

FROM FOCUS TO IMPACT:

Five Lessons for Strengthening
Math Systems



TABLE OF CONTENTS

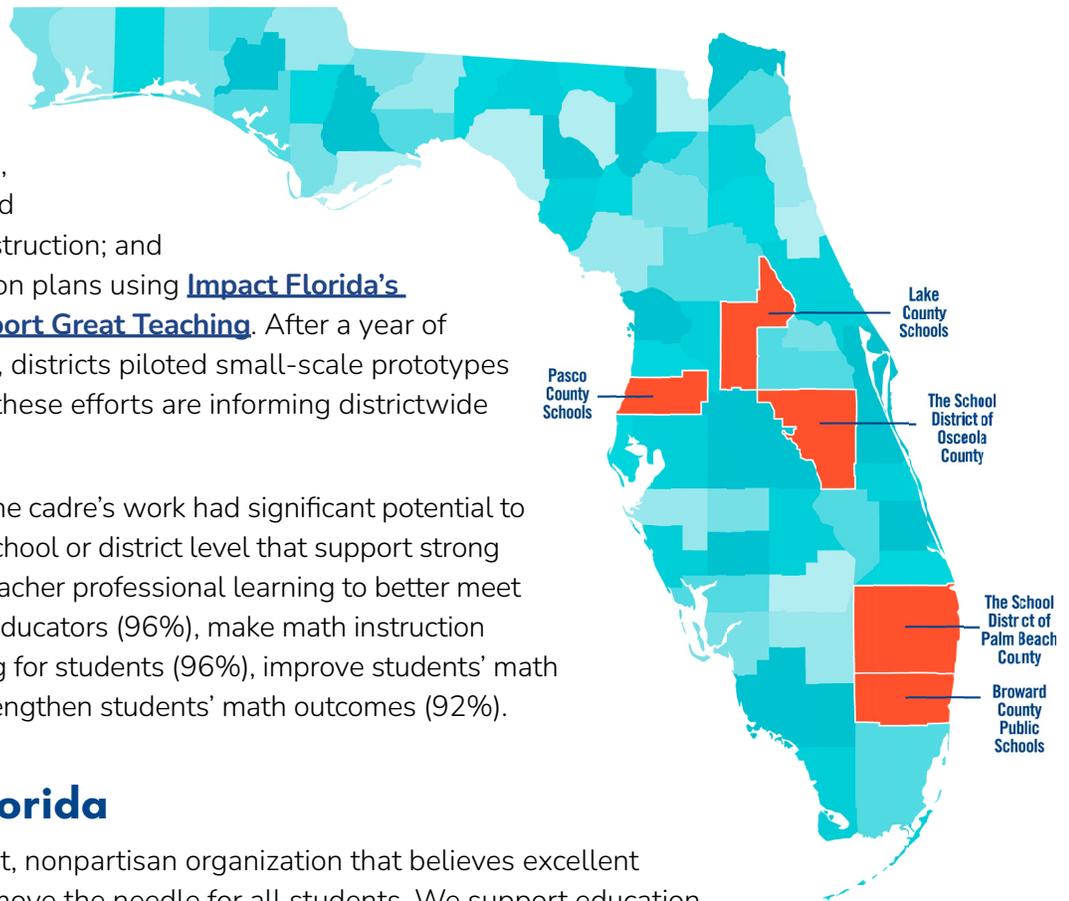
ABOUT THE FOCUS CADRE	3
<hr/>	
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR	4
<hr/>	
LESSON 1: BUILD CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL TEAMS TO ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION	6
<hr/>	
LESSON 2: CENTER STUDENT AND TEACHER VOICES FROM THE BEGINNING	8
<hr/>	
LESSON 3: YOU NEED A PRINCIPAL ON YOUR TEAM	10
<hr/>	
LESSON 4: IT'S IMPORTANT TO START SMALL	12
<hr/>	
LESSON 5: DON'T WAIT TO EVALUATE PROGRESS	14
<hr/>	
A FOUNDATION FOR WHAT COMES NEXT	16
<hr/>	

About the Focus Cadre

The Focus Cadre was a two-year initiative by Impact Florida supporting five districts—Broward County Public Schools, Lake County Schools, the School District of Osceola County, The School District of Palm Beach County, and Pasco County Schools—to strengthen K–9 math instruction.

District teams worked together to analyze instructional and student achievement data; engage teachers, students, families, and leaders; define a shared vision for effective math instruction; and design and implement action plans using [Impact Florida's Five Conditions That Support Great Teaching](#). After a year of data analysis and planning, districts piloted small-scale prototypes in 2024–25. Insights from these efforts are informing districtwide scaling in 2025–26.

Participants reported that the cadre's work had significant potential to improve conditions at the school or district level that support strong teaching (96%), enhance teacher professional learning to better meet the needs of mathematics educators (96%), make math instruction more relevant and engaging for students (96%), improve students' math experiences (96%), and strengthen students' math outcomes (92%).



About Impact Florida

Impact Florida is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes excellent classroom instruction can move the needle for all students. We support education leaders and teachers with knowledge and resources to ensure that great teaching and learning is consistently realized in Florida schools. Our cadres bring educators and education leaders together across districts to design, test, and scale effective practices and learn from each other. Every cadre is distinct in its membership, duration, supports, and activities.



Letter from the Director

Dr. Katelyn Devine, Director of Math Success, Impact Florida

The Focus Cadre was designed around a simple but powerful idea: transformation doesn't begin with a solution; it begins with understanding.

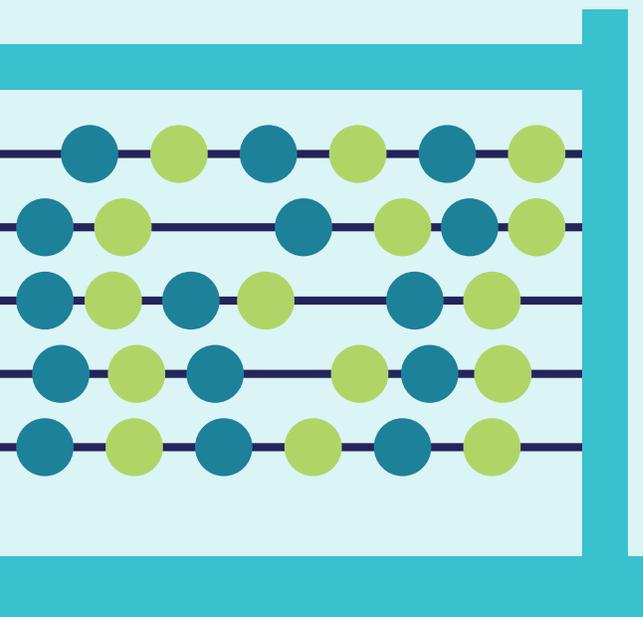
Participating districts committed to a year-long process of inquiry and design, followed by a year of implementation. They examined a broad range of data sources—including student achievement, classroom observations, student work, and qualitative input from focus groups, surveys, and interviews with teachers, students, and families. This holistic view allowed them to identify root causes and generate insights about the barriers and opportunities within their systems.

Making decisions through the eyes of students makes the work even more urgent—and more complex. Questions like “Which teachers and schools should receive the newest professional learning?” challenge district leaders because the instinctive answer is “all of them.” But with limited time, resources, and capacity, saying “yes” to everyone can actually dilute impact.

Sometimes it's more strategic to say no.

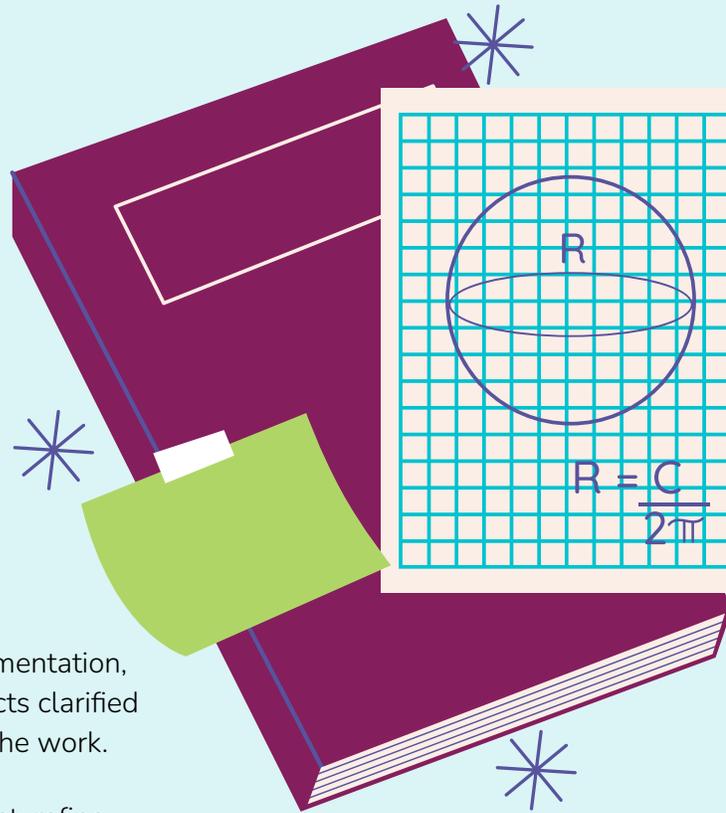
That's why we believe it's essential to pilot new approaches in a focused way, get the details right, and learn what works before attempting to scale. This intentional process helps ensure that promising ideas become embedded in systems and sustained over time, instead of fading away when the next solution arrives.

With that mindset, districts in the Focus Cadre designed and piloted targeted solutions aligned to their math visions. Their aim: to transform student experiences and outcomes not through quick fixes, but through well-informed, deeply rooted change.



This report highlights their journey, the lessons they uncovered, and the foundation they've laid for future systemwide impact:

- * Bringing together educators from multiple departments fostered stronger, more coherent plans through shared understanding, improved alignment, and collective ownership of systems-level change.
- * Elevating student and teacher voices, along with perspectives often left out, led districts to create solutions that better reflected real classroom experiences and community needs.
- * Involving principals in planning strengthened implementation, and when direct participation wasn't possible, districts clarified their role and provided targeted support to sustain the work.
- * Starting small by prototyping enabled districts to test, refine, and build confidence in strategies before scaling.
- * Regularly reviewing and applying data to decision-making helped districts adjust in real time and stay focused on student outcomes.



Early results have been overwhelmingly positive, with 70 percent of prototype classrooms reporting instruction that met the full depth of the grade-level benchmark. There were promising shifts in classroom culture and practice, and growing alignment between teachers and leaders around what high-quality math instruction looks and sounds like.

Heading into the 2025–26 school year, the five districts are already expanding their prototypes to reach more grades and schools. Word is spreading, and the work is far from done. But one thing is clear: by centering collaboration, clarity, and continuous learning, these districts are laying the groundwork for math instruction that truly works—for students and for those who support them every day.

Katelyn Devine

**Dr. Katelyn Devine,
Director of Math Success, Impact Florida**

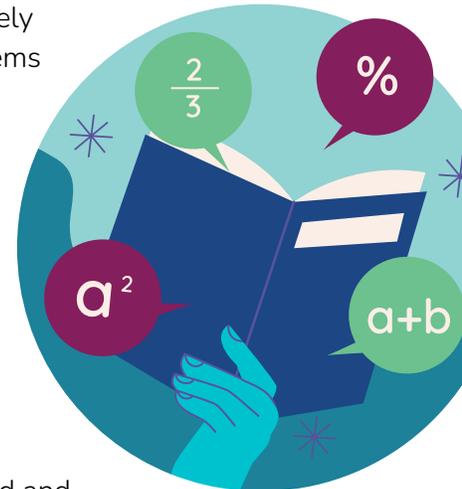
LESSON



Build cross-departmental teams to establish a shared vision.

Intentionally bringing together educators across departments and levels, including those not traditionally involved in math planning, cultivates a shared vision and builds the collective ownership needed for lasting change.

Cross-departmental planning teams resulted in strengthened coherence of strategies and supports for schools during implementation. The School District of Osceola County’s mathematics department partnered with the Professional Learning department, which already had clear processes and tools for mentoring. Rather than creating something entirely new, the mathematics department adapted and extended these existing systems to support their coaching vision. Because both the professional learning and mathematics department were involved from the beginning, they delivered consistent messaging and coordinated support for coaches in prototype schools resulting in greater coherence and clarity for school-based staff.



“When you feel genuine ownership of the work, the way you approach it is completely different. It transcends a single math priority and shapes everything we do across the district with greater responsibility and integrity.”

—Dr. Tiffany Scott, Director of Professional Learning, Lake County Schools.

The School District of Palm Beach County benefited from including an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) representative in their planning team, which led to a more unified and inclusive understanding of rigorous math instruction. Together, they co-developed a shared definition of rigor and created a Professional Learning Community (PLC) protocol that helped teachers identify high-quality resources aligned to this vision. This collaborative approach broke down departmental silos and fostered stronger communication across departments. Bringing together diverse perspectives led to clearer instructional guidance and greater assurance that all students would have access to rigorous, grade-level content.

Cadre members learned that inviting more voices to the table is not enough. Every participant also needs a

clear purpose and defined responsibilities, and shared language to contribute productively and carry the vision back to their own department. Districts with a clearly articulated vision reported a “more unified” delivery of expectations to schools and more consistent implementation. When that shared message was reinforced through every interaction with teachers and school leaders it translated planning into daily practice and sustained momentum, even amidst competing priorities.

Recommendations for District Leaders

- * **Identify which departments or roles support math instruction or implementation.** Look beyond the math team. Consider including staff from Professional Learning, School Leadership, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), English Language Learning, and Research and Accountability.
- * **Invite stakeholders with a clear purpose.** Be explicit about why each person or department is at the table and how their perspective will inform the work. Cadre members reported stronger buy-in when the purpose of each member’s role on the team and potential contributions were well defined.
- * **Develop a common vision for implementation.** Collaboratively defining priorities helps align efforts and strengthen communication. Cadre members noted that co-developing a shared vision supported more consistent implementation and reinforced a collective commitment to the work.

Questions to Ask

- * Which departments or roles need to be involved in this work, and why?
- * Have we clearly articulated each stakeholder’s role and contribution?
- * How are we ensuring alignment across departments once the work begins?



CADRE OUTCOMES



- * **95% of Focus Cadre participants reported that they more frequently seek input from other parts of the organization as a result of participating in Impact Florida’s Focus Cadre—** including departments such as professional learning, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Human Resources, and English Language Learning on district work as a result of their participation.
- * **In Lake County Schools, cross-role collaboration helped align supports and develop consistent messaging around fluency instruction,** leading the district to request six additional team members join the team mid-year to address growing internal demand and belief in shared planning.

LESSON



Center student and teacher voices from the beginning.

Starting with a deep understanding of teachers' and students' experiences helps districts elevate often-overlooked voices, ground decisions in real needs, and embed those insights into every phase of planning and implementation.

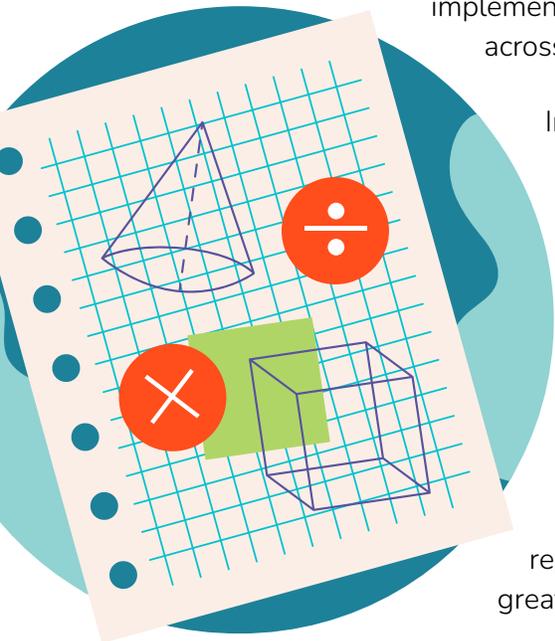
Cadre participants explored how to design and execute initiatives not just for students and teachers, but with them, by embedding their perspectives throughout both planning and implementation. Because it's usually difficult for teachers or students to attend planning meetings, cadre participants found ways to meet teachers, students, and families where they are through empathy interviews, focus groups, and student panels held in schools and classrooms.

Districts also worked to engage a more representative set of voices. In addition to including teacher leaders and high-achieving students, districts included participants who were newer, less engaged, or more likely to have concerns. This approach allowed districts to gather a more complete picture of the classroom experience and better understand how implementation was unfolding across different settings.

“[It’s] not so much the what, but the who. We often forget feedback from the students, who are our most important stakeholder.”

**—Mickey Banek, K-5 Math Program Planner,
The School District of Palm Beach County**

In Broward County Public Schools, professional learning for secondary math teachers included students, giving teachers the opportunity to apply new strategies in real time. After each mini-lesson, students provided feedback. Their affirmations about the experience boosted teacher buy-in and encouraged implementation of the strategies in their own classrooms. Teachers found it valuable to immediately practice strategies with students, particularly around checking for understanding. Many students reported that it positively impacted their experience, sharing that it felt great when teachers applauded their answers.



Recommendations for District Leaders

- * **Use multiple methods to gather feedback.** Pair empathy interviews and student panels with quick surveys or focus groups to capture both depth and breadth. Vary the setting and format to make it easier for participants to share openly.
- * **Be intentional about who you include.** Seek input from a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, including newer or more reluctant teachers and students with a range of achievement levels. Avoid relying solely on the most vocal or readily available participants.
- * **Design engagement around stakeholder realities.** Gather feedback where stakeholders are. Bring the table to them. Conduct interviews or panels in schools, during planning time, or as part of regular student and teacher routines.
- * **Close the loop and share how feedback is used.** Let participants know what changed as a result of their input. Sharing these updates builds trust and encourages continued engagement.



Questions to Ask

- * What don't we know, and who is best positioned to answer the questions?
- * Who aren't we hearing from, and how will we reach them?
- * How can we incorporate feedback from teachers and students at multiple points, not just during planning, but throughout implementation?
- * What barriers might prevent some stakeholders from participating, and how can we design opportunities that meet them where they are?

CADRE OUTCOMES



- * **100% of Focus Cadre members reported they now more frequently seek input from stakeholders**, especially teachers, students, and families, as part of their work. This reflects a systemwide shift toward more inclusive and responsive planning and implementation.
- * Prototype classrooms, where teacher input shaped planning and professional learning, **were nearly twice as likely to show students engaged in effortful learning** compared to non-prototype classrooms.

LESSON



You need a principal on your team.

Including principals in both planning and implementation strengthens school-level execution and builds momentum by ensuring leaders understand the vision and are equipped to support their teachers.

Focus Cadre districts found that successful implementation of math initiatives hinges on the involvement of principals, not as recipients of district plans, but as full partners in their design and execution. When principals were included in developing the district vision, they provided crucial context and acted as an on-the-ground champion of the work.

Principal inclusion in planning equipped them to support implementation with greater clarity and confidence. At Lake Point Academy in Lake County Schools, Principal Andrea Steenken served on the district planning team and, as a result, was able to clearly communicate expectations to staff and align new initiatives with existing priorities to fit her school's unique context. This early involvement contributed to stronger momentum compared to schools where leadership was not engaged from the outset.



“Leadership development shouldn’t be an afterthought. From the district office to the classroom, planning with leaders in mind makes lasting instructional change possible.”

—Laine Obando, Executive Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Lake County Schools

Similarly, in The School District of Palm Beach County, Dr. Moneek McTier, Instructional Superintendent, played an active role in planning efforts. Her involvement supported faster and deeper implementation at Glade View Elementary, one of the district's prototype schools, and contributed to measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Not all districts were able to include a principal on their team, prioritizing the principal's time at their school. However, these districts emphasized the importance of providing targeted support to help principals define their role in implementation and alignment with the broader vision.

Melissa Holtz, Director of Elementary Learning at Broward County Schools, noted, “The principals

who lead and support teachers need to have a clear understanding of what the teachers are trying to implement and the tools to help them be successful.” When principals grasped both the expectations placed on teachers and the strategies needed to support them, they were better equipped to guide instructional practices and maintain momentum at the school level.

Recommendations for District Leaders

- * **Include at least one principal on your core planning team.** Engage a current school leader early in the design process to ensure that district strategies are informed by school-level realities and are ready for implementation.
- * **Plan for principal needs, even if they can't join the planning team.** Build supports into the plan that clarify the principal's role, equip them with tools, and provide structured onboarding for implementation.
- * **Connect district priorities with school-level realities.** Work with principals to fit the initiative into their school's existing systems, ensuring alignment with other ongoing efforts and avoiding initiative overload.
- * **Monitor whether stakeholder groups are receiving and reinforcing consistent messages.** Use feedback data, walkthrough notes, and meeting debriefs to assess consistency and adjust communication as needed.



Questions to Ask

- * How are we preparing school leaders to understand and lead this work not just to implement it?
- * What tools, resources, and guidance have we provided to principals to support their leadership?
- * Are there clear expectations for the principal's role in implementation?
- * If a principal wasn't involved in planning, how are we onboarding and supporting them to lead this work effectively?

CADRE OUTCOMES



- * At Lake Point Academy, where the principal was directly involved in the cadre, **fourth-grade math scores grew by 20 points**, far exceeding both the state and district averages for growth in Grade 4.
- * Student learning gains at Lake Point Academy were particularly strong in number sense, with approximately **9 points of growth and a measurable reduction in students performing below grade level.**
- * In Palm Beach County, Glade View Elementary's **third-grade math scores rose by 29 points**, more than four times the district average growth and the highest of any prototype school.

LESSON



It's important to start small.

Testing a new initiative with a small group before scaling gives districts the opportunity to evaluate, adjust, and refine their approach early, supporting stronger, more effective implementation when scaling up.

Districts felt the urgency and responsibility to reach every student, but launching too much too quickly often leads to setbacks. Focus Cadre districts described how previous districtwide rollouts, introduced without enough testing or refinement, created confusion and led districts to abandon the work when challenges emerged. This time, they chose a more deliberate approach.

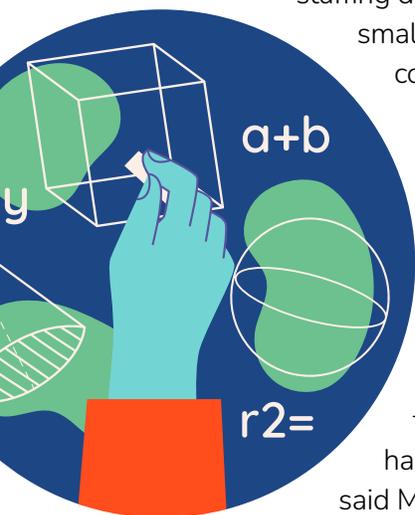
Districts embraced prototyping as a disciplined approach to change: starting small, learning quickly, and scaling smarter. Rather than launching initiatives districtwide all at once, they tested ideas with a limited group of schools or classrooms. This allowed districts to move from design to action in manageable steps, adjusting tools and supports in real time based on feedback. In all Focus

Cadre districts, prioritizing the pilot in a few schools helped maintain momentum even through staffing disruptions and weather-related closures. Leaders found that working with a smaller group of schools made it easier to spot challenges and respond quickly to build confidence before scaling.

“We need a proof of concept. We want to see how everything works and be able to tweak our plan along the way so that when we find that success we can broadcast that to our other schools.”

—Robin O'Brien, Mathematics, Science, & STEM Manager at The School District of Palm Beach County.

Prototyping was a critical step in each district's continuous improvement process. Districts used early implementation feedback to iterate and refine, rather than treating the pilot as a one-time test. This mindset helped districts adapt as they went, rather than waiting for end-of-year results to inform change. In Pasco County Schools, when their plan wasn't having its intended impact, they reassessed what was doable given hurricane recovery efforts and other district priorities and modified their support to schools. “Before, we were just hoping that follow-up support would happen at schools. Now, we actually have a plan for it to happen, and it's a plan we can realistically implement given our other commitments,” said Mark Butler, Pasco's senior supervisor of K–12 Math and Science.



Selecting early adopters was critical to the success of prototypes. Districts prioritized schools and individuals who were not only willing to try something new but also open to giving honest feedback. They emphasized the value of selecting a diverse and representative group for the prototype to help ensure that lessons learned would apply more broadly across contexts. These champions helped refine the model and build credibility for scaling.

Some districts observed that prototyping supported broader engagement by creating opportunities for early participants to share experiences and build momentum during scale-up. In Broward County Public Schools and Lake County Schools, principals involved in the prototype are sharing their lessons learned and the impact on teachers and students with new principals who are being brought into the work as the district scales.

Recommendations for District Leaders

- * **Identify a set of early adopters and include them in the planning process.** Select a small, diverse group of schools or classrooms to pilot the work, ensuring they represent the range of contexts across your district.
- * **Engage those closest to the work (school leaders, teachers, and students) in frequent feedback to make adjustments before going to scale.** Create structured opportunities for feedback through interviews and reflection protocols during the pilot phase.
- * **Communicate the purpose and boundaries of the prototype clearly.** Help all stakeholders understand that this is a learning phase, not a full launch, and that adjustments are expected.
- * **Document and share what you learn during the prototype.** Track both successes and challenges. Use those stories to inform adjustments and build momentum as you expand the work.

Questions to Ask

- * Who are the right early adopters to involve, and do they reflect the diversity of our district's schools and contexts?
- * What supports do our prototype schools need to test this work effectively and share their experiences?
- * What evidence will we collect to determine whether the prototype is ready to scale?

CADRE OUTCOMES

- * **Prototype classrooms were more than twice as likely to use most or all district-approved resources** compared to non-prototype classrooms in the same schools.
- * **Prototype classrooms were three times more likely to employ instructional practices that indicate high-quality instruction** compared to non-prototype classrooms in the same school.



LESSON



Don't wait to evaluate progress.

Building routines to monitor implementation and early outcomes, rather than waiting for end-of-year data, supports districts to stay focused, identify challenges, and respond quickly to improve results.

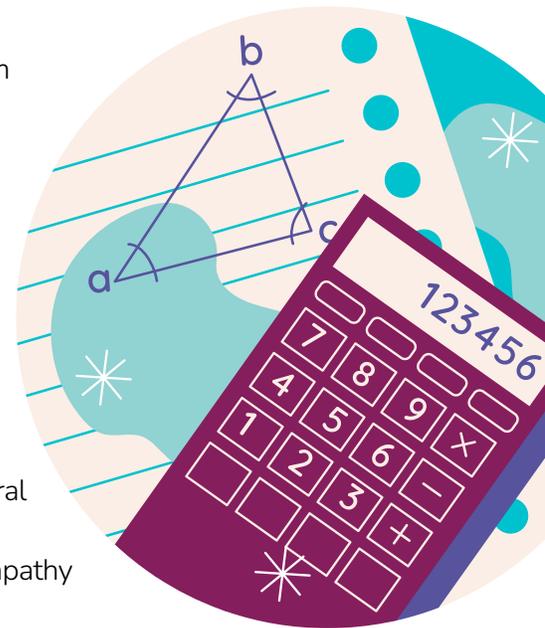
At the outset of the Focus Cadre, many districts were already collecting data. What shifted was how and when they used it. Rather than waiting for lagging indicators, such as end-of-year assessment scores, districts began to identify and track leading indicators that could provide earlier insight into whether their priorities were taking root. This more proactive approach helped districts course-correct in real time, rather than looking backward after opportunities to adjust had passed.

To support this shift, districts first clarified the key learning questions they aimed to answer and then selected data collection methods aligned to those priorities. Rather than relying solely on traditional student performance metrics, they expanded their approach to include classroom walkthroughs, student work samples, empathy interviews, and stakeholder surveys.

Pasco County Schools took this a step further by consolidating data from multiple sources into a single, school-level view. This holistic approach allowed them to identify patterns across measures rather than viewing data in isolation. Positive outliers highlighted which elements of the implementation were most impactful, while consistent signals across multiple data points helped the district more precisely direct support to schools in need of additional assistance.

In other districts, using leading indicators allowed districts to identify challenges early and provide more targeted support. Lake County Schools developed a robust monitoring plan that included teacher and student surveys and empathy interviews. Initial responses were too general and led to the district team having more questions that led to actionable next steps. Rather than looking to new data sources, they refined their empathy interview questions and reengaged teachers to surface clearer insights.

Yet even with stronger indicators, several districts realized that without dedicated time to review and discuss findings, the data alone was insufficient. As Dr. Moneek McTier, Instructional Superintendent in The School District of Palm Beach County, reflected, "It is important to know what you're monitoring for and be clear about how you want to respond to your data. Sometimes there is a lot of monitoring but little



“Hope isn’t a strategy.”

—Dr. Hope Strange, Coordinator of K12 Mathematics
in The School District of Osceola County

response or action based on what you monitored.” Monitoring was most effective when districts built it into their calendar, ensuring regular touchpoints for reflection, learning, and decision-making.

This ongoing review also gave districts the ability to question assumptions and refine their strategies. As Dr. Hope Strange, Coordinator of K12 Mathematics in The School District of Osceola County, noted, “Hope isn’t a strategy.” Without clearly defined expectations and mechanisms to evaluate progress, districts risked mistaking activity for impact. Ultimately, effective monitoring was not about collecting more data, but about identifying the right signals, reviewing them at the right time, and using them to inform action. By focusing on leading indicators and building in the routines to act on them, districts strengthened implementation and increased the likelihood of sustained success.

Recommendations for District Leaders

- * **Define success across the year, not just at the end.** Identify specific indicators that will show whether your plan is on track and determine what success looks like at each stage of implementation.
- * **Build monitoring into the calendar.** Protect time to review data, reflect together, and adjust their approach in response to what they learn.
- * **Use multiple forms of evidence.** Combine quantitative measures (like student assessments and classroom observations) with qualitative inputs (like empathy interviews and surveys) to understand how implementation is unfolding and where support is needed.
- * **If you feel like you aren’t getting the right data, don’t be afraid to ask different questions.**

Questions to Ask

- * What do you want to know?
- * What data will best answer your questions?
- * Who is best positioned to answer your questions openly and honestly?

CADRE OUTCOMES

- * **100% of cadre members agreed that using data to monitor both teacher and student progress is vital for continuous improvement** and achieving their district’s math goals.
- * **Districts emerged with clearer takeaways about what effective monitoring looks like.** When asked what lessons they would carry forward, the most common responses included using multiple data sources to monitor impact, leveraging data to make real-time decisions, and using data to guide follow-up with participants.

FOCUS
K-9 MATH

A Foundation for What Comes Next



Systems-level improvement isn't a moment; it's a mindset. The Focus Cadre provided districts the structure and support to build that mindset and now, they are putting it into action.

Districts across Florida joined the Focus Cadre to strengthen math instruction, but the lessons they gained went far beyond any single content area. Through two years of shared inquiry, design, and implementation, districts developed habits of practice centered on clarity, collaboration, and continuous improvement that proved invaluable when unexpected challenges arose.

This year, all five districts faced tough realities: significant budget reductions, shifts in district leadership, and mounting pressure to do more with less. Yet even in these circumstances, Focus Cadre districts were able to adapt and stay the course. They credited the Focus Cadre for providing them with tools and routines that enabled them to act decisively and strategically, rather than reactively.

Districts also shared that the cadre strengthened their internal systems for collaboration and monitoring. They had built relationships across departments and defined shared goals that could outlast any one initiative or leader. When faced with hard decisions, they could draw on those foundations to navigate change with greater coherence and resilience.

What's Next for Focus Cadre Districts

The conclusion of the Focus Cadre does not mark an end, it marks a transition. All five districts created detailed plans to scale their prototypes in the 2025–26 school year. For some, that means reaching more schools with targeted professional learning and coaching. For others, it means expanding successful approaches to additional grade levels.

What's Next for the Focus Cadre

After a year of data collection and planning across the K–9 continuum, our Focus Cadre districts identified foundational skill gaps in the earliest grades as a critical barrier to long-term math success, including Algebra 1 outcomes. To address this, we launched the Focus K–3 Math Cadre in June 2025 to support early mathematics education. This next iteration of our work reflects a deeper understanding: to transform student trajectories in math, change must begin where learning begins.

