

Parents push for curriculum changes

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[photo Record-Eagle/Jan-Michael Stump: Hannah Ellery, 8, reads a book while her mother Doris Ellery listens to Dianne Walker of We All Count speak Monday night at Traverse City Central High School. Parents concerned with TCAPS math curriculum gathered Monday evening in the school's auditorium to discuss possible reforms.]

TRAVERSE CITY -- Maribeth Swan said learning math in Traverse City Area Public Schools is like building a house without a foundation.

Swan joined about 100 parents and community members who gathered on Monday to push for changes to the district's "reformed math" curriculum. The teaching strategy favors discovery and group interaction, but Swan said it left her sons frustrated and discouraged because they didn't learn the basics.

"It doesn't make sense for the students," she said. "I want my kids to like math."

The Swans transferred their oldest son, now in the sixth grade, from TCAPS to the Grand Traverse Academy to find a different math option.

The citizens group, We All Count, wants the district to find a math curriculum that blends traditional and reformed math. Parents also seek a program that relies on textbooks instead of hand-outs, includes sample problems, addresses basic math skills and includes a glossary to help students and their parents understand the work.

Dianne Walker, a retired TCAPS math teacher, is leading the group. She said the effort came after many years of parents expressing individual concerns.

"We're asking TCAPS to help find a curriculum that will empower parents," she said.

TCAPS started in the early 1990s phasing out traditional math courses in favor of reformed math.

In 1998, responding to a flurry of parent complaints, the district began letting students in the ninth through 12th grades choose between traditional and reformed math programs. But elementary and junior high math classes are still based on reformed math.

Superintendent James Feil attended Monday's meeting along with school board members Fred Tank and David Barr.

Feil said test scores show TCAPS students are achieving higher in math since the district switched to the new curriculum.

"But that doesn't mean that there's not more to be done," he said.  
"We have to do everything possible to make sure all kids succeed."