

Testimony to the School Board, Feb. 22
Bob Mosman

We represent a growing group of parents from District 81 who are opposed to the elimination of traditional math options at our schools. We believe in having a math choice for our kids, because Math Matters!

We are asking the school board to direct the District to indefinitely continue offering traditional math classes at all District 81 schools. At the high school level this means offering the separate and discreet courses named Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II/Trigonometry, Pre-Calculus and Calculus. At the middle school level, this means preparing students for these high school courses by offering traditional middle school math classes with course names as Pre-Algebra and Algebra. At the elementary level, this means offering traditional math classes teaching our children basic math facts and algorithms without being calculator dependent.

We believe the teachers in this district to be capable, creative, and sincere in looking for ways to meet all students' needs. Teachers need effective and varied tools, not a "one size fits all" curriculum. The Investigations and Connected Math Project were adopted approximately 9 years ago for the elementary and middle schools. It was specifically stated by the committee members that the adoption of these materials was for supplemental use only and at the discretion of the teachers. Last year the programs suddenly became the core curriculum. [We have serious concerns about this being the only curriculum available to our children.](#)

Tonight you will hear a presentation on Contemporary Math in Context or otherwise known as CorePlus Mathematics Project which embraces a philosophy of math education which is child centered instead of skill centered. This means the students are encouraged to explore mathematical possibilities while working on a group project. Students are encouraged to explain their reasoning in "paragraph proofs" which means that standard international mathematical notation is relegated to a back seat and the English language takes the front seat. One look at the books demonstrates the emphasis places on verbal language skills instead of on mathematical formulas and notation.

One last emphasis, is that these methods rely heavily on the use of calculators. The problem is that these methods encourage the use of calculators from early elementary ages and upward. Students do not learn how to perform basic mathematical functions unless they have their calculators handy. Calculators are not allowed while taking the college math placement exam, nor are they allowed in many college math classes.

The fact that the texts are so well-aligned with the WASL is problematic when considering the fact that college bound students must be prepared for college

entrance exams (such as the ACT or SAT), whose math sections reflect traditional expectations of student ability.

Every generation or two, math related fads show up: “The Activity Movement” of the 1930's; the “Life Adjustment Movement” of the 1940's; “New Math” of the 1950's and 60's; the “Open Education Movement” of the 1970's; the college “Calculus Reform” of the 1980's; and now, the “Math Reform” movement of the 90's continuing on. This continual trend is often portrayed in the media as the “Math Wars.” In each case, what have we always come back to? Fundamental skills taught through more traditional methods --that’s what “tradition” means: long established customs or practices. Fads can breathe new life into traditional practices, which is great, but let’s not place fads ahead of foundation. NONE of our children should be made to feel like a mathematics “guinea pig.”

As a community, we have an obligation to prevent the mistakes made in other districts nationwide. Traditional math options should not be in question--“fad math” should be. In our district, we want traditional math to be given its place as the long-standing foundation for mathematics education.

We want our teachers to be able to be creative and use their expertise. Instead, employee morale is very low. Many are being forced to teach something they don’t believe in. We are losing expert educators to early retirement or other districts. This should be alarming to all of us.

We are looking out for our own children but we are also thinking of future students. We believe in the public school system and do not want to have to go elsewhere for the academic excellence that we know can be provided here

Link #1:

<http://www.lit.net/orschools/everydaymath2.htm>

Tsewei Wang

Associate Professor

Chemical Engineering &

Laboratory for Information Technologies

Dougherty Hall

The University of Tennessee

Knoxville, TN, 37996-2200

wang@lit.net (or wang@hickory.engr.utk.edu)

OFFICE: 865-974-6769

LAB: 865-974-1195

fax: 865-974-7076