lingered on her teacher to-do list. Things like thinking through frequent student misconceptions that might come up in the lesson, communicating more with families, and collaborating more with the school's English Learner Specialist to better support those students in lessons.

**While Ms. Cole was excited about the potential of new, high-quality math materials, she was also skeptical.** The district had launched new initiatives before that were supposed to help teachers and students, like a Character Development Program, a new phonics curriculum, and an incentive program for students to read at home. Teachers often felt like they were told about these new programs and then left to figure them out on their own, which always took a lot of time and effort. **Ms. Cole especially felt that new programs fell flat because teachers weren't included in the planning process.** For example, the Character Development Program that the district launched a few years ago required teachers to read aloud picture books that talked about character traits like self-confidence, empathy, and grit. However, teachers were supposed to read these books in addition to the books in their ELA curriculum. Teachers noticed this problem right away, but they didn't have the opportunity to share the issue with leaders. Reflecting on these past experiences, Ms. Cole wondered, **"What would the adoption of new math materials be like? Would teachers get help? Would teachers be involved in planning? Would teachers have opportunities to share their experiences and give feedback?"**



## **Discussion Questions**

What concerns does Ms. Cole have about the curriculum adoption process?

What other concerns might other teachers have?

How could leaders in ISD learn about these teacher concerns?

What could ISD do to respond to these concerns?



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A few weeks later, Ms. Cole received another email, this time from Ms. Walker, the district's K-5 Supervisor. The email invited district educators to apply to serve on the Review Committee for the new math curriculum and to share what they wanted in a curriculum. The email explained that a smaller Selection Team had already started planning for the adoption, but they wanted the Review Committee to be larger and more representative of different viewpoints in the district. Ms. Cole was relieved to hear that the Selection Team included three teachers. Hopefully, she thought, with teachers involved in the process this early on, it would go smoother than past initiatives. Ms. Cole decided not to apply based on the time commitment, but answered the survey sharing that she wanted a curriculum that is **"exciting for students, aligned to standards, easy to use, and has lots of resources that help me reach all of my students."**

A few weeks later, members of the Review Committee stopped in Ms. Cole's class to observe her teaching a math lesson. They left a note saying that they were observing lots of classrooms as part of the selection process to get a sense of how teachers were currently approaching standards-based math instruction and to deepen their own understanding of great math instruction. A few days later, Ms. Cole received an email from Ms. Walker that explained the "math tour" and included some of the Review Committee's reflections, including that teachers were working hard, but that they were using a lot of different materials and the materials weren't always aligned to standards. Ms. Walker shared some quotes they'd heard from teachers, including one from a teacher at Ms. Cole's school about how she wishes she had a clearer understanding of what the standards were asking for. In response to comments like these, Ms. Walker explained that the Review Committee had decided to adopt a walkthrough tool, the [Instructional Practice Guide \(IPG\)](#), as their vision for excellent math instruction. She talked about how the committee would use the IPG to inform their selection of materials and that the district hoped to find other opportunities to use the IPG to support professional learning and help build a district-wide understanding of what great math instruction looked like.



## Prevent the Pitfalls

Developing a shared instructional vision was a major differentiator for districts who experienced successful implementation.

Ms. Walker had attached a copy of the IPG to the email and Ms. Cole looked at it. Overall, she liked the way the IPG described what math instruction should look like, but she had no idea what to do with it. She asked her school's instructional coach about the IPG, who told her that she didn't know anything other than what was shared in the email, and to just keep an eye out for more information. Still not sure what she was supposed to do with the IPG, Ms. Cole printed a copy and stuck it in her planning binder.

Ms. Cole found out that a 1st grade teacher at their school, Mr. Dowell, was on the Selection Team and Review Committee. Soon after the email with the IPG, Mr. Dowell arranged a "conversation hour" for after school one day to share the initial criteria the Review Committee had created for evaluating curricula and to get feedback from teachers. Ms. Cole stopped by the meeting for a few minutes on her way out of the building. She thought the committee's criteria made sense, but told Mr. Dowell that what she really wanted was a curriculum that included supportive resources for teachers. While trainings and planning were helpful with past resources, she'd inevitably had to figure a lot out on her own. She wanted a curriculum with a strong teacher resource guide that she could go to for ideas or when she had questions.

Some weeks later, Ms. Cole got another email from Ms. Walker with an update on the curriculum selection process. It explained that the Review Committee had used the list of key criteria, which was based on teacher feedback, to review and narrow the list of potential math curricula down to two, and now they wanted more teacher input before making a final decision. To give teachers a chance to see the curricula, sample sets of materials would be dropped off at each school site for teachers to browse. District leaders were also going to host a town hall event where teachers, families, and community members could learn more about the two curricula and watch some sample lessons.



Ms. Cole was interested in the town hall and specifically wanted to see someone teach with the curricula, but couldn't attend the meeting based on her family's schedule. Instead, she decided to take some time during her planning period the next week to look at the sample materials that were sent to her school. There was a feedback form for her to fill out where she could share things she liked and didn't like and any questions she had. On her form for one of the curricula, she wrote that she liked the four-part lesson model and the idea of giving students time to talk about their learning at the end of each lesson, but that she didn't like how many problems there were in the practice section and that she didn't think she'd be able to get through everything. She had a lot of questions, like what kind of work teachers needed to do to prepare for lessons, what to do if students didn't grasp the key math ideas during the concept development section of the lesson, and how she could differentiate the materials for her students. As her list of questions about the curricula got longer, Ms. Cole wished she could talk with the teachers who had actually taught with the curricula.

Near the end of the year, Ms. Cole received an email from the teachers who had been involved with selecting materials, announcing that they'd chosen Eureka Math as the new curriculum. The email included an explanation of why Eureka had been selected and reasons why the teachers were looking forward to using it the next year.

**The email made Ms. Cole optimistic; if teachers had been involved in the selection process, and if teachers were enthusiastic about the curriculum's potential to help all students learn, then the curriculum was probably a strong choice.**

About six weeks later, Ms. Cole received an email from Ms. Walker announcing that the new Eureka Math materials had arrived and welcoming teachers to explore them. As she looked through the materials, she remembered the email that the teachers had sent describing the curriculum and explaining why they were excited to use it, and began to feel a bit more excited herself. She still had many questions, though. How much time would she have to get through all of the content in each lesson? What was an "exit ticket" and would she have to use them every day? Were there materials for math centers, and could she do small group work with students? Ms. Cole had worked hard to make the old math curriculum work for her students and she was nervous she'd be forced to give up some of her favorite activities that got students excited about math.





## Discussion Questions

How were teachers engaged in the curriculum selection process?

What information was communicated with teachers? What other information might teachers have found helpful?

When and how were teachers invited to share feedback?

How did Ms. Cole use the vision for excellent instruction? What could ISD have done to support use of this shared tool?

How did ISD support and learn from teachers during this phase? What else could they have done?



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Soon after the materials arrived, Ms. Cole received an email from Ms. Walker explaining what would happen next. She shared that a group of educators, called the Eureka Leadership Team (ELT), had been assembled to make decisions about how to best implement Eureka. Ms. Cole was again relieved to see that six teachers were on the ELT, including one from each grade level and school. The email listed some of the questions that the ELT would address, like how to align Eureka’s assessment model with the other assessments the district used and what kind of goals they should set to know if their curriculum implementation efforts were on track. Ms. Cole was glad to know that a group of teachers and leaders were thinking about these types of things and hoped that teachers would be invited to share feedback on whatever plans the ELT came up with.

A month later, Ms. Cole received an email from the teacher at her school who served on the ELT, Ms. Herrera, asking for feedback on the plans they’d made for collaborative planning meetings, coaching, and training. In her response, she said that she liked how the curriculum training included lots of time to prepare for teaching the first unit. She also liked that teachers would be meeting in grade level teams, which would allow for grade-specific standards and content discussions. The coaching plan didn’t seem much different from what they were already doing. She had questions about the collaborative planning meeting structure, especially since up until now teachers had mostly been able to decide for themselves how to use their planning time. In her feedback email, she said that she wanted to know more about the planning meeting structure and when teachers would have flexibility to do other things together.



### **Prevent the Pitfalls**

The districts that experienced the greatest implementation success took their time in Phase II.

Moving too quickly from materials selection to distribution (without considering how the curriculum would impact pacing, grading, instruction, and assessment) can create anxiety and confusion.

The next week, Ms. Cole joined all of the other elementary teachers in her district as they packed into a school cafeteria to learn about the curriculum. Some training sessions were in the cafeteria with teachers all together, sitting in school teams. These sessions included a deep review of the instructional shifts, overviews of how Eureka was organized, and explanations of new district policies related to the curriculum, such as grading. Most sessions, however, took place in grade level breakout sessions in classrooms. Ms. Cole worked a lot with the other 2nd grade teachers in her school and the district. In these breakout sessions, teachers on the ELT led discussions and activities related to understanding grade level standards and internalizing the learning goals of the first module of instruction. To do this, they completed the end-of-module assessment for the first unit, discussed the knowledge and skills needed to complete the assessment, and then analyzed the unit plan to see how the lesson sequence developed the necessary knowledge and skill. They identified practice problems in various lessons that reflected key knowledge and skills and worked through them together.

The teacher leaders modeled a sample lesson while the other teachers participated as students. Through the sample lesson, the teachers developed a better understanding of the four different parts of the lesson model and how they connected together. The teacher who taught the lesson explained the lesson internalization process she went through to prepare to teach. Teachers then chose a lesson from the first week of the first unit to internalize and rehearse for feedback with peers. Instructional coaches and principals stopped by the different breakout rooms to participate in the sample lessons and check in with their teachers.

**By the end of the weeklong Eureka training, Ms. Cole felt like she understood how Eureka was organized, how it supported grade level standards, and what her role as a teacher was in implementing the new materials well.** She felt confident in teaching the first module because the 2nd grade team had reviewed it closely together. In general, she was happy with the new materials and believed they would help her engage all students. However, she had two frustrations. First, district leaders set the expectation that teachers follow Eureka’s pacing guide as written. Ms. Cole had found success with the old curriculum when she incorporated math centers and small group time with students once a week. While Eureka’s pacing guide included some built-in flex days for teacher-directed remediation or enrichment, they weren’t weekly. When Ms. Cole asked her instructional coach if she could continue doing math centers on Fridays, her coach replied, “It doesn’t look like it.”

Ms. Cole's second frustration was around professional development. Ms. Cole and her 2nd grade team were used to meeting weekly for collaborative planning. They usually talked about upcoming lessons, looked through assessment data together, or brainstormed how to differentiate lessons for individual students. Occasionally, they spent time venting to one another about the stressful parts of their job. Overall, Ms. Cole enjoyed the collaborative planning time because even though it was unstructured, it was usually productive and it was bonding time for teachers. Now with Eureka, teachers were supposed to follow a specific "Looking forward/Looking back" model where they alternated between preparing for an upcoming lesson and reflecting on a previously taught one. While Ms. Cole understood how this approach could help them understand the curriculum and how well students were learning with it, she liked the flexibility teachers had with collaborative planning before. **Furthermore, teachers already had the stress of learning a whole new curriculum – why would district leaders ask them to learn a new collaborative planning model at the same time?**





## Discussion Questions

How were teachers engaged in the process of preparing to launch the curriculum?

What information was communicated with teachers? What other information might teachers have found helpful?

When and how were teachers invited to share feedback?

What was the purpose of ISD's teacher training on the new math materials?

What were Ms. Cole's concerns? Why did she feel that way?

How did ISD support and learn from teachers during this phase? What else could they have done?

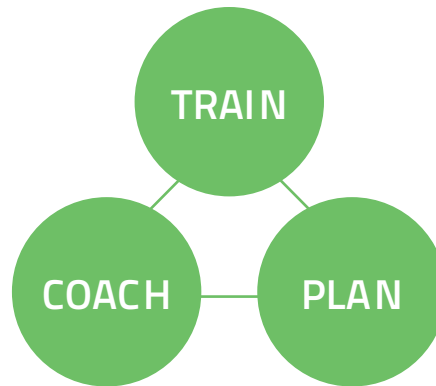


# CHAPTER

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Ms. Cole experienced both successes and challenges as she began teaching with Eureka. She found that she enjoyed the consistent four-part lesson structure and that her students quickly adapted to the routines. Though some teachers didn't like the debrief section at the end because they wanted to give students more time with the practice problems,

**Ms. Cole found that asking students questions about what they learned helped the ideas to stick. She enjoyed hearing students summarize learning in their own words and thought doing so was particularly beneficial for her students who were learning English.**

Ms. Cole did struggle, however, with the fluency section. She thought that asking students to complete as many problems as they could in a minute made them feel like they were competing against one another. She noticed that some students began to misreport their answers, just so they could be in the group of students who got to stand up and say they'd answered a higher number of questions. After doing the Sprint activities a few times, Ms. Cole gave them up. When the Eureka lessons included a Sprint activity, Ms. Cole substituted it for another one, including some of the songs, chants, and games she had used in previous years to help students with counting and computational fluency. She didn't tell anyone that she had dropped the Sprint activities because she didn't want to get in trouble for not following the curriculum as written.

An area where Ms. Cole did seek out help was with the practice problems. She felt that there was never enough time to finish all of the practice problems. She brought up this challenge during a collaborative planning meeting and other teachers shared that their students typically didn't finish the problem sets either. More specifically, the problems they typically got through were the initial, easier problems, not the higher-level ones, which made some teachers wonder if students were fully understanding the standards. They wanted to know how they could modify the practice section of lessons in a way that would meet the lesson's goals for the standards and student problem solving. Ms. Cole asked the school's instructional coach, Ms. Kerr, for help. Ms. Kerr recommended that the teachers review the problem sets for each lesson and identify the problems that were most aligned to the level of rigor of the standard, as well as which problems best scaffolded students up to that level. Then, teachers could choose a sample of these problems, ensuring that students had some opportunity to practice with scaffolded problems while also getting to higher-level questions that met the expectations of the standards. **Teachers agreed that this modification gave students and teachers more focus and helped them work efficiently.**

Where Ms. Cole and her 2nd grade teaching team consistently faced frustration was in collaborative planning. They liked the "Looking back" part of the model where they analyzed student work from a previously taught lesson. They had done this kind of data reflection before and felt comfortable with the protocol. What they didn't like was the "Looking forward" model. In the "Looking forward" protocol, teachers were supposed to closely analyze one upcoming lesson. Some teachers wanted to talk about more than just one lesson. Other teachers thought it was pointless to talk about a lesson that was already planned for them. Ms. Cole felt like she already "looked forward" to each lesson independently. Doing the same thing in a collaborative planning felt redundant. She couldn't distinguish how the conversations teachers were supposed to have during the collaborative planning were different from the individual preparation they were doing on their own.

It wasn't until Ms. Kerr asked teachers to think about potential student misconceptions that could occur in the lesson that collaborative planning started feeling productive for Ms. Cole. Anticipating questions that might arise for students wasn't something she was regularly doing; however, during the "looking back" meetings, she started seeing more examples of how student misconceptions got in the way of their understanding. Proactively planning ahead for those in the "looking forward" meetings made a lot of sense. Ms. Cole and her team began having meaningful discussions about different students' needs and how they could utilize the notes in the curriculum on supporting all learners and make modifications to the lessons.

During the first semester with Eureka, some teachers viewed it as a scripted curriculum that they had to follow mechanically. However, through the process of closely analyzing lessons and making modifications to support their students, teachers began to feel like they were using their creativity again.

As the year went on, Ms. Cole felt like teachers and leaders got better at reflecting on the curriculum and making improvements. The grade level team leaders at her school met with their coach and principal each quarter to talk about data, identify the good things that were happening, talk about where teachers were still having challenges, and brainstorm solutions. Before each of these meetings Ms. Cole's grade level leader, Mr. Bryant, asked her to write down what was going well with Eureka, where she still had questions or challenges, and any other questions or topics she wanted the leaders to discuss during the quarterly meeting. After each meeting, Mr. Bryant shared notes about what they discussed and what actions they'd committed to taking next. The K-5 Supervisor, Ms. Walker, sent a survey to teachers every quarter where teachers could rate how well different structures were working and share open-ended feedback. Ms. Walker also updated the district website regularly and sent monthly newsletters with curriculum-related information and stories from classrooms about how teachers and students were learning with Eureka.

Throughout the second semester, and especially during the fourth quarter, Ms. Cole looked forward to grading her students' end-of-module assessments. She was eager to see how they did and if they had met the district's student growth goals. Over the year, Ms. Cole had observed her students develop more confidence in attempting challenging math problems on their own. Ms. Cole also felt like her students were talking more about math, explaining how they worked through problems, and asking questions about new concepts. She thought that the increase in math discussion was a result of Eureka's daily lesson debrief, which prompted students to discuss their learning.

However, despite positive anecdotal evidence, students' scores on end-of-module assessments were disappointing. Only half of Ms. Cole's students earned a 3 or 4 (out of 4), indicating that students had met grade level expectations. Teachers across the school saw similar results. Some teachers, including Ms. Cole, also worried because there were many students' whose progress monitoring scores hadn't jumped much. And, when 3rd through 5th grade teachers got their state assessment scores back, they were virtually the same as the previous year. Ms. Cole was discouraged. How could they have worked so hard and not seen growth? The principal scheduled a meeting to talk with all teachers. The principal said that she was proud of the growth that students had made. She urged teachers to view their work with Eureka as an investment that would pay off more down the road.

The principal's words were encouraging, but Ms. Cole still felt deflated. She was tempted to blame Eureka, in part, for students' minimal growth. What if she had been able to make more changes to the curriculum? What if she had been able to do math centers, like she had before, and given struggling students more one-on-one support? Ms. Cole knew these "what if" questions weren't productive, but they were hard to avoid. She cared so much about her students and believed so much in their potential – she didn't want to waste their time on a curriculum that might not lead to greater growth and learning. As the year ended, Ms. Cole entered her summer break with mixed feelings about Eureka.

Near the end of the summer, Ms. Cole was invited to participate in a focus group with district leaders about how to best support teachers and students with Eureka the next year. Ms. Cole talked about her mixed feelings – how she knew Eureka had helped students learn, but how assessment scores had remained flat, and how she wanted to explore more ways to modify the curriculum to meet all students' needs. Other teachers in the focus group talked about wanting more support with the debrief part of lessons. Multiple teachers said that they wanted more time to work with instructional coaches and each other.

During their in-service training before the start of the next school year, Ms. Cole's principal shared information about new supports that would be available to teachers to help them with Eureka. Her principal pointed out that many of these supports were in response to teacher feedback, like wanting more opportunities for teacher collaboration. **Overall, Ms. Cole felt like people were talking about Eureka with a lot of optimism. Teachers and leaders seemed like they'd learned from the first year and were making adjustments to ensure this next year would be better. She was excited and hopeful for the coming year.**





## Discussion Questions

How were teachers engaged in the learning and improvement processes of this phase?

What information was communicated with teachers? What other information might teachers have found helpful?

When and how were teachers invited to share feedback?

What could ISD have done differently to make Ms. Cole feel more comfortable asking for help with the math Sprints?

How did teachers and leaders in ISD adjust their practices as challenges came up? What else could they have done?

How did Ms. Cole, and other teachers, feel after Year 1?

What could leaders in ISD do to set teachers and students up for further success in Year 2?



**INSTRUCTION**  
PARTNERS

TEACHER VIGNETTE