

Email Communicating Adjustments After a Stepback

This resource provides a sample email from a school leader to their staff explaining the key takeaways and changes from a quarterly stepback meeting.

Dear Educators,

Our Curriculum Leadership Team met recently for our first quarterly stepback meeting. The purpose of these meetings is to look at data together, celebrate the successes we're seeing with the adopted instructional materials, and respond to the challenges we also know are there. We look at data from classroom observations and surveys and also all the feedback we've heard from you in planning meetings and hallway conversations. In this email, we want to share what we talked about at our recent meeting and the specific steps we're taking to better support you and your students in learning with the new curriculum.

What did we learn from data and feedback?

First, we learned that all of you are working very, very hard! Teachers are studying the curriculum during planning meetings and making sure students get to the meat of each lesson. And, students are working hard too. More and more students are finishing problem sets and demonstrating their understanding on exit tickets. While only a third of students earned a proficient score on the most recent end-of-module assessment, we feel good that student learning is moving in the right direction, and it's because of your hard work!

Second, we learned that timing and pacing are still a challenge. The curriculum has a lot of content to get through and some of us are still figuring out how to make sure students get to the application part of the lesson before the math block ends. The computational fluency part of the lessons, in particular, is taking a lot of time, especially for students who have skill gaps and struggle with basic computations.

What did we celebrate?

We celebrated the creative solutions you all have come up with to support your use of the materials. Specifically, we want to highlight how the 3rd-grade team has responded to the challenge of pacing and making sure they get to the heart of each lesson. Here is a tip from Ashley, the 3rd-grade team leader:

“All of us in 3rd grade found that we were having a hard time getting through lessons. There were just so many problems to do in the problem set. So, during our collaborative planning meeting we started looking at lessons together and labeling the different problems in the set. We labeled them “must do” or “may do.” We made sure the “must do” problems included some easier problems that scaffolded kids’ learning and also made sure there were enough of the more challenging problems that reflected the rigor of the standards. We tell kids the “must do” problems and focus our attention and feedback on those. This strategy has made the practice section of our lessons more purposeful and efficient.”

Ashley noted that at first the team used planning time to label problems together, and that it took a while. But, after some practice, they felt confident organizing problems on their own and now use their planning meeting for other forms of collaborative support.

We encourage all grade-level teams to label “must do” problems in the practice set as one strategy for making math lessons more purposeful.

What actions will we take to improve?

We learned through our observations and through your surveys and feedback that the fluency part of the lesson is a challenge. There are lots of different routines to figure out, and many of our students still struggle with basic computational skills. We’re seeing lots of teachers stopping to help students with these skills, which can then delay the rest of the lesson. We want to respond to these challenges in a few ways.

First, we want to reiterate the purpose of the fluency section. Students get a little practice with important computational skills each day, and this daily practice will lead to improved computation over time. It’s okay if students make mistakes because they’ll get many more chances to practice! Please don’t feel like you have to stop and correct each mistake every day. The curriculum is designed to spiral skills, and we can also use our judgment as educators to spiral the skills we know our students need. If you’re getting stuck in the fluency section, please remind yourselves that students will get more practice another day and try to move on.

We are also committed to taking these action steps:

- Over the next two weeks, our coaches will prioritize observing during the fluency part of math lessons. Coaches will compile the successful strategies they see and will share them with all teachers.

- During these observations, coaches will also record videos of teachers who have made progress with fluency. Teachers can watch these videos and get tips for how to quickly execute fluency procedures and keep the lesson on pace.
- Coaches and grade-level team leaders will work together to prioritize fluency during planning meetings over the next month. Specifically, they will plan time to walk through the fluency section of an upcoming lesson and have teachers rehearse it together. These rehearsals will provide opportunities for teachers to share valuable feedback with one another.

If you have any questions about our stepback meeting or about these action steps, please don't hesitate to ask! We thank you for the hard work you're putting into the new curriculum and we're excited to see even more progress next quarter.

Sincerely,

The Curriculum Leadership Team

Principal name

Coach name

Grade level team leader names