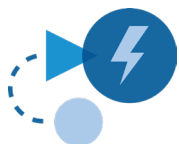




# MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS: Students

These recommendations are intended for people communicating with 6th to 10th grade **students**, including teachers, instructional designers, district leaders, curriculum developers, content developers, and others who work to engage, motivate, and enable students to learn math.

There are seven messaging recommendations for students described below. The first three recommendations should be applied across all messaging, so that all messaging interventions elevate student agency and acknowledge the real-world context and emotional nature of math learning. This approach helps prime audiences to be more receptive to the other messaging based on the other recommendations.



## **ELEVATE STUDENT AGENCY: Messaging should elevate student agency and center students' emotions and experiences, which are critical to their math learning.**

- Position students as active participants in their math learning with messages that feature peers who describe their own experiences learning math and how their choices have enabled them to be persistent when math gets difficult.
- Elevate near-peer student messengers (an older student close in age) with a range of experiences and feelings about math to help students relate more positively and quickly to the message.
- Highlight student agency by underscoring that students can make decisions about how they approach, persist through, and solve problems.
- Messages about math learning should balance honesty with agency.



## **ACKNOWLEDGE REAL-WORLD CONTEXT: Empathize with students, teachers, and parents by acknowledging and naming the real-world challenges they face.**

- Acknowledge the realities students face (i.e., sometimes help is unavailable, having a bad math teacher for one or more classes can interfere with math learning, large class sizes, fear of embarrassment, testing, issues outside the classroom, etc.).



## **ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONS IN MATH LEARNING: Normalize the emotional nature of learning math and provide examples of how negative emotions can be reinterpreted.**

- Acknowledge that mixed or negative emotions, like feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, or confused about learning math, are normal and shared by others.
- Reframe negative emotions as an indication of a need to seek help and not an indication of an inability to learn higher-level math.
- Do not inadvertently dismiss students' emotions by suggesting that negative feelings are something to be pushed through, ignored, or skipped over (e.g., "just keep trying" and "there's no reason to be upset").



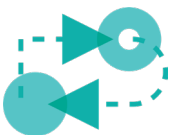
### **MAKE MATH RELEVANT: Deliver credible and motivational messaging on the utility, relevance, and value of higher-level math for students' lives, desired careers, and futures.**

- Include examples of relevance that students understand, believe are real, and care about, such as: keeping your career options open; financial literacy; and having greater financial power so you don't get scammed or cheated.
- Pair messaging about relevance with messages that show students where and how they can get help, support, and resources.
- Show varied examples that resonate with different young people. Avoid messaging that focuses exclusively on how higher-level math is a prerequisite to future education goals, refers to the value of math in abstract phrases like "math is a universal language", or lists specific jobs that use higher-level math.



### **AFFIRM THE VALUE OF MISTAKES: Normalize making mistakes as an important and valuable part of learning, including learning math.**

- To normalize making mistakes as a part of learning, draw parallels to other subjects or skills, include messages from teachers and near-peers, and be honest that mistakes carry different consequences (e.g., mistakes on homework versus mistakes on tests).
- Affirm that making mistakes does not reflect on a student's overall capability or potential but rather indicates that you need more help or support.
- Do not provide generic advice or cliched enthusiasm about making mistakes (e.g., "It's great to make mistakes."). Instead, acknowledge and empathize with the negative emotions students may feel (e.g., "You're learning, and that's what matters. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. Keep going and don't be afraid to ask for help.").



### **ENCOURAGE HELP-SEEKING: Build student confidence to seek the help they need to learn math and equip parents and teachers with messaging that supports and encourages students to seek help.**

- Encourage students to recognize that asking questions is a valuable part of the learning process and that everyone has questions at some point in their learning.
- Take the stigma out of asking questions during math learning. Share stories of students who asked a question despite their concerns of being embarrassed and had a good experience.
- Expand students' perceptions of the places and people who can assist them with learning math. Suggest a range of options for getting help that are accessible to a wide range of students.



### **REFRAME STRUGGLE AND CAPABILITY: Reframe struggle from a sign of lacking capability to a sign of needing support.**

- Acknowledge that struggling while learning is a common experience and not inherently a sign that you're bad at something.
- Use messengers who share their own experiences of struggle and describe how they overcame this and what resources helped them.
- When possible, deliver messaging during the actual moment of struggle, as it is particularly impactful.
- Do not provide generic affirmations or simplistic advice (e.g., "just keep trying") without also offering concrete ways to get help.