

CASE STUDY



# Green Dot Public Schools

IM® 6–12 Math





# Ánimo in Action: Green Dot's Math Revolution with Illustrative Mathematics

At Green Dot Public Schools, leadership and professional learning cultivate a culture that values growth, transforms public education, and builds collaborative relationships among students and faculty engaged with the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum.

Green Dot Public Schools is a charter school organization committed to providing quality education in underserved communities. Founded in 1999, Green Dot's mission was inspired by the stark digital divide in Los Angeles, where "green dots" on maps represented areas with internet access.

“We're really working in an environment where we believe that all students can be successful, and we put in the work to make that happen.”

Areas lacking that access were often also communities lacking educational opportunities and other essential resources. These communities became the launching point for Green Dot schools. Twenty-five years later, Green

Dot has proudly grown into a collection of 18 schools in Los Angeles, CA, serving over 10,000 students in grades 6–12.

Green Dot incorporates the word “Ánimo” in the names of many of its schools, such as Ánimo Watts College Preparatory Academy and Ánimo James B. Taylor Charter Middle School. This Spanish term, meaning strength, perseverance, and rigor, reflects the organization's clear belief that all students are capable of and deserve access to rigorous grade-level instruction. This commitment to excellence has shaped Green Dot's **strategic plan**: Outperform the national average to create college-ready learners; develop and retain talented educators; create an education model that can be replicated across schools; and engage with family and community.

Integral to Green Dot's ambition and success is the need to invest in foundational subject matter, including math. During the 2023–24 school year, Green Dot leadership made academic growth in mathematics a priority, partnering with the Achievement Network to create math benchmarks that were aligned and equitable across the district. By 2030, Green Dot aims to have 30 percent of its students proficient in math, with 100 percent of students meeting or exceeding their math growth goals.

Hitting these targets means finding the right mathematics curriculum. Green Dot's selection committee used EdReports to identify potential curriculum providers. IM K–12 Math™ stood out due to its high ratings from EdReports in three key areas: Focus

& Coherence, Rigor & Mathematical Practices, and Usability. Between 2016 and 2019, Green Dot thoroughly reviewed, vetted, and ultimately adopted IM curriculum for its middle and high school mathematics programs.



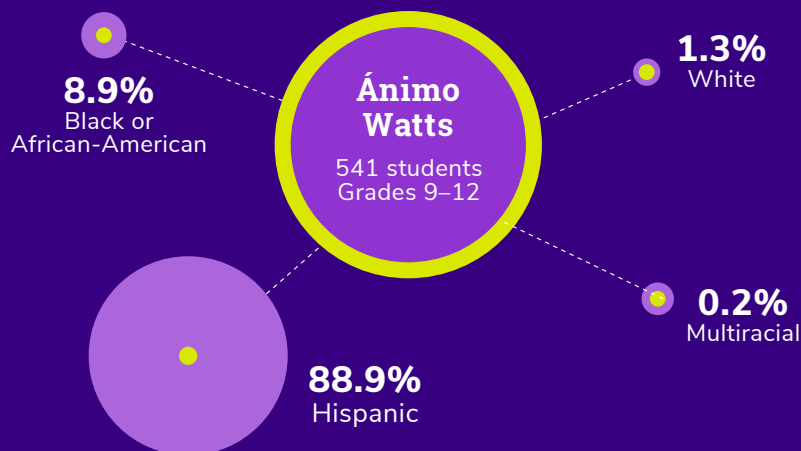
**René Agustín**  
Ánimo Watts Assistant Principal

Ánimo Watts Assistant Principal René Agustín, who served on the curriculum review committee, emphasized IM's accessibility as a key factor in its selection. Agustín noted that compared to other curricula that often use complex language that can make learning more difficult for students, especially multilingual learners and students with disabilities, the IM curriculum "doesn't feel overwhelming . . . it's more accessible."

Another key feature that influenced the committee's decision to adopt IM's curriculum is its versatility. "There are ways to adjust it based on need for your students and your audience," Agustín elaborates. "You don't have to do the full lesson to get the meat of the lesson . . . then [for] some teachers who are really passionate about getting that extra practice, it provides that at the end of each section. It does a good job of balancing the needs of teachers and students."

Finally, the review committee also noticed parallels between IM and Green Dot's approach to fostering mathematical growth among its students. Green Dot strategically employs comprehensive planning that not only enhances student achievement but also empowers educators and actively engages their communities. This approach closely aligns with the four pillars of the IM Classroom: curriculum, professional learning, leaders, and community.

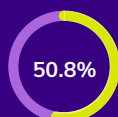
## Ánimo Watts Demographics



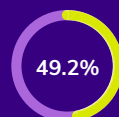
STUDENT/  
TEACHER  
RATIO **20:1**



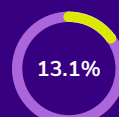
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Female



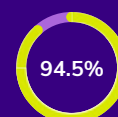
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Multilingual Learners

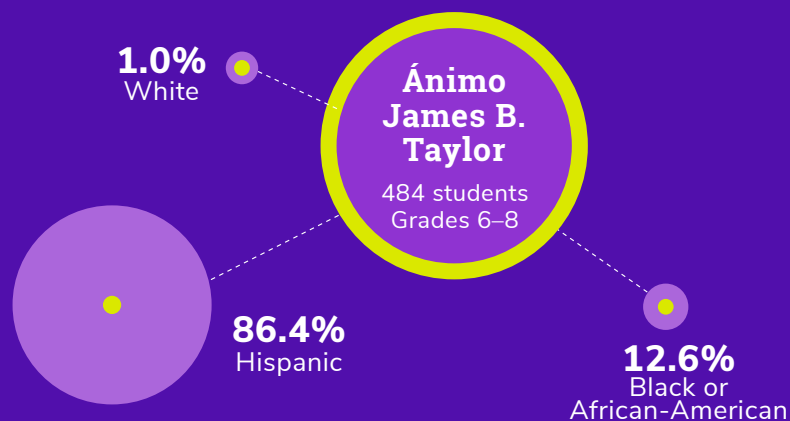


Students with Disabilities

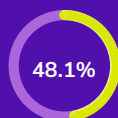


Socio-economically Disadvantaged

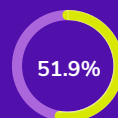
## James B. Taylor Demographics



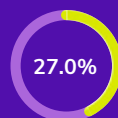
STUDENT/  
TEACHER  
RATIO **28:1**



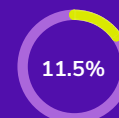
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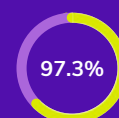
Male



Multilingual Learners



Students with Disabilities



Socio-economically Disadvantaged





## Leaders

Green Dot's success starts with a culture set by its leadership. It's a culture that prioritizes a growth mindset, builds relationships, and sets high yet achievable expectations for all. Agustín explains that the emphasis on culture is an intentional decision of the leadership and part of Green Dot's organizational blueprint. "We have two administrators just dedicated to the culture of the school. . . . We are a very relationships-based school."

This culture makes Green Dot schools unique and successful. It also creates an environment where the IM Classroom can thrive. When **leaders** establish a growth mindset and a relationship-focused culture, several positive outcomes emerge: The rigorous **curriculum** can challenge all students to become

strong math learners, **professional learning** for educators can take priority, and a **community** between the school and family is fostered beyond the walls of the classroom.

But school leaders aren't just deciding what the culture is; they are leading by example and laying the groundwork for strong mathematics education. Heather Schacher, teacher and math department chair at Ánimo Watts, believes it's important for an administration to not only support the curriculum but also receive training on it. "I think it needs to be embedded in coaching support," she explains. "Admins need to understand what IM is, whether they have a math background or not . . . otherwise, they cannot coach the teacher effectively."



**Heather Schacher**  
Ánimo Watts teacher and  
math department chair

Green Dot administrators work hand-in-hand with department heads and math specialists to determine the best ways to successfully implement curriculum, support teachers, and use time effectively to strengthen their mathematics departments. One key decision was to invest in professional learning before and throughout the school year.

### Green Dot Adoption Process, 2016–2019



# The Four Pillars of Green Dot's Strategic Plan



## COLLEGE READY LEARNERS

We will outperform the nation in preparing college graduates.



## HIGH-QUALITY REPLICABLE MODEL

We have built an organizational and school model that can be replicated across schools.



## HIGHLY EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS

We develop and retain top talent who are empowered, appreciated, and successful in their roles.



## ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Our parents are our partners. They strongly recommend and support our schools.

# The Four Pillars of the IM Classroom



## CURRICULUM



Teachers and students use an IM Certified® curriculum and practice IM's problem-based instructional model with integrity.



## LEARNING



Teachers participate in IM Certified® Professional Learning and have access to implementation support.



## LEADERS



School leaders and administrators understand and support systemic changes if necessary to change teachers' practices.



## COMMUNITY



Families and communities are engaged with and support their students' learning.







# Professional Learning

Green Dot understands that in order to have an impactful mathematics program for students, teachers need to be set up for success. As a district, the schools have prioritized opportunities for professional learning and teacher collaboration. Green Dot works with IM Certified® partner Kendall Hunt and has taken advantage of IM's professional learning offerings, incorporating them into teacher orientations each year.

Megan Brisco, a district math curriculum specialist, breaks down Green Dot's professional learning

process. "We want [teachers] to have the context of the unit, so [we do] a lot of work around understanding the language routines, understanding the instructional routines in the curriculum, and talking about assessments." Once teachers have a solid understanding, they dive into some hands-on work, Brisco explains. This involves doing unit assessments and cool-downs, reading the unit narratives, and exploring the grading guidance.

While it is important that schools have access to IM's professional learning, it is equally important that

the professional development is reinforced by the school's leadership. Investing in professional learning and teacher collaboration has helped Green Dot teachers form tight-knit communities and trust the rigorous curriculum. This directly impacts the classroom, creating space for students to apply themselves and accept the challenges of the IM curriculum.

# Curriculum

Green Dot students come ready to learn, understanding that education is a journey toward gaining knowledge rather than merely finding the right answer. In fact, when the district surveyed students, 95 percent reported that "it is okay to make mistakes in class because they can learn from them." That mindset is crucial to a willingness to engage in the problem-based math provided by Illustrative Mathematics.

Brisco has 15 years of experience at Green Dot schools, so she knows effective math instruction when she sees it. She appreciates that IM's distinct problem-based approach allows for more substantial learning experiences compared to other curriculum. "Traditional textbooks often can have 50 problems on the same thing, but I love that we're digging deeper into content with the tasks that are provided in Illustrative Mathematics," she explains.

Green Dot teachers are able to trust the IM curriculum because they know that they have the support of the district. For example, because teachers new to the curriculum often struggle most with pacing, Green Dot's curriculum specialists wrote curriculum maps that were paced out for the entire year, providing recommendations for each instructional block and suggesting optimal assessment timelines.



**Raul Jimenez**  
Ánimo James B. Taylor  
math teacher

Ánimo James B. Taylor math teacher Raul Jimenez reflects on the supportive network in place: "Anytime little things come up or things change, I know our curriculum specialist . . . is quick to let us know and give us any guidance."





## Community

Green Dot recognizes the link between the strength of the school community and students' ability to embrace challenging curriculum like IM Math. Green Dot also never forgets who it is serving—communities in need of equitable education opportunities. With this awareness in mind, Green Dot leaders created a “Theory of Action for Assessments and Data Usage” to ensure that they are assessing student achievement fairly. Equity not only informs how Green Dot leaders and educators

evaluate progress, but it also guides how they provide access to learning opportunities in their classrooms. Whether it's incorporating text-to-speech on students' computers during language-heavy sections of the curriculum or implementing academic discourse cards that help students engage in conversation with their peers, Green Dot schools utilize IM-provided resources to ensure bilingual learners and learners from diverse backgrounds receive appropriate support.

Green Dot also recognizes that student and family well-being is crucial to the educational experience. To that end, the schools conducted a series of “Empathy Interviews” with teachers, students, and families. Through intentional data collection and analysis, Green Dot leadership gains insight into students' experiences, allowing them to identify and break predictable patterns that may hinder student success.





# Green Dot's Efforts Are Yielding Results



Results from the 2024 Smarter Balanced Math test, which makes up the California

Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, show that 65 percent of Green Dot schools experienced an increase in students meeting or exceeding math standards from the previous year. This impact is tied directly to the curriculum decisions that influence student learning. Jiminez, now in his ninth year of teaching, sees the connection. "The rigor of IM just prepares [students] to think a little bit more critically," he says. "They're not just going to get

two-plus-two types of questions. They're going to . . . have to decipher what's being asked of them."

Schacher couldn't agree more. "I did have experience using another curriculum at one point . . . and it was very hard to keep students on the grade-level standard because that curriculum wasn't exactly quite as rigorous and didn't provide as many clear materials the way that IM does," she says. "What I love about IM is that it's very rigorous for students, it's very inquiry-based, and all of the materials that a teacher needs to be successful are there."

Green Dot students are also seeing success beyond high school. In the class of 2024, 90 percent of seniors with a 2.5 GPA applied to a California State University (CSU) campus, while those with a 3.0 GPA applied to a University of California (UC) school. In 2024, fall college enrollment was at 67 percent—an increase of six percentage points, and approaching pre-pandemic rates. And at 74 percent, Green Dot's college-ready graduation rate is 22 percentage points higher than the state average.

Green Dot Smarter Balanced Assessment Performance

School Name	2023 Met or Exceeded in Math	2024 Met or Exceeded in Math	Percentage Changed
Ánimo City of Champions High School	1.32%	6.49%	5.17%
Animo Compton Middle School/High School	4.32%	8.06%	3.74%
Ánimo Ellen Ochoa Charter Middle School	21.84%	27.86%	6.02%
Ánimo Florence-Firestone Middle School	24.88%	25.72%	0.84%
Ánimo Inglewood Charter High School	20%	18.44%	-1.56%
Ánimo Jackie Robinson Charter High School	20.41%	16.06%	-4.35%
Ánimo James B. Taylor Charter Middle School	12.96%	15.48%	2.52%
Ánimo Jefferson Charter Middle School	15.43%	11.44%	-3.99%
Ánimo Leadership Charter High School	24.34%	29.42%	5.08%
Ánimo Mae Jemison Charter Middle School	10.09%	10.83%	0.74%
Ánimo Pat Brown Charter High School	13.77%	18.62%	4.85%
Ánimo Ralph Bunche Charter High School	10.69%	14.90%	4.21%
Ánimo South Los Angeles Charter High School	11.03%	10.45%	-0.58%
Ánimo Venice Charter High School	12.75%	11.22%	-1.53%
Ánimo Watts College Preparatory Academy	12.82%	16.80%	3.98%
Ánimo Legacy Charter Middle School	7.25%	5.99%	-1.26%
Oscar De La Hoya Ánimo Charter High School	7.03%	12.59%	5.56%

# The Power of High Expectations in Math Education

When a culture of growth mindset meets the rigorous expectations of a challenging curriculum, teachers and leaders can push students to achieve beyond what may typically be expected of them. To successfully implement the IM curriculum, “there’s an element of staff culture that already needs to be present—a belief that all of our students can learn math,” Schacher says. “Even amongst math teachers, we’ll often hear, ‘So-and-so is just not a math

person.’ We don’t hear this at my school now because we’ve done a lot of work on growth mindset and math mindset amongst the staff.”

That mindset relies on trusting the Illustrative Mathematics curriculum and implementing it with integrity. Jimenez sees the impact of trusting the curriculum. “It’s pushing [students] to a level that I don’t think they maybe have been pushed to in the past. But it was one of those things

where I went from, ‘This is too hard for my kids’ to, ‘You know what? They can actually reach this level. I need to push them to challenge themselves.’”

Agustín agrees and adds that he enjoys watching students engage with the IM curriculum. “If you launch it right, you’re going to get some really cool responses from kids.”

## Green Dot Vision and Theory of Action

### At GDPS we believe:

- that rigorous data analysis is an anti-racist practice because it allows us to disrupt predictable patterns of success and failure based on aspects of identity.
- that educators must use data from assessments to close gaps in both achievement and opportunity.
- that assessment types are designed for specific purposes and are part of a comprehensive, coherent assessment system that aims to improve instructional effectiveness.
- that we are stronger when we collaborate and seek opportunities to understand our students.

### If we:

- select assessments aligned to grade-level content standards and high-quality instructional materials,
- clearly define the purpose of each assessment,
- consistently administer and score assessments,
- provide time, space, and support to analyze assessment data and student work,
- implement what we learn from data analysis to adjust instruction,

### then we will make progress toward fulfilling our mission as we:

- ensure that our students reach their full potential by graduating college ready.
- consistently see gains in students mastering grade-level content.
- achieve our proficiency and growth goals in ELA and Math.













# Empowering Educators: Green Dot's Commitment to Professional Growth

At Illustrative Mathematics, we recognize that effective leadership and professional development are key to building a culture of continuous growth and collaboration. Green Dot schools exemplify this commitment with a multifaceted, comprehensive approach to professional development, equipping educators with the tools, training, and support necessary to successfully implement the IM curriculum.

Green Dot empowers teachers to take an active role in their professional growth. Educators collaborate to analyze student performance data and plan instructional strategies, ensuring that professional development sessions are tailored to their specific needs.

Throughout the year, Green Dot provides continuous opportunities for professional growth. Over the summer, new teachers—whether new to Green Dot or new to teaching—receive two weeks of professional development, including four days of general training and two days focused specifically on the IM curriculum, explains Megan Brisco, district math curriculum specialist.



Megan Brisco  
District math curriculum specialist

"We [start with] two Illustrative Mathematics professional development days, in which we've basically taken the structures that we experienced in the IMPD when we did it years ago," says Brisco. "We spend a good amount of time digging into the unit . . . doing some of the cool-downs . . . and understanding things at the unit level because they need that to engage in our new-teacher PD days, where we do lesson level planning."

Before school starts, Green Dot holds a math team PD with everybody across the organization. "This year our focus is on academic discourse, and so we provided a sample using IM, like here's where you input discourse, here's what the slides look like. We gave them a sample and gave them some planning time," Brisco explains.

Green Dot also coordinates a dedicated professional development day for all math teachers in September. This is followed up with a workshop-style professional development day in January, offering various strategies and content options for teachers to choose from. "Those are our biggest PD days," Brisco notes. "Beyond that . . . most of it lives in department time and with the curriculum specialist working with department chairs or admin to do co-planning or thinking about department time."

Green Dot's commitment to professional development reflects the organization's core values and dedication to creating a culture of learning. By investing in their educators' growth, Green Dot schools are better equipped to implement effective teaching strategies and support student success.

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