

ADDRESSING READINESS AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 DURING IMPLEMENTATION

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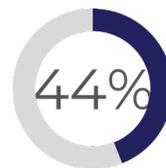
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INTRODUCTION

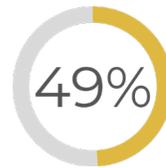
Over the summer of 2021, Atlanta Public Schools hired 367 teachers. The amount of turnover and unfilled positions is a story plaguing public education across the country. It is fair to say that the shortages and turnover rates were noticeable before Covid-19, but the challenges of reopening schools and the current environment with the impacts of Covid-19 have made it more challenging to keep staff and fill open positions.

While Local Education Agencies across the country are experiencing high turnover and unfilled staff positions, districts are also still trying to address new priorities due to Covid-19. It is challenging to continue to effectively implement a new curriculum when there are competing initiatives, day-to-day operation challenges, and unique needs for students and staff brought on by the pandemic.

KEY POINTS



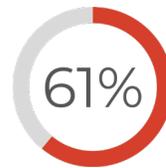
of public schools reported having **one teaching vacancy** as of January 2022



of public schools reported having at least **one non-teaching staff vacancy** as of January 2022



of the vacancies reported were due to resignation



of the vacancies reported specifically identified the **Covid-19 pandemic as a cause of increased staff vacancies**

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, School Pulse Panel (2021–22).



To explore this concept and assist districts across the country, the Effective Implementation Cohort (EIC) aims to produce reliable, practical evidence and measures to inform the planning and implementation of a district-wide, high-impact math improvement initiative. Atlanta Public Schools (APS), in partnership with Achievement Network (ANet), are part of the EIC, which comprises ten educational service providers and 19 local education agencies.



DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS:

87	Total number of Schools
49,732	Total number of Students
14	Number of Middle Schools
3.83%	Latino Students
35.51%	Black Students
78.20%	Free and Reduced Lunch Rate

While the story of Atlanta Public Schools may seem commonplace in the current realities of schools, the district has been able to continue to make strides and implement Illustrative Math, delivered by Amplify, as a high-quality middle school math curriculum. While continuing to address the impacts of COVID-19, the district regrouped themselves in the work and continued to move forward with the implementation plan. So what readiness factors were in place before Covid-19 that allowed the district to address staff turnover quickly? What did the district do to orient new staff and build the team to continue to implement?

In the Spring of 2021, before the pandemic, APS partnered with ANet to begin planning for the implementation of the Illustrative Math curriculum at all 14 middle schools in the district. The math curriculum would be the first adopted curriculum used in all 14 middle schools to create consistency across the district and achieve the vision for math teaching and learning. Year one of implementation was to begin in the fall of 2021. The implementation plan included detailed action steps involving curriculum selection, capacity-building supports for staff, data collection for decision-making, communication, and the development of a District Implementation Team to support teachers.

Atlanta Public Schools Vision for Math Teaching and Learning:

In Atlanta Public Schools, we aim to be a high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system. We will get there, in part, by living out [APS's Definition of Teaching Excellence](#) (DTE) and our Academic System Framework in each and every school and classroom.

ALL ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS WILL

See mathematics as a connected discipline that helps them understand the world and critique new ideas.



Demonstrate that they are flexible and resourceful problem solvers by making meaning of the mathematics.



Challenge each other's thinking through reasoning and evidence-based critique.



Engage in productive struggle with grade-level aligned tasks that invite them to use their prior knowledge to build new understanding.



Demonstrate their mathematical understanding with peers and teachers, both orally and in writing, through grade-appropriate mathematical representations.



Exhibit a growth mindset by taking risks, seeking feedback from teachers and peers, and reflecting on both their successes and mistakes.



Collaborate with peers and build relationships based on mutual respect and inclusion of each other's mathematical ideas.



KEY- CONNECTION TO DTE



Culture of Learning



Essential Content



Academic Ownership



Demonstration of Learning



Social Emotional Learning



Beliefs and Values

However, even the best plans have hurdles and surprises (Graphic). In the summer of 2021, the district experienced extensive turnover, including their [Executive Sponsor](#), Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and District 6-12 Math Coordinator. Additionally, ANet experienced turnover in critical technical assistance positions.

Let's look at the details of how Achievement Network (ANet) and Atlanta Public Schools supported the transition of key personnel in the Fall of 2021 to maintain momentum in their implementation. The ANet System Partner working with APS transitioned from ANet in October of 2021. As a result, Raynise Smith, Vice President of System Services, took over as the direct technical support for Atlanta Public Schools. Knowing the importance of the project, Ms. Smith took immediate action steps to support not only ANet's staff transition but also the district staff.

First, Ms. Smith recognized the need to maintain open communication with the project Executive Sponsor or key district decision-maker who champions the work. Ms. Smith met and communicated with Dr. Selena Florence, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning to ensure consistent interactions between the technical assistance provider (ANet) and implementation point person, Dr. Jason Patterson, Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction.

Next, both ANet and APS recognized the need to ensure a robust onboarding of new hires. Together, they addressed this need by collaboratively defining the roles and responsibilities of new hires and by providing opportunities to build expertise in curriculum design and implementation strategies. Dr. Patterson clearly outlined each new member's role and responsibilities, and new hires engaged in professional learning with ANet and Amplify providers to build their expertise.

These actions built the capacity of new math team members - the 6-12 Math Coordinator and two Math Specialists who work directly with middle school math instructional coaches and teachers.

Knowing the importance of focusing on the goals and action steps in the implementation plan, ANet and APS recognized the need to practice the pause to ensure that every interaction was connected directly to the implementation of Illustrative Math and the Year 1 implementation goals.



"On day one, my role felt like a jigsaw puzzle that needed to be put together before I could be effective. However, I also felt that I did not have the time to sit with the individual pieces because students, teachers, and coaches were in need of immediate support at that point in the school year. I knew learning and executing would have to be simultaneous, and that flexibility with regard to understanding the implementation of a new curriculum was critical in my transition. It took several weeks for me to completely understand the intentional structures that were in place to support the work of the Secondary Mathematics Team, which consists of myself and two Math Specialists. What I found most helpful in my transition was having open access to, as well as scheduling protected time with my director to discuss the various entities within and outside the district in place to support the work around implementation of our middle school curriculum. This time allowed me to more quickly complete the jigsaw puzzle while I learned how to center and prioritize our efforts. I felt successfully "onboarded" not necessarily when the puzzle was complete, but rather once enough pieces were in place that I knew how the full picture should look."



DR. ASHLEY GARNER

Secondary Math Coordinator

In January, the newly developed District Implementation Team restarted and the Math Team members conducted walkthroughs using the Curriculum Look-For tool and to track these observations in a central system. Time was spent calibrating the use of the tool, collecting data, and preparing information for the District Implementation Team. This allowed the team to track the goals and analyze the data to magnify wins and address trend areas of growth in implementation.

The final action necessary was to ensure that growing relationships and establishing trust was built into every meeting and interaction between the technical assistance provider, District Implementation Team, and staff. ANet was very intentional in approaching Atlanta Public Schools as co-learning and co-designing partners. Time spent in building relationships with all new hires was time well spent and ensured trust as the project moved forward. The district Math Team was persistent in visiting campuses and providing support to school leaders and teachers. This built trust between campuses and the district Math Team. Additionally, the district was very intentional in creating consistent communication through existing channels for new hires and critical perspectives involved in the project.

By regrounding in the work in the Fall of 2021, ANet and APS could onboard new staff, collect critical data points, and develop a district implementation team grounded in the goals of implementing Illustrative Math and the vision for math teaching and learning. By the end of the school year, in the spring of 2022, the district implementation team had not only met consistently every month to address implementation barriers, but they also successfully identified three (3) primary challenges to their infrastructure that they are currently addressing.

The team began their meeting schedule this fall with a regrounding of the why of the project, a review of the three challenges and action steps, and the celebration of the implementation successes that have occurred.



"Anchoring our work in the implementation plan and goals was critical for creating focused and coherent professional learning and school support plans for schools, teachers, and coaches during the second semester. Each week, I met with my ANet System Partner to thought partner about short-term goals, what we wanted to be true after an engagement with our teachers, coaches, and leaders, and how that work ultimately would push us towards our long-term goals. This consistent partnership allowed me to address the root causes of our implementation barriers, enlist the correct support to remove the barriers, and strengthen the communication among all stakeholders to improve the understanding of and buy-in for full support of the curriculum. As a result of our thought partnership, I was able to facilitate opportunities for schools to provide feedback about the curriculum that we used to more intentionally deploy Math Specialists. Specialists tailored their support to each school based on walkthrough data and established coaching plans with the school Instructional Coach and School Leadership Teams. Part of that support plan included circling back to monitor progress toward their goals. The improvement we saw in the second semester was driven by intentional and focused planning, but the result of the work of our instructional coaches, specialists, and teachers who made conscious decisions each day to do the work necessary to improve our students' mathematics learning outcomes in Atlanta Public Schools."



DR. ASHLEY GARNER

Secondary Math Coordinator



SO, WHAT ACTION STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO ENSURE CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MIDST OF HIGH LEVELS OF STAFF TURNOVER?

- Create a solid and detailed transition and onboarding process
- Maintain open communication all critical perspectives, including crucial district decision makers and champions of the work
- Ensure robust onboarding of new hires by clearly defining their roles and responsibilities
- Provide opportunities to build expertise in the curriculum design and implementation strategies
- Maintain the focus on goals and aligned actions
- Build relationships and trust between team members and agencies and team members and key stakeholders

TO LEARN MORE VISIT:

Additionally, the Effective Implementation Cohort has several direct resources you can utilize to support the implementation of a curriculum. Check out the following documents or visit eic.fpg.unc.edu.

[Readiness Constructs, Indicators, and Definitions](#)

[A list of Readiness Assessments before you begin implementation](#)

[Taking contextual factors into account as you measure readiness](#)

[Addressing readiness factors impacted by Covid-19](#)