INDEPENDENT PRACTICE in Middle School Math Classrooms

After hearing about TenMarks from a colleague, middle school math teacher Steven Koponen introduced the program to his students during Math Madness 2012. Once his students at O.E. Dunckel Middle School in Farmington Hills, MI, began practicing their math skills in the contest, they were hooked and began regularly checking their status in the weekly contest updates of classrooms throughout the country. Even though they were thousands of problems behind the winning classroom in their group, Mr. Koponen’s classes competed diligently for an honor that no other class in the contest could claim -- a pancake breakfast cooked for them by their math teacher.

Getting Started
To implement TenMarks as a math practice program in your classroom, assign a few TenMarks tracks to your students. By picking and choosing bite-sized topics aligned with upcoming quizzes, tests, and exams, your students practice the necessary math skills in an environment where they have help when they need it. For his class, Mr. Koponen chose topics that would appear on his weekly quizzes.

Independent Practice
Though Mr. Koponen regularly assigned tracks to his students in the days before quiz or test time, he found that his students enjoyed being able to practice skills outside of their assignments. In their independent practice within the program, his students refreshed content that they had previously learned.

When Mr. Koponen referred to TenMarks reports to track his students’ progress, he found that they were specifically making use of the hints and video tutorials in the program. They were also motivated to complete problems in order to gain access to the games within TenMarks.

Before the final exams came around, Mr. Koponen began assigning entire albums of content to his students for a more in-depth review during their independent study days, a time when they could choose any method of review they desired to prepare for their tests.

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Demographics
- 656 students
- Grades 7-8
- 63% Caucasian
- 17% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 8% free or reduced lunch

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**Independent Study**
During class scheduling, some of Mr. Koponen’s students expressed an interest in testing out of Honors Geometry in order to take more advanced math classes. (In his district, students can apply to test out of a course by taking and successfully passing the final exam to earn credit for the course.)

For these students, and for a select few who wanted to get a “sneak peek” into what they would be learning during the next school year, he assigned albums to students for independent work. Over the summer, he will be brainstorming on how to better incorporate TenMarks into the classroom for the fall and hopes that the next TenMarks math contest will engage his students in more healthy competition and encourage them to practice their math skills, ultimately increasing their procedural fluency so that they can dedicate more energy to higher-level mathematical thinking.