



Tri-Town School Committee picks new math curriculum

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Boxford Middleton Topsfield — After more than a year of investigating multiple math programs to meet the needs of Tri-Town's elementary students including a piloting period that tested two math programs, Math in Focus: Singapore Math and Math Expressions, the Math in Focus series was endorsed by the Tri-Town School Union at its March 8 meeting as the new math curriculum.

The individual elementary school committees are expected to approve Math in Focus at upcoming meetings.

Pilot teachers introduced both Math Expression and Math in Focus to students in their classrooms from September 2011 to January 2012.

"After a great deal of investigation, research, discussion and analysis, the Math Pilot Committee confidently made a recommendation to the three school committees to implement Math in Focus as the new mathematics program for the Tri-Town School Union," said Christine Elliot, director of curriculum for the Tri-Town Union.

During the piloting process, "Teachers initially found it a bit unsettling to move at a slower pace through the units than they were accustomed to," said Elliot. "Our teachers were used to moving quickly through lessons to try to keep up with a rigorous pacing guide in Math Trailblazers."

The cost for the new curriculum is based on the number of students and teachers in each town, and materials and professional development are included in the following total amounts per town: Boxford, \$144,000; Middleton, \$147,000; and Topsfield, \$111,000.

Boxford is proposing to use money from its free cash account to pay for the math materials at Town Meeting and Middleton also expects to ask Town Meeting for the money on its Spring warrant. Topsfield plans to pay its \$111,000 cost over two fiscal years.

Math in Focus will be implemented completely for all K-6 students in September 2012. Pilot classrooms in K-5 will continue using the program and/or many of the resources from the program during the remainder of this school year, said Elliot.

About Math in Focus

Trainer for the Math in Focus program Mary Quadrini from Houghton Mifflin went before the Tri-Town Union School Board to explain why the program is a success and stressed that it meets the newly adopted Common Core Standards by the state.

"The Common Core Standards in this country are asking everyone to change the way students learn because obviously it hasn't been working," said Quadrini. "Our challenge for all of our students is to make them and help them become the critical thinking and problem solvers we know they can be."

The current math curriculums, Math Trailblazers and Impact Math editions, are not aligned with the Common Core Standards, Elliot explained.

One main issue with Math Trailblazers was the vocabulary.

"Math Trailblazers is a language based program and its vocabulary is fairly program specific," Elliot explained. "The vocabulary was not what we considered to be 'real math vocabulary' creating confusion for students as they transitioned on to other programs."

Math in Focus has a focused and coherent syllabus, which introduces fewer topics in each grade, but teaches them to greater depth. Topics are taught to mastery, so students can build from year to year across grade levels without repetition, said Quadrini.

"Once teachers got accustomed to the new pace, they realized that it gave them the time they needed to go deeper into the concepts so students had a stronger understanding and were provided with a better foundation," said Elliot. "It also provided teachers with the time needed to extend the curriculum for students who needed enrichment."

Math in Focus is the U.S. edition of Singapore's top ranking math program. It follows the same scope, sequence and pedagogy as its Singapore edition, but has been enhanced with the addition of a greater Teacher's Edition, differentiation components and interactive technology.

Professional development

The challenges of implementing a new program will be making sure there is adequate support for upper level teachers who can help their students become successful, said Elliot.

“Professional development is key in meeting today’s educational demands,” said Elliot.

School systems today are charged with addressing ever-increasing demands including reducing the achievement gap, adopting evidence-based practices as well as meeting adequate yearly progress goals, Elliot explained.

This summer teachers will attend a one-day training program and will participate in a series of trainings by grade level throughout the year to delve deeper into the mathematical concepts at their specific grade level, said Elliot.

“Teachers will meet at various times throughout the year with grade level colleagues from across the Tri-Towns to discuss the implementation and plan together,” said Elliot.

For information about Math in Focus visit hmeducation.com/singaporemath/.

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