Exemplars® K–12
We Set the Standards!

PROVEN RESULTS: 92% PROFICIENCY AND LOVING MATH AT MONTECITO UNION

Case Study

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SCHOOL PROFILE

Enrollment: 345
Math Proficiency: 92%
Free or Reduced Lunch: 4%
Population Density: Sparse Suburban

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>
> **Jeff Linder**
> Math Specialist

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Montecito Union School, a public elementary school in Santa Barbara County, is home to passionate educators committed to high expectations and continuous growth.

CHALLENGE

Despite a dedicated faculty, the school faced challenges with improving learning outcomes on state tests and other measurements of math learning. Its leadership sought a resource that would shift instruction toward the Mathematical Practices and engage students in deeper problem-solving.

RESULTS

Since adopting Exemplars, Montecito Union has seen dramatic growth: 92% of students scored proficient in math in 2024–25, with 71% scoring at the advanced level. Students also gained confidence, perseverance, and a genuine love for mathematics.

THE CHALLENGE

In 2013, Montecito Union realized that traditional instruction was not producing the desired results. Teachers modeled solutions while students repeated steps, leaving them disengaged and unprepared to demonstrate proficiency with the Standards of Mathematical Practice. Despite strong teacher dedication, state test scores remained flat.

> "We needed to shift our practice to provide more opportunities for our students to make sense of the math and to have them think through solving problems. Teachers needed to be less helpful to give space for students to become problem solvers." **– Jeff Linder**

CHOOSING EXEMPLARS

To shift from rote learning to deep problem-solving, Montecito Union adopted Exemplars *Problem Solving for the 21st Century*. The resource provided a robust bank of rich, problem-solving performance tasks organized by grade level and content standard. "Exemplars was an easy sell," said Linder. "It gave our teachers the tools to ask purposeful questions and gave students the space to struggle, persist, and make sense of mathematics." Teachers evolved into facilitators, guiding inquiry rather than providing step-by-step answers. Students, in turn, became sense makers and doers of math — embracing productive struggle and developing resilience.

THE RESULTS

The results have been dramatic. Since adopting Exemplars:

- 92% of students scored proficient in math on the 2024–25 state assessment, with 71% scoring at the advanced level.
- Students showed greater perseverance, confidence, and joy in mathematics.
- Anecdotal evidence revealed a cultural shift

> "Our students changed. They now love math! They love it so much they go home and talk about it with their parents. They ask to stay in during recess and finish a math task. They show up 45 minutes early to school on Fridays to do problem solving. One even invited me to lead their math birthday party, true story." **– Jeff Linder**

Montecito Union's journey illustrates the transformative power of Exemplars. By shifting the focus from rote memorization to authentic problem solving, the school fostered both measurable gains in achievement while instilling a vibrant culture of mathematical thinking. With math proficiency at 92% and a majority of students scoring advanced, Montecito Union stands as a model for how Exemplars can empower schools to raise expectations, build student confidence, and inspire a lifelong love of learning.

LOOKING AHEAD: EXPANDING INTO SCIENCE

Building on its math success, Montecito Union recently began using Exemplars scientific-inquiry performance tasks. While math scores have reached exceptional levels, the school is eager to strengthen outcomes in science as well. "We are not as happy with our science scores and hope the Exemplars tasks help bring them up," shared Linder. "We're already implementing them, and we're optimistic about the impact."

This expansion highlights the school's confidence in Exemplars as a trusted partner for elevating student achievement across disciplines.