Math Tubs are a time when the students gain an understanding of mathematical concepts through the use of manipulatives. They are hands-on approach to make connections among various concepts, as well as a way to use some paper pencil activities to record information that they have learned. While at Math Tubs the students are able to link a concrete level to a more abstract level. During this time they can use manipulatives to represent concepts while working independently or in groups to solve problems. The students are able to make connections of the mathematical concepts. They gain an understanding of what patterns are, what it means to add and subtract, why it is important to sort, to sort past color, shape and size, use problem-solving skills to figure out different ways to sort, collect information and why it is important to be able to count quantities. We are able to discuss why these concepts are important and make real world connections. Math Tubs have become a very essential time of the day for my students. For me they are a perfect way to implement the performance standards into my classroom. They were the perfect balance that I had been looking for to compliment my calendar math time as well as my whole group teaching.

Math tubs started for me about 13 years ago. They all began with Math Their Training. As I began to implement them into my classroom I felt frustrated because I never really knew which students had been to which math tub. I was also unsure of how to clearly communicate what the students were doing at the math tubs with my parents. Due to this frustration a new way for me to utilize Math Tubs was born.

Now years late, I start with the Georgia Performance Standards in Mathematics. I use the backwards design idea. I plan the standards I need to include in the tubs based on some pre-assessment of the student’s academic needs. These pre-assessments can be formal, informal, paper pencil or through conversation with my students.
The beauty of Math Tubs is that I able to differentiate the learning in the tubs and offer open ended activities in which I can work one on one with students by assisting, adjusting or challenging students by asking some higher level questions. This may include challenging them to complete a task above that skill in the tub. I can also adjust the number of math tubs that I have going at one time, the number of students that I allow to go to a tub a time and the length of time I have a set of math tubs going. Most of my math tubs last 3 to 4 weeks. As I change out or introduce a new math tub, I go over what a student should do at the tub, what standard we are addressing and post that standard with the math tub that meets that standard. In turn, if you were to ask the students what they were learning at their math tub, they could refer back to the standard and communicate what they are doing, what they are learning, how it might apply to the real world and why it is important to know how to perform that standard.

The activities I use in my Math Tubs come from a variety of sources. I use the GPS Framework units, materials that our county has adopted, best teaching practices or other resources that I have collected over the years. I use all these resources to plan how I will meet the standards. I let the standards guide my planning. I start with the standard and work backwards.

I love the Georgia Performance Standards because I know specific what my students need to be learning. They help to guide my instruction and tasks that the students complete. They are a true frameworks of learning. I can also match my assessments to my instruction.
One of the best things about Math Tubs is the contract (a type of checklist) that I use with my students. Like I mentioned earlier I became frustrated previously when I didn’t have a way of knowing where the students had been and how to communicate the skills being practiced. I would even stop instructional time to assess for report cards, but that is what the contract does for me.

The contract states the math tub, the activity, the standard, and how the child performed in that task while at the math tub. If the child needed teacher assistance and would benefit from additional practice at home I can offer that advice as well. I can make anecdotal notes directly on the contract that provides parents the information they need to help their child at home. The contract has become one of my most important assessment tools.

I now feel like I am able to use this checklist as a tool for assessment that continues all quarter. I can still do my mid-quarter and end of quarter assessments on the students that might need another assessment piece, but I feel that I know exactly what the students know, what they need additional practice with, and what students need challenging. It also cuts down on the amount of instructional time lost due to report card assessments. It actually gives me more teaching time. I am able to have more conversations with the students about what they are learning and how they think they are doing at meeting the standards. I can also post work samples as a guide to the other students.

The GPS and Math Tubs are finally what I have found to make my teaching math successful for my students and for me.