Connecting Math Concepts: **Changing the Equation for Special Education Success**

Steere Farm Elementary is a small, rural elementary school serving grades two through five in Burrillville, Rhode Island. With just over 260 students and one special education teacher assigned to every grade level, the school is committed to reaching students who need extra support in math.

Courtney Francis, the school's principal, and Linsey Allain, the school's lead special education teacher, shared how *Connecting Math Concepts* became the intervention tool that finally gave their struggling math students a clear path to closing the gap.

The Challenge

Steere Farm follows a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, using a "Math Map" that outlines the interventions students receive based on their screening data. But before adopting *Connecting Math Concepts*, the school didn't have a structured Tier 3 math intervention in place. Students who scored below the 12th percentile on the district's STAR screener had the most significant math skill gaps and the support they received was inconsistent. Their modified assignments, small-group reteaching, and push-in help often focused on getting through the core lesson rather than addressing unfinished learning.

Allain described the flaw in earlier intervention efforts, "That's not really targeting the need. That's just like helping them keep their head above water so they're not absolutely drowning in something that feels like a foreign language."

DISTRICT INFORMATION



Name:
Steere Farm Elementary

Location:
Burrillville, Rhode Island

Grade:
2–5

Francis saw the same pattern when she joined the school. “There was no Tier 3 programming at all,” she said. “They were doing the very best they could to just push in and use temporary, band-aid approaches to kids struggling in math to help them get through, but never really closing gaps.”

The Solution

Connecting Math Concepts offered the structured, research-based intervention the school needed. Its built-in placement tests provided a clear starting point. The explicit instruction model laid out a sequenced instructional path. And mastery-based pacing matched instruction to students’ current skill levels.

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“The placement test for *Connecting Math* really helped us target the breakdown in foundational skills,” Allain explained. For her fifth-grade students—many of whom were working on third-grade skills like place value, mental math, and word problem strategies—having a roadmap made all the difference.

One of the program’s most valuable features, both educators agreed, was its scripted structure. Though some teachers initially had reservations, **the script ultimately freed them to focus on what mattered most.** “I don’t need to be reinventing the wheel,” Allain said. “I can put my attention towards watching my students, and the script kind of creates that consistency for them, which really is exactly what they need… there is definitely room for professional judgment. There is definitely room for relationship building with your kids.”

Francis noted another advantage: ***Connecting Math Concepts* teaches one clear method for solving problems**—a significant contrast to the five different approaches used in the school’s core curriculum. For students who struggled with abstraction and choice, a single, reliable strategy proved far more effective.

The Results

Results from the implementation of *Connecting Math Concepts* emerged relatively quickly. To track progress, the school uses weekly Acadience computation probes for progress monitoring — and within the first six to eight weeks of consistent instruction, Allain began seeing movement on students’ weekly computation probes. These were small but meaningful signs that something had shifted. Students who had previously given up on math—who would seek distractions or shut down during the math period—began participating more willingly, persisting longer, and approaching math with less avoidance.

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By the end of the school's first full year of implementation, benchmark assessments showed measurable improvement across grade levels. Students at every grade level who had been flagged as "urgent intervention" on the STAR screener showed marked improvement by spring...with the benchmark itself rising throughout the year, making the results even more significant.

Grade 2:
from 9% in urgent intervention to 2%

Grade 3:
from 8% to 0%

Grade 4:
from 8% to 3%

Grade 5:
from 6% to 3%

"We were down to under 5% in the whole school," Francis said. "Which is what our goal was."

One unexpected outcome: students with language-based learning disabilities began approaching word problems in ways Allain had never seen before. "I feel like kids with language-based learning disabilities are starting to approach word problems differently. And I've never seen that before. How do you fix a reading problem that's showing up in math?"

Teachers, too, found the program transformative. "They feel effective," Francis said. "And I think that's been the biggest piece here."

Moving Forward

The success at Burrillville Public Schools has extended beyond its own walls. Encouraged by the results, the district has now adopted *Connecting Math Concepts* in its kindergarten and first-grade school as well, with the belief that catching gaps early leads to better outcomes at every level.

"Early and often," Francis said. "The quicker you can catch the gaps and close them, the better."

For educators still weighing whether to embrace a scripted intervention program, Francis points to a broader lesson from the experience: "There's some misunderstanding around what Tier 3 even means. Some think that modifying the Tier 1 curriculum is specialized instruction—and it's not. We have found that *Connecting Math Concepts* is specialized instruction for our kids that needed it the most."

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At Steere Farm Elementary, *Connecting Math Concepts* has transformed a patchwork of individual efforts into a coherent, effective system—one that has the data to prove its effectiveness. Beyond the data, students are strengthening foundational skills, engaging more productively in math instruction, and building confidence that they, too, can succeed in math.



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