

School: Williams High School
School District: Plano Independent School District
Location: Plano, TX
Math Teacher: Amber Branch
Technology: Casio FX-9750G Plus & FX-9860G

Summary: In a district that predominantly uses another brand of calculator, this Algebra teacher was able to take advantage of the under \$50 price of the Casio fx-9750G Plus graphing calculator and supply her students with calculators they could use both at home and in the classroom. Hear about the experience she had with her students – success in the classroom, with homework assignments, and with performance on their state mathematics exam.

Who Am I?

My name is Amber Branch and I have been teaching Algebra 1 at Williams High School in the Plano Independent School District for the past two years. Prior to that, I taught Algebra 1 for six years in the Fort Worth Independent School District. When I came to Williams High School, I was specifically hired to teach a double-blocked Algebra 1 class designed for students who had failed our state's standardized TAKS* exam for mathematics.

My Calculator Experience

Since I was going to be teaching double-blocked periods to students who were clearly struggling in math, I thought it would be a great idea to issue each of my students a graphing calculator for them to keep at their house. This way they would have access, both in class and at home, to the technology they are required to use on the TAKS exam. I have always used Texas Instruments technology (TI-81, TI-82 and TI-83), but I knew that the cost of buying extra TI calculators to issue to my students was out of the question. After having this discussion with our secondary math coordinator, he suggested trying the Casio "version" graphing calculator instead. Since the comparable Casio calculator (fx-9750G Plus) was around half the price of the TI, we could afford to order twice the number of calculators and allow one set to stay at home with the students for the year. After six years of utilizing Texas Instruments calculators, I was skeptical that I would be sacrificing functionality for price. I was soon surprised.

My Casio Experience

Prior to School Starting: I received my new Casio fx-9750G Plus calculators just two weeks before school started. I was very nervous and cynical of having to "learn" a new calculator, much less "teach" that new calculator to students who were also used to using a TI-83 Plus. So, for the next few days, calculator in hand, I began reading the User's Guide. I will say this is the first user guide for anything, much less a graphing calculator, that is user friendly and easy to understand. I was able to quickly find the answers to 99% of my questions. For those questions that remained, Casio's support staff answered them quickly, efficiently and even offered to come and do training for me.

The more I used it, the more I began to realize that the Casio fx-9750G Plus was easy to navigate and easy to use. My attitude of "Wow, this will be really challenging" changed in a hurry, as I realized that I had support and was not losing any of the functionality to which I had become accustomed. In fact, in my opinion, the fx-9750G Plus is easier to use and more logically designed than the TI-83 Plus.

The First Weeks of School: The first day of school, my students were really excited to hear that they would be issued a graphing calculator to take home for the year. However, when they saw the Casio's, they immediately started to complain that they did not know what these calculators were and that "there was no way they were going to figure them out". They were all accustomed to using a different graphing calculator. I understood their concerns and began class with a basic overview of the calculator, the icon menu system, and some of the general functions. By the end of class, the overwhelming consensus was that the calculator's were "really easy to use". By the end of the first few weeks, students were very comfortable with their use and even started showing me things that the calculator could do!

During the School Year: During the year, my students went from "being comfortable using a new calculator" to huge fans of the Casio fx-9750G Plus. They even began showing their friends things they could do in fewer keystrokes than on the TI and telling them that they needed to get one!

While the transition, for both my students and I, was easy, there were a few times during that first year of using Casio, where I was unsure of how to incorporate the calculators into my lessons. I was very pleased that when I contacted Casio for suggestions, I was quickly sent workbooks with activities to use with my classes. This support was very helpful and provided me with new ideas. As the year progressed, I found that what I thought was going to be a long and painful transition from my familiar TI graphing calculator to Casio turned out to be a smooth and wonderful experience. My students caught on fast, enjoyed using the fx-9750G Plus, and are much more proficient on this calculator than any group of students I have ever taught. I attribute this to the calculator being so easy to learn and use. Another important factor that aided this successful transition is the fact that Casio is so much more affordable. I was able to give my students their own calculator to use at home for the duration of the school year.

At the End of the School Year: I had a great deal of success with my Algebra students that first year – success in the classroom, with homework assignments, and with outstanding performance on their TAKS exam. In fact, when my students went to take their TAKS exam they were initially issued a TI-83 Plus. They quickly gave them back to the exam proctor and asked for "their Casio."

Overall, I find the Casio fx-9750G Plus to be "kid friendly" and less expensive all while maintaining the functionality an Algebra teacher needs from a graphing calculator.

Where Do We Go From Here

After that first year with Casio two things happened:

- At the beginning of this school year, my old students, now in Geometry, came running to me to "borrow" a calculator because they just didn't want to use the TI calculators anymore. It was nice to be able to let them know they could buy one of their own for less than \$50.
- I had the opportunity to use Casio's latest graphing calculator with my classes. This calculator – the fx-9860G – is every bit as good as the fx-9750G Plus and also provides: a larger, higher contrast screen than any calculator I have ever used, an emulator that brings the calculator functionality to my computer, and an option that allows all the calculators to connect to the overhead panel.

I look forward to another successful year with my students and with Casio.

*TAKS – Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills

For More Information About:

Casio fx-9750G Plus & fx-9860G

www.casioeducation.com

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