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'Math in Focus' at center of course, textbook change

By [Steve Coulter](#) on April 16, 2013 in [Government](#), [Latest Local News](#), [Lead News](#), [Schools](#) · [0 Comments](#)

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Math in the 21st Century is going to be a lot different than it was in the past.

That was the message Assistant Superintendent Kimberly Beck conveyed to the Board of Education in her hour-and-a-half presentation April 8 when she discussed the course proposal for "Grade Six Common Core" and the recommendation for new math textbooks for grades three through six.

"It's no longer about what a student knows, it's about what they can do with what they know," Ms. Beck said. "This recommendation has Common Core, the 21st Century and Ridgefield in mind."

"Math in Focus" was the textbook recommended to the board to approve for the 2013-14 school year. Houghton Mifflin is the publisher.

Ms. Beck said she believes Math in Focus will assist the district form eight standards of mathematical practice required by the Common Core State Standards, which will help students connect directly to the "Seven Survival Skills for the 21st Century."

Ms. Beck said the seven skills are critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship, effect on oral and written communication, accessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination.

Board members were concerned that the package of text and online materials could be a sunken cost with the shift away from textbooks to online material in recent years.

"What this program gives us is an interactive tool to meet the Common Core goals more effectively," said Patricia Cooney, the elementary math department chairman, who spoke with Ms. Beck. "Online only is the direction we're going in, but we're not there yet —we're in between the world of all-online and the world of the math textbook."

The total cost for Math in Focus in 2013-14 is estimated at \$194,046.72, including \$44,000 for professional development and \$9,820.09 for shipping and handling.

Board members pointed out that there was only \$135,000 in the budget for new textbooks and \$35,000 for professional development.

Ms. Beck responded that the total cost had shifted with the addition of the sixth grade to grades three through five.

"Aligning elementary and secondary is crucial, and that's why we need new textbooks for the sixth grade — it's the grade level that will go through the

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biggest change," she said. "Our hope is that Math in Focus can extend through the eighth grade."

The total cost proposal for grade six is \$29,010.75.

The new secondary sequence for math coursework in grades six through 12 was presented to the board on Feb. 11. The sequence was fully aligned with the *Common Core State Standards*, which will trigger significant changes in instruction, content, rigor, and depth, and application of advanced problem-solving skills.

Ms. Beck added that 46 out of 50 states have already adopted the *Common Core State Standards* and that the state-mandated standards will be assessed for the first time, nationwide, in the 2014-15 school year.

"This is not a Ridgefield thing, it's not a Connecticut thing — it's a universal adoption," Ms. Beck said. "This isn't a choice, it's a mandate. We must be at full implementation by 2014-15."

Before the schools change the content, sequence and instructional practices within all math classes, it will host two forums explaining the new "common core" curriculum.

The first forum "What Does Common Core Mean for Elementary Mathematics?" will be held at Veterans Park on Thursday, April 25, at 7 p.m.

"What Does Common Core Mean for Secondary Mathematics?" will be hosted at the high school on Wednesday, May 1, at 7 p.m.

Board member Chris Murray said he felt the sequence was too linear because it places children on a track and puts them "in a spot they can't get out of."

Ms. Cooney replied that the exposure and pacing will be consistent throughout and the new sequence will have a "similar feeling" to the one that is already in place.

"The critical piece is the Common Core units," she said.

The seven unit titles are using expressions and equations; operating with positive rational numbers; understanding positive and negative numbers; applications of geometry, ratio and rates; algebraic reasoning; and statistics and distributions.

"The sixth grade content in the Common Core is currently in the eighth grade curriculum," Ms. Beck said. "The content standards — what we are teaching — and the standards of practice — how we are teaching — are going to be very different."

She added that Wilton, Weston, Greenwich, and Bedford, N.Y., have all recently adopted Math in Focus.

"It's comfortable knowing that other towns see a match with this textbook and their math programs," she said.

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