In 2005, Jacob Hiatt Magnet School adopted an expanded day schedule with a school-wide focus on open response writing. Staff trainings, instructional strategies, and collaboration meetings were planned to ensure that writing was taught using consistent methods across all classrooms and content areas. Three years later, the school had seen dramatic gains in English language arts, but progress in math achievement had not been as substantial. In response, the school implemented an additional math support block for the 2008-2009 school year.

With the same focus the school had committed to creating its approach to writing three years earlier, Hiatt’s leadership team thoroughly analyzed state assessment and benchmark data to identify specific content strands to target during math support. Data also determined student groupings; each student is placed into one of three groups based on the content strand in which he/she struggles most. In the 2012-2013 school year, these three content strands include: 1) number sense; 2) measurement; or 3) patterns, relations, and algebra. Student groupings are adjusted once each year, after the school has analyzed results from mid-year benchmark assessments. Each group is led by a core content teacher.

Beginning in 2008, all students in grades 3 to 6 now receive three days of math support each week—the other two days are devoted to enrichment courses—during the last 55 minutes of the school day. While objectives during math support vary each day, these classes follow a weekly structure: students review and re-learn key math concepts two days each week and play hands-on math games during the third day. “We’re very intentional in what we teach in our math support,” says one 4th grade teacher. “We want to make sure that we’re reinforcing the most important skills that they’re getting in their math class. That also requires a lot of communication among teachers.”

For many students, their math support teacher is different from the teacher delivering other core content subjects. As a result, adequate time for teachers to meet and discuss student progress is essential to the alignment of math supports to core math classes. Hiatt’s weekly 45-minute grade level meetings allow teachers to not only discuss student progress, but also identify key concepts to review and share instructional strategies as well. “We’ll compare end of unit assessment data to get a sense of which teacher may have taught a skill really well,” says one teacher. “If one classroom scored really well on patterns, relations, and algebra, I can ask them how they taught that and use those strategies when I teach my support class.”

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