



# WHY SHOULD EDUCATORS USE MATH MENU?



By: Multiple Contributors

Marilyn Burns was one of the first in the math education field to talk about using Math Menus. She identified three big questions that teachers consistently ask:

- *What do I do with students who finish their math assignments more quickly?*
- *How can I free up time to work with students who need extra help?*
- *How can I differentiate experiences to support struggling learners while also meeting the needs of students who require additional challenges?*

**Math Menu is the answer to all of these questions.**

Math Menu is a time for students to engage in independent practice, play, and exploration. At All Learners Network, our goal is to select learning opportunities for our students' Math Menus that allow students to practice computation and problem-solving independently. While students exercise choice and independence by engaging with purposeful offerings, educators in the room have the freedom to respond to all students' growth needs (i.e. their instructional level) with targeted small-group instruction.

During Math Menu, students engage in purposeful independent practice that is differentiated by readiness, while the teacher meets with small groups to provide targeted instruction. Math Menu meets the logistical needs identified by Marilyn Burns, it also has other powerful benefits.

So much of a student's experience during a school day is planned for them, it is empowering to have time where they can make choices and feel successful. When students can access work independently, they get to experience a sense of self-efficacy



and agency. This contributes to a positive growth mindset and strengthens their identity as a learner and doer of math.

As students make and manage their choices during Math Menu, they build important self-regulation, time-management, and executive functioning skills. These are scaffolded as the teacher rolls out more choice and independence over time.

Students also build important social-emotional skills while working in partnerships or small groups during Math Menu, such as while playing math games. Also, Math Menu is often really fun for students! For some students, it is their favorite part of the day - and we always count the intersection of math and joy as a win!

Math Menu also has benefits for teachers (which of course, impact students as well). In a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) some students need additional layers of targeted instruction. Math Menu provides a time and structure for teachers to work with small groups, as well as a time for interventionists and special educators to push in and work with individuals or groups of students.

Math Menu doesn't just address the needs of students needing extra support, it also provides space to extend learning for students ready for additional challenge. Teachers can use Math Menu to dynamically respond to the needs and interests of all individuals in the classroom.

Math Menu also provides an opportunity for ongoing formative assessment - both through the independent work students are completing as well as carving out time for small group instruction and individual student interviews.

Math Menu also helps to alleviate the tension between grade-level learning targets and individual student readiness. By focusing menu content primarily on the key understandings identified at each grade level (High Leverage Concepts), educators have dedicated time to address gaps in understanding the most essential concepts.

To reap the benefits of Math Menu, it is important to make sure ALL students access Math Menu time regularly. The All Learners Lesson Structure allows for Math Menu to take place. Although menu can provide additional content to independently engage students who finish other work early, menu should never be considered a "reward" or "dessert" that can only be accessed after completing something else. All students deserve to experience the wonderful benefits of Math Menu!



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



1. Learn more about Math Menu and how it fits into a balanced math block in chapter two of our free book. Review some of our free menu resources here.
2. Read about encouraging playful productive struggle during Math Menu here.
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.

