

AIM4S^{3™} Professional Development— Make it a Marathon, Not a Sprint

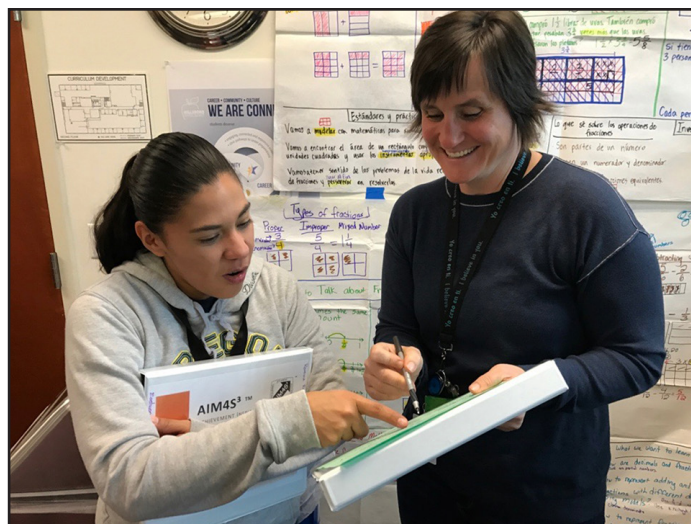
by Evelyn Chávez and Lisa Meyer—Dual Language Education of New Mexico

Promising practices...

Meaningful professional development that impacts instruction and student learning is a strategically run marathon—not a sprint. We wouldn't expect to attend a seminar on marathon running, watch someone run a marathon, and then go out and run a marathon a week later; but we ask teachers to do this all of the time. We expect them to attend a training, immediately implement it in their classrooms, and promptly see differences in their students—but rarely do we provide the ongoing support, coaching, and practice for teachers to become effective implementers of powerful professional learning.

This article is in response to administrators and teacher leaders asking what it takes to implement professional development—specifically the framework *Achievement Inspired Mathematics for Scaffolding Student Success* (AIM4S^{3™})—in a way that leads to changes in teacher beliefs and practices and increases student learning (see below for more on AIM4S^{3™}). We base this response on feedback from hundreds of teachers and administrators, our own work with schools and districts, and current research on effective professional development.

The AIM4S^{3™} framework impacts math instruction at a school site when teachers become open to making



Teachers discuss AIM4S^{3™} unit planning and resources during scheduled collaboration time.

shifts in their instruction, and the leadership team is ready and able to support the teachers in this journey. However, this outcome can only be realized if there is a long-term vision and commitment that is grounded in readiness *before* the initial training.

Readiness

The questions below can help a school determine if they're ready to implement AIM4S^{3™} or if they need additional discussion and work before taking that step.

- 1) Are we committed to making mathematics instruction a priority for our professional learning?
- 2) Is AIM4S^{3™} a good match for our school?
- 3) Do we have the structures and resources in place to support the type of planning and collaboration that AIM4S^{3™} encourages?
- 4) Have we built staff consensus that AIM4S^{3™} addresses important needs identified at the school? Is the staff on board with this initiative?

What is AIM4S^{3™}?

AIM4S^{3™} is designed to support elementary and middle school teachers in delivering high-quality, targeted mathematics instruction for students who are often underserved—language learners, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those who struggle with mathematics. AIM4S^{3™} is an instructional framework; it is not a curriculum. Teachers use the programs and resources that their district has adopted. AIM4S^{3™} supports teachers in planning and implementing the Common Core State Standards and aligns with the four domains of the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

AIM4S^{3™} is based on the beliefs that 1) teachers, as professionals, need to have the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions based on the instructional needs of their students, and 2) all students can be successful mathematical problem solvers if provided access and well-designed supports.

As a principal, if you send staff to get trained in AIM4S^{3™} without having a plan of support and implementation, you are going to see surface level practices that will probably fade over time. Not because the teacher doesn't want to implement, but because there is not support logistically and professionally for the teacher to succeed.

—Chris Sánchez, Principal Support Specialist,
Albuquerque Public Schools—

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Soleado—Spring 2018





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Moving Forward

The first step is to build an AIM4S^{3™} leadership team that will move the initiative forward. Typically, this team has three to four members, including an administrator, a teacher leader knowledgeable about mathematics instruction, and a respected classroom teacher. The team builds consensus and buy-in with the staff before training begins and provides support for teachers as they use the framework with students.

Within the leadership team, we recommend identifying a team leader who will be responsible for organizing trainings and follow-up, communicating with staff, and maintaining the focus on this work as the initiative moves forward. This person works closely with the AIM4S^{3™} trainers to make sure that the professional development is differentiated to target teachers' specific needs and the school's demographics. This individual often supports grade-level teams with planning and aligning their AIM4S^{3™} implementation with other school and district expectations.

Rollout Plan: Keeping the Initiative Alive

Once the leadership team is in place, we recommend and support building a long-term professional development plan for the AIM4S^{3™} initiative. While this plan will change and develop over time, it provides an implementation guide and ensures that support continues beyond the first year of training. Below are insights and recommendations to inform a 3-year plan for both participating teachers and the AIM4S^{3™} leadership team.

Year 1—Initial Training and Implementation

In the first year, teachers participate in 6 days of in-depth professional development (3+3 AIM4S^{3™} PD Model). The initial 3 days are consecutive and include an overview of the theory and strategies, live classroom demonstrations, and time for participants to plan for implementation in their own classrooms. The remaining 3 days are spread throughout the year to support teachers with implementation. This includes teachers sharing classroom artifacts, deepening their understanding of the framework, and continuing classroom planning. During the first year, many teachers use individual strategies, while others

AIM4S^{3™} is a significant tool for teachers that scaffolds math concepts for all students, regardless of their proficiency level. If done well, this framework structure fits in the Highly Effective Level of Performance of Domain 3 on the New Mexico Teach Observation Rubric (based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching).

—Christy Sigmon, Principal, Albuquerque Public Schools—

What does the research say?

Effective professional development:

1. is content focused;
2. incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory;
3. supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts;
4. uses models and modeling of effective practice;
5. provides coaching and expert support;
6. offers opportunities for feedback and reflection; and
7. is of sustained duration.

—Darling-Hammond., Hyster, & Gardner, 2017

are ready to connect strategies and implement a good portion of the framework. It is helpful to know that some schools train their entire staff at one time. For others, is it more realistic to train a grade level at a time with a rolling implementation.

In this first year, the AIM4S^{3™} leadership team's role is to actively support teachers and learn alongside them, encouraging a professional culture of learning at the school. It is critical that administrators attend key parts of the initial training. This allows them to support teachers and have realistic expectations for implementation. It also provides opportunities to observe the classroom demonstrations and work with trainers to see how high-quality implementation of the framework aligns with district evaluation rubrics.

Year 2—Developing Implementation

In Year 2, teachers better understand how the different components of the framework work together to increase student learning. For many, their practice begins to shift as math instruction becomes more student centered. Teachers incorporate high-level problem solving into instruction, and their expectations for student oral and written output increase as their toolbox of sheltering and scaffolding strategies grows to support these expectations.

Teachers plan units from a broader AIM4S^{3™} perspective, analyzing grade-level standards more closely to fill any gaps they see in program materials or students' knowledge. Dedicated grade-level planning time in teachers' schedules allows them to collaboratively create

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AIM4S^{3™} units that include formative and summative assessments. Ideally, this planning is supported by an instructional coach or lead teacher who is knowledgeable about the framework and can actively support teachers in going deeper with their planning and locating resources to support instruction.

At this time, many schools are ready to use DLeNM's instructional rounds protocol, VISITAS[™], to give teachers an opportunity to observe each other's classrooms, identify future professional development needs or next steps, and continue to refine their practice in specific areas. We have found VISITAS[™] to be a powerful structure for helping a school community define best practices and set expectations for high-quality instruction that meets their students' needs.

During the second year, the AIM4S^{3™} leadership team is key to keeping the professional development alive. In addition to prioritizing planning time, it is important to provide opportunities for teachers to share what they are doing in their classrooms. This can be as simple as having everyone bring an AIM4S^{3™} artifact from their math instruction to share during a 10-minute gallery walk at a staff meeting. AIM4S^{3™} trainers provide additional professional development to address specific needs, such as supported planning, classroom coaching, or facilitating the VISITAS[™] protocol. Site and district administrators may consider supporting a school or district team in AIM4S^{3™} trainer certification to build capacity and ensure sustainability of the framework.

I honestly plan ahead better than I have ever done. It forces me to take an in-depth look at the module and take the big ideas out and organize them in a kid-friendly manner. I can't be a week-by-week teacher. I am more intentional and organized. I look at the tests and make sure that students have access to all of the material they will be assessed on, even if it isn't covered in the math book. —Teacher —

Year 3 and Beyond—Full Implementation

Toward the end of Year 3 and moving forward, teachers are knowledgeable about and implementing the complete framework. Teachers are the architects of their instruction—they have a deep understanding of best practices in math and how to make instruction accessible to all of their students as they continue to refine their practice. In working

towards sustainability, the leadership team continues to support teachers and to have high expectations for full implementation. They identify and celebrate shifts in deep understanding of best practices. They ensure that new teachers are trained in the framework so that they can collaborate and plan with their grade-level teams and maintain the high level of mathematics instruction that is in place. In short, the leadership team keeps the AIM4S^{3™} work alive while new school and district professional development initiatives in other areas are rolled out.

The Payoff for Running the Marathon

If there has been strong support and high expectations for implementation, it is in the second and third years that a school community sees the payoff of this work. This is when schools see strong evidence of changing practice and differences in student outcomes. Many teachers see higher scores on their evaluations which reinforces that the work they are doing is positively impacting their instruction. They also see changes in student engagement, thinking, and achievement.

Unlike a sprint, the commitment to a “professional development marathon” pays high dividends. With the extended commitment, there are meaningful changes to the instructional culture of the school because both teachers and students have internalized the learning and truly made it their own.

References or Related AIM4S^{3™} Articles

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For more information about AIM4S^{3™}, please visit www.AIM4Scubed.dlenm.org, or contact Lisa Meyer, lisa@dlenm.org.