

CREATING A MATHEMATICS THEORY OF ACTION IN LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Authors: Allan Broslawsky, Caryn Ward, and Stephanie Kennedy

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This brief describes LAUSD's iterative and collaborative process of developing a Mathematics Theory of Action and details how this document guides their ongoing work.



LAUSD VISION AND THEORY OF ACTION

Through collaboration with district leadership and partner organizations, LAUSD developed the following vision and Theory of Action. This brief will describe how they developed and utilized these mission-guiding documents.

VISION

All LAUSD students will identify as mathematicians, see the beauty and joy in mathematics, and use their math knowledge and skills as tools for empowerment and liberation, in service of becoming change agents within their local or global community. To build this identity, TK-12 Mathematics teachers and leaders in LAUSD will provide opportunities for all students to engage in mathematical discourse, sense making and meaningful problem solving to develop open, inquiring, and demanding minds with the confidence to approach novel situations with adaptability, insight, and creativity.

KEY POINTS



Creating a Theory of Action (TOA) was the first necessary step to guide LAUSD's implementation work and is expected to generalize to other initiatives across the district.



Developing a TOA is an iterative process of co-creation with diverse perspectives that takes time, but ultimately facilitates a greater sense of shared ownership and willingness of staff to use it to guide implementation activities.



Mapping the various system components (roles, structures) and their functions within implementation was critical to creating common understanding.



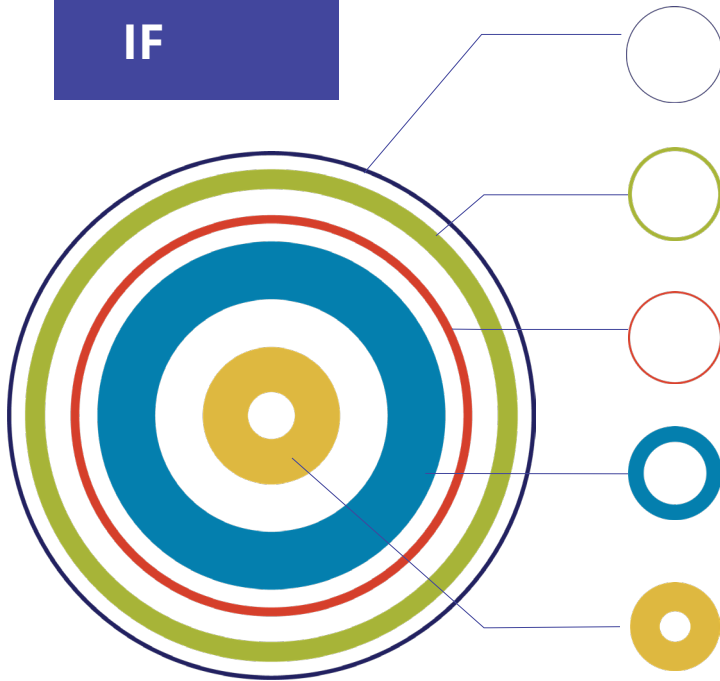
Within complex systems like LAUSD, communication is both critical as well as challenging, especially during periods of change and uncertainty. Communication continues to be a prioritized area of need for the implementation of the Illustrative Mathematics (IM) curriculum.



In the first year of the project, 76% of teachers observed were at least attempting to implement Illustrative Mathematics with integrity (awareness stage), and 10% of teachers were fully in the implementing or integrating stage of the rubric (see [IM Reflection Tool](#)).

THEORY OF ACTION

IF



If the **Central Office** selects materials and tools that support that vision and incentivizes and monitors their use;

And if all **Local Districts** set and implement localized strategies to implement this vision and align their resource allocation;

And if all **Communities of Schools** support schools to focus on instruction and use data continuously improve;

And if **Instructional Leadership Teams** monitor their instructional programs and use that data to build collective teacher efficacy;

And if **Teachers** use the provided [materials](#), [time](#), [and data](#) to work together and continuously improve their [practice](#)



AND IF

And if all levels of LAUSD support **parents and families** as equal partners in mathematics teaching and learning;

THEN

All students will realize their full and productive math achievement, have positive, productive math identities, and reach our math vision because they have consistent access to strong and empowering instruction throughout their math career in LAUSD.



ABOUT THE DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM (DIT)

LAUSD STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Serving over **600,000 K-12 students** in over **1,000 schools** covering **710 square miles**, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the **second largest school district** in the United States.

The student population of LAUSD is [incredibly diverse](#), representing over 97 spoken languages and a multitude of racial and ethnic identities.

[English Learner](#) enrollment has increased by over 5% in the last year alone to 91,424 students.

LAUSD estimates that **4 out of 5 students** come from families [experiencing poverty](#) and that around 400,000 are eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

AMONG STUDENT POPULATION:

73.4%	Latino/a
10.0%	White
7.5%	African American
3.9%	Asian
2.0%	Filipino

The District Implementation Team (DIT) guiding the work of the EIC project consists of Division of Instruction (DOI) administrators who work together to lead implementation of the IM curriculum across LAUSD.

This cross-departmental team includes math coordinators, data coordinators, administrators of instruction, representatives from the office of access and equity, the office of special education, and those identified as EIC Executive Sponsors.

Executive Sponsors play a critical role on their team and in the EIC work as champions who support district and school staff as they engage in implementation of high-quality middle years mathematics curriculum. They are selected for this role because of their ability to influence others, authority to make decisions regarding resource allocation, institutional knowledge, time, and positive relationships with staff and stakeholders. Executive Sponsors from LAUSD include the Chief Academic Officer, Senior Executive Director, and Administrator of Instruction, as well as Assistant Superintendents from each of the six local school districts within LAUSD.

LAUSD is divided into six local school districts: East, West, South, Northeast, Northwest, and Central. Each has formed their own cross-departmental implementation team to guide the implementation of IM in their own district.

SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS



Three professional learning providers support LAUSD in implementing IM in middle schools: The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools (The Partnership), Leading Educators (LE), and Achievement Network (ANet). The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools supports 20 campuses in LA Unified under a memorandum of understanding with the district. Several schools within the Partnership have already implemented Illustrative Math as their curriculum of choice. The organization takes the learnings from its own implementation journey to lead the development of district systems and provide professional learning support for local districts as they implement IM. Leading Educators is a national nonprofit partnering with districts to create professional learning systems that promote excellent and equitable teaching as a key lever to disrupt racial inequity and expand opportunity for all students. As part of this work, LE supports district partners to strengthen the conditions for adult learning, instructional leadership,

and sound teaching practice necessary to improve student learning.

In the EIC, the Partnership works with three of six local districts in LAUSD (East, South, and Central), while Leading Educators supports the other three (Northeast, Northwest, and West). Both providers lead the development of district systems and provide professional learning support for local districts as they implement IM. ANet plays a critical role in supporting the DOI implementation team to manage assessment and measurement systems of implementation efforts for IM in all six local districts. As a Learning Partner of the EIC project, the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) supports partnerships between professional learning providers and school districts in their implementation and measurement efforts, as well as collects and studies data to answer the project's learning questions within the [cohort-wide learning agenda](#).

DEVELOPING A MATHEMATICS THEORY OF ACTION (TOA)

LAUSD adopted the IM curriculum as a pilot program in part to combat low mathematics test scores and declining enrollment rates. Although the district was optimistic about the promise of the curriculum to reverse these trends, there was no dedicated plan in place to ensure the curriculum was implemented effectively. The Division of Instruction (DOI) co-developed the Mathematics Theory of Action (TOA) through an inclusive and iterative process, which included feedback from stakeholders across many layers of

LAUSD including the DOI, local districts, school leaders, and partner organizations. The TOA focuses on developing a foundational hypothesis as to what people at each layer of the system (DOI, local districts, COSs, school leaders, teachers) must do in order to effectively implement the curriculum and achieve improved outcomes for students. In year one of implementation, the TOA has been so impactful that other initiatives across LAUSD are now contextualizing it for their own specific initiatives to guide their work.

REFLECTIONS ON DEVELOPING THE TOA

Prior to the EIC work, there had not been a formal plan or framework for guiding the implementation of IM across LAUSD. Creating a TOA was the first necessary step to set the implementation team up for success as they embarked upon implementation of the curriculum in schools. Reflecting on this process, team members noted the purposeful use of an iterative approach to collecting and using feedback from various perspectives both within LAUSD and partners like The Partnership. Secondary Mathematics Coordinator Philip Ogbuehi recounts, "Once an initial draft was developed, the Chief Academic Officer [and Executive Sponsor] then convened a meeting of local district leadership, including Administrators of Instruction (AIs), and shared what was developed. In that same meeting, the AIs brought their math teams who listened to what was done and provided input." With each subsequent draft of the TOA, the development team continued to solicit and incorporate such feedback, ultimately producing the final version in July 2021. Philip continued, "It was a very clear and collaborative process, but also a challenging process. It challenged our ideas, our assumptions, as well as things we thought would work."

While time-intensive, this process built a sense of shared ownership of the work and greater utilization of the TOA by staff at all levels in their implementation work. Firoza Kanji, a fellow Secondary Mathematics Coordinator heavily involved in the TOA process, said, "I wasn't 100% sure how much of [the TOA] would be owned by the whole system. I have been very pleased with how [the TOA] has gone out into the system, and how the local districts and math coordinators have aligned the work they do with the Theory of Action. I anticipated it to take longer to be put into use system-wide."

The involvement of Executive Sponsors proved invaluable to the TOA's success, as well. "The Executive Sponsors have done a really good job of putting the TOA out there and asking the local district [staff] to put it into action," Firoza continues. In the role of Executive Sponsor, LAUSD's Chief Academic Officer, Alison Yoshimoto-Towery, actively supported the process, promoting and championing

its development along the way. In addition to convening critical perspectives to provide input during the drafting process, Yoshimoto-Towery emphasized the importance of how each level of support across LAUSD must work in concert to create the change in student outcomes they wished to see, including her own. "At my level, how are we making sure that we're aligning all those systems and structures to make sure that the work gets done?"

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Executive Sponsor, LAUSD's Chief Academic Officer, **Alison Yoshimoto-Towery**

Philip believes that having the TOA creates cohesiveness among the different levels of LAUSD's complex system and creates opportunities for other initiatives beyond middle school to successfully engage in similar processes. He is proud of the fact that their team was able to engage partners and local districts to co-create a TOA that is now not only guiding their IM work, but that he also envisions extending to other initiatives. "That document is physically helping us in the implementation of the IM program and also any other program we're going to implement in the future." He is hopeful the district will soon begin seeing the translation of the TOA into improved outcomes for priority students in mathematics.



LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Communication is challenging yet vital to the success and sustainment of implementation work in systems as large and complex as LAUSD. This is especially true during times of significant transition or uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread staff shortages, or changes in leadership. Communication continues to be a prioritized area of need for LAUSD's IM implementation work. With so many levels of support working together to drive better outcomes for priority students, the DOI and District Implementation Teams are focusing efforts on shoring up cohesive communication plans, protocols, and policies.

As a result of the TOA development process, LAUSD leveraged several opportunities to provide consistent coordination and leadership for IM implementation. The first of these was the creation of an IM Coordinator role. With funder support, LAUSD also saw the need to coordinate with the four external partners on the EIC project, each with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, so that coherence in support to local districts and schools was at the forefront. The coordination of the external partners also supports the strengthening of their own internal capacity for systemic implementation.

With the TOA now in use, the implementation team has its sights set on its next steps. This includes assessing progress and determining whether the way they have aligned across workstreams, roles, and structures is working towards their goals. Additionally, the district is committed to communicating with caregivers and students through focus groups and targeted communication to ensure that they can adjust their implementation plan based on the feedback they receive.



ABOUT EIC

The Effective Implementation Cohort (EIC) is a project designed to help school districts across the country implement an instructional system that supports using a high-quality middle school math curriculum. The EIC aims to increase districts' capacity to implement a high-quality middle-grade math curriculum to accelerate learning for students experiencing poverty, Black, Latino/a, and/or English Learner (EL)-Designated students. As part of this work, the EIC will learn and share with others outside of the project what districts need to have in place for effective implementation, what aspects of implementation at the district and school level most benefit priority students, and the work involved in making site-wide implementation successful.

The EIC has a goal of producing reliable, practical evidence and measures to inform planning and implementing a district-wide, high-impact math improvement initiative. This brief is the first in a series highlighting various aspects of implementation work among district-provider dyads in the EIC cohort. The purpose of this series is to provide a deeper look into the strategies, activities, challenges, and successes of implementing a high-quality middle-years math curriculum.

TO LEARN MORE VISIT:

Creating a Theory of Action

<https://k-12leadership.org/tools/creating-a-theory-of-action/>

[Effective Implementation Cohort \(EIC\)](#)

Learn more about the partnerships supporting LAUSD

[Partnership for Los Angeles Schools](#)

[Leading Educators](#)

[Achievement Network](#)