Teachers in Omaha Get Customized Math Professional Learning

K-12 Professional Learning Success Story

“I knew as soon as I met with Carnegie Learning that they would be the team we would work with because we needed someone to truly collaborate with us, not just deliver a standard one-size-fits-all PL package.”

– Megan Fiedler, Facilitator of Curriculum and Assessment for the Archdiocese of Omaha

Archdiocese of Omaha Catholic Schools

Demographics:

- **Enrollment**: Roughly 19,000 in 70 schools
- **Grade Level**: K-12
- **Race**: 81% White, 7% Black, 4% Unknown, 3% two or more races, 2% Asian, 2% Native American, 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- **Economically Disadvantaged**: 16%
- **Students With Learning Differences**: 6%

Challenges:

- Sole emphasis on procedures and memorization
- Shift to new materials and mathematics standards
- Unaligned math curriculum across K-12

Solutions:

- Customized Professional Learning Workshops (2021-22)
- Math Professional Learning Academies (2022-23)

Populations Served:

- K-12 Teachers

Results:

- Balanced teaching model that builds conceptual understanding and procedural fluency
- Knowledge of best practices for teaching math
- Teacher confidence with new materials and revised standards
- Strong teacher buy-in
Megan Fiedler, an educator of 24 years, is the Facilitator of Curriculum and Assessment for the Archdiocese of Omaha and is responsible for aligning and implementing standards across 70 schools that educate roughly 19,000 K-12 graders.

When it came to finding the right professional learning program for her teachers, Ms. Fiedler knew she needed to do her homework because her challenges were many. She sought ongoing support as she and her team aligned the math curriculum, updated standards and materials, and trained faculty on current evidence-based best practices for teaching math.

She also knew her schools needed to create more seamless transitions between grades and move towards a balanced, student-centered approach where each year truly built off the one before.

Given the scope, length, and complexity of the task at hand, Fiedler knew her needs would be a tall order for one professional learning partner to fill. Happily, she found what she was looking for with Carnegie Learning.

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A True Collaborative Partner

"We spent a year researching the right professional learning team for our schools because our needs were so specific," Ms. Fiedler shares. "We knew we needed a partner who could customize and adjust to what we needed. We were juggling an upcoming revision of our mathematics standards with updating our fairly antiquated materials. We also needed to share evidence-based best practices for teaching math with all our teachers. And we needed a partner who would collaborate with us for 2-4 years at least. It was a lot."

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Ann Rasmussen, Assistant Principal of the Omaha Catholic School Consortium and a 22-year educator echoes Fiedler's comments about collaboration and customization.

"Everything was customized to us," Rasmussen explains. "If we were having structural challenges or needed support working through a lesson, that was addressed. When we needed help with pacing, our coaching team reorganized lesson plans so that we talked about pacing first. It wasn't this rigid program that had to be adhered to; rather, it was adapted to our needs."

A Customized Professional Learning Package

Together, Fiedler's colleagues and members of the Carnegie Learning PL team designed a three-year program to support teachers as they shifted to new materials, new standards, and a new way of teaching math more aligned with 21st-century best practices.

"In our first year, we focused on the eight instructional best practices that we know, through research, work when it comes to teaching math," Ms. Fiedler explains. "In our second year, once we'd established that foundation, we did the math PL Academies and focused on how to begin putting these best practices in place in our classrooms. And next year, we'll do a middle and high school math collaboration series with Carnegie Learning. So we'll be able to look at our new standards and think about how to apply them."

Welcoming Teachers Aboard

For professional learning to stick, teachers have to get behind it, something Fiedler says was sometimes challenging at first but is getting easier with each new session.

"We knew going in that this was going to be a great challenge," Fiedler shares. "We were asking teachers to really think about the pedagogy of teaching math, and these sorts of deep dives are always time and labor-intensive."

"But we're really starting to see the benefit of things like classroom creativity and productive risk-taking that come when teachers think deeply about their practice," Fiedler continues. "I had one elementary school teacher tell their Carnegie Learning coach, 'You know, I didn't really like this in the first year. I felt like I was a struggling learner."

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But in the second year, I looked forward to seeing you every time because it started making sense to me. You understood my challenges, allowed me to ask questions, and immersed me in math content that opened my mind to the point where I could start putting what I’d learned into my lesson planning. And now I understand that good things are in the works.”

While many teachers have been challenged to move outside their comfort zones, they’ve responded positively with unusually high approval. Of the 300 participants in the 2021-2022 workshops, the average overall rating of the sessions was 8.4 out of 10, with an 8.6 out of 10 for the Professional Learning Academies a year later. Compare this to the industry average of only 10% of educators saying the professional development they’ve attended was helpful.

After a series of 2021 workshops about math teaching best practices:

- 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "I will be able to incorporate what I learned into my daily work."
- 94% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "The workshop was relevant to my needs."
- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "The materials provided were helpful."

Teachers gave an average instructor rating of 9.01/10.

After Professional Learning Academies in 2022-2023:

- 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "I will be able to incorporate what I learned into my daily work."
- 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "The workshop was relevant to my needs."
- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "The materials provided were helpful."

Teachers gave an average instructor rating of 9.16/10.

Ms. Fiedler reflects, “We, and this includes the Carnegie Learning team, value and care about our educators, and after each session, we reflected on how teachers responded to that session and brainstormed how we could keep addressing their needs in the future. What’s more, by our teachers getting to work with the same presenters and coaches for multiple years, relationships were formed which helped everyone develop better understandings of what students need to learn and grow in math.”

Looking Forward to Future Professional Learning

When discussing what’s in store for the future, Ms. Fiedler says she’s excited about more customized, effective, professional learning.

“One of the reasons we continue this work with Carnegie Learning is because of their willingness to keep problem-solving with us so that we can really speak to the needs of our teachers."

“It’s been a journey to figure out how to best support our teachers through all that they’ve gone through in the past few years, and Carnegie Learning has helped us show them that the answers are there and we can all grow into better, stronger educators.”

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