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Let's start by examining what strong math instruction can look like at the classroom level. To do this, we'll think about how the best coaches run their soccer practices. A well-run soccer practice that develops each of its players and the team is like a balanced math block that deepens the classroom's collective math knowledge as well as develops and refines each individual student's math thinking.

Every practice starts with a team warm-up. This warm-up is inclusive of all the players and intentionally sets the tone for practice. More importantly, the team warm-up establishes and reinforces the team culture so that players are ready for the hard work they are about to face together. This is like the Launch of our math classroom instruction using a variety of predictable number sense routines that invites all students to get ready for the work ahead. There is power in routine that is inclusive of everyone! Just like the soccer practice warm-up must include all the players, the launch to our math classroom instruction, through the use of predictable and engaging number sense routines, must invite all students to join. No one sits on the sidelines during warm-up, just like all learners should be included in our launch.

A strong soccer practice then transitions to the team portion of practice. This involves every player on the team no matter position or skill level. All members of the team are expected to come together to continue to develop big concepts in soccer. Every individual player needs to deeply understand certain concepts that are central to being a successful team. We learn individual skills and concepts like offense, defense, passing and dribbling for a collective purpose. This is like the grade level concept development that happens during the main lesson in an All Learners Lesson Structure. No matter a

player's position or skill level, everyone is expected to build their understanding of key soccer concepts.

The team part of practice takes on all the big ideas of soccer when we're operating as a team. One of the most difficult skills to coach and develop in young soccer players is how to use space on the field in unison with the rest of your team to create runs and passes that get around their opponents. This is the main problem solving required of players throughout the game. The coach attempts to give the players a bird's eye view of the field and player positioning. Every soccer coach I've ever had relies on a visual representation of the field and players to help the team understand and use space more effectively. This is similar to the importance of using visual models throughout the Main Lesson instruction of a balanced math block. Just like visual representations help soccer players conceptualize space and player positioning, visual models in mathematics are central to students' understanding of foundational concepts and skills.

In a well-designed soccer practice, focus then transitions to developing individual skills. This sometimes involves letting players focus on skills that are specific to their position. It is the time in practice when each individual soccer player is responsible for making their own skills stronger. This means different things for different players. This matches the Math Menu portion of the All Learners Lesson Structure. Students are asked to work on skills and games that they can do independently while the coach or teacher is able to work with small groups of players on specific skills needed at their skill level or position. Every player is involved in work that will help them develop into a stronger player and problem-solver for the team.

Finally, the coach always brings the team together at the end of practice. We acknowledge the hard work that the athletes brought to the practice. We celebrate growth and perseverance. We address issues of team culture. We recap key understandings from the team portion of practice. This represents the way a strong math educator will always close out a math block with an opportunity to reflect and celebrate together as an inclusive learning community.

What Now? Scan the QR code and scroll to the bottom of the post for links to next steps

1. Read more about Launch (pages 16 - 21) of our free book, Teaching Math for All Learners.
2. Check out our blog "Seven Closure Activities for Your Math Block."
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.