

Main Line Suburban Life > News

Radnor curriculum committee calls for adoption of 'Singapore Math'

Wednesday, June 17, 2015

By Linda Stein

lstein@mainlinemedianews.com

[@lsteinreporter](#) on Twitter

RADNOR >> The Radnor Township School Board curriculum committee agreed Tuesday to recommend a new elementary math curriculum to the full board.

After studying the current math curriculum, listening to parents, teachers and administrators, staff recommends the district adopt Math in Focus, which is also called Singapore Math.

Previously, 122 parents had signed a petition demanding that the district drop its Everyday Math curriculum for the elementary schools, saying that there are better math curriculums available and that too many families must take their children to outside tutors for arithmetic help.

Kelly Murray, supervisor of instruction, said Math in Focus, and the latest version of Everyday Math, were the two final contenders after “a very long and thorough process.”

In addition to looking at what curriculum was available, staff members checked to see what neighboring districts used and also reviewed student assessments, Murray said.

While Everyday Math IV was aligned to the Common Core standards, Math in Focus is both aligned to the Common Core and offers more advanced learning, she said.

Feedback from 12 parents or community members who studied both programs found 83 percent preferred Math in Focus. And 72 percent of teachers and administrators preferred Math in Focus.

“Our goal was to really put the strengths and weaknesses on the table,” said Murray. The case for changing the math curriculum includes the concern that somewhat fewer students were “reaching their math goals” and there were inconsistent results in standardized testing among the three elementary schools.

However, Murray said that she learned from other districts that the program’s success would depend on professional development for teachers. She recommended the district delay implementation of the new curriculum until the 2016-17 school year “so we can get all our ducks in a row.”

They will also continue to study the math curriculum for the middle and high schools, she said.

Board Member Lydia Solomon agreed that the data “overwhelmingly indicates Math in Focus” be chosen. But she asked

whether that “outweighs the expense and training everyone and all the work that has to go into administratively supporting that.”

She asked what the price of the new curriculum would be so there will not be “sticker shock.” Superintendent Michael Kelly said he will include that when the resolution goes to the full board next week.

Katie Cook, a fourth grade teacher at Wayne Elementary School, said the teachers looked at all three programs initially presented and “thoroughly compared” them.

“Singapore not only met the Common Core but exceeded it. My team and I supported this whole heartedly,” Cook said.

However Carla Skuchas, a teacher at Ithan Elementary, had some reservations.

“Staff development aspect is critically important,” Skuchas said. “It’s been many, many years since we did any math professional development. It has been lacking. Whatever program is chosen is critically important ... Elementary teachers are generalists.”

Skuchas and the teachers on her team were “rooting for the other side” and are “not as happy.” They were concerned for the students in the basic and below basic group and a lack of “teacher technology.”

Board Member Charles Madden said the selection process was “data driven.”

The new curriculum will take “teacher buy in. As a teacher, it’s invaluable when you’re asked, ‘What did you think of this?’” he said.

Susan Michaelson, another board member, thanked Murray for the thorough review process and said that she was “really happy.” Her sister has used Singapore Math for 15 to 20 years and “swore by it.”

“I was really hoping we would move in that direction,” said Michaelson. “Finally we’re going to get it right.” She urged Murray to be sure the “transition is effective.”

“I’m excited for it,” said Michaelson. “I think it’s a great decision.” She also thanked the parents who’d gotten involved.

Board President Kimberly Doherty also thanked those who had taken part in the district’s study of its math curriculum.

“We will be making a decision with pretty robust data behind it,” she said. And she added, “To have a year to transition it in is a spectacular idea.” Parents as well as teachers will need to get used to the new math curriculum.

Gale Morrison, one of the parents who pushed for a new math curriculum praised Murray and said that she was thrilled.

Murray “organized the vertical teams (of teachers) and a lot of meetings — something we had not been doing and didn’t do when we bought Everyday Math for five more years in 2012. She made sure every teacher had a voice and felt heard. She really listens when she talks to parents. This decision means so much for kids who struggle with math and the ones in the middle who think they ‘just aren’t any good at it.’”

“Everyone has to take to heart what she said about investing the time and money into professional development and training, and I have heard that from people in other schools and districts who made the switch,” Morrison said.

“I was surprised to hear Lydia Solomon raise budgetary concerns over this, that’s very rare for her,” Morrison said. “It was only mentioned in passing, but it’s important we pay attention to the comments last night about our percentage of children

scoring 'not proficient' on their math PSSAs getting larger not smaller. That should not happen in Radnor and thank goodness we are taking steps now to address it."

Facilities Committee

Leo Bernabei, director of operations, told the committee that work is under way to renovate Wayne and Ithan elementary schools and work on the high school parking lot and driveways. Most summer programs will be held at Radnor Elementary School this year because of the construction. Work on the turf field will begin on July 7 so it won't interfere with the 4th of July fireworks program, he said.

He also warned the committee that it was time to start thinking about a temporary population increase that's been projected for the high school.

As of March 27, there were 1,168 students at Radnor High School. A Pennsylvania Economy League study shows that will rise to 1,309 students in 2020-21 before dropping to 1,200 students in 2023-24, which is the school's capacity.

Bernabei asked the committee to think of how to best handle the temporary population bulge to make recommendations, whether to repurpose rooms or add additional permanent space.

Madden suggested scheduling changes including increasing the school day.

"Radnor at one time had a night school for vets that came back from WWII," he said. "We have done some out of the box thinking. We have open campus. If kids don't have to be on campus they don't come in." Then he added, "It could be a scheduling nightmare."

Government Relations and Communications Committee

The committee agreed to ask the board to approve a resolution asking the state Legislature to reform the Pennsylvania School Employees Retirement System (PSERS), which is putting a strain on local districts that are trying to come up with additional funds as retirement expenses increase.

Board Member Eric Zajac gave a brief history of how PSERS ran into financial problems, because of the stock market dips and increases to retirees approved by the state when the system had a surplus.

The school districts' contribution rate to PSERS will jump from 25.8 percent for the 2015-16 school year to 32.2 percent for the 2019-20 school year, according to the state figures. Some of the proposals in the Legislature to reduce the increases call for new employees to have a 401K system rather than a fixed retirement system and for current employees to contribute more to their retirement.

The resolution will go to the full board on Tuesday.

URL: http://www.mainlinemedianews.com/articles/2015/06/17/main_line_suburban_life/news/doc55818500ebc6d521141304.prt

© 2015 Main Line Media News, a **21st Century Media** Property