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Hooksett dumps 'Everyday Math'

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HOOKSETT - With the first Common Core assessment nearly around the corner, Hooksett is working to bring its school district in line with the new state standards, overhauling its math curriculum with a completely new program.

After testing several programs, the Hooksett School Board voted May 7 to adopt Math In Focus, a program Superintendent Dr. Charles P. Littlefield described as a "world class mathematics program," as the district's new math program, replacing the controversial Everyday Math program that is currently used.

According to the district documents, the cost to buy the program is \$271,249.20.

The Common Core Standards, which were formally adopted by the State of New Hampshire in 2010, are part of an education initiative sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to standardize curriculum and performance expectations throughout the country.

Common Core's approach to math specifically has been described as "an inch wide, mile deep."

Critics of Everyday Math used an inversion of the phrase in deriding that program as being "a mile wide and an inch deep."

In the Math in Focus program, skills and concepts are organized into focused "domains," with those skills being developed and built upon systematically from grade to grade with the ultimate goal being "mastery."

Everyday Math, developed by the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, has been described as a "spiral learning" program, where students return to topics periodically, attacking them from different angles or experience levels.

It focuses on concepts and "discovery," eschewing memorization through repetition for a more abstract understanding of how the material works.

In the 2011-12 school year, the district evaluated Everyday Math in the light of the Common Core requirements, and found it insufficiently rigorous and systematic.

This past school year, the district tried out three possible replacements: Math In Focus, and a

combination of Go Math for grades K-6 and Big Ideas for 6-8.

Educators came before the school board at its May 7 meeting to recommend Math In Focus, lauding its focused professional development and rigor. The group urged the board to approve the purchase immediately so that teachers can have teaching materials to review before the summer.

"This is a big thing, there's urgency to get this passed tonight." said Cawely Middle School Principal Matthew Benson. "It's a solid program ... we made this decision with (the teachers) who believe that this is the next step. We're in the job of developing the intellectual minds of children. They feel strongly about this program."

Math In Focus is the American version of Singapore math, a program based on the curriculum used in the Republic of Singapore. That math program, which was the model curriculum for the common core, places a strong focus on model building, using pictures to bridge the gap between "concrete" math and "abstract math."

It is also known as a heavily "scaffolded" program, each level building on preceding levels, systematically mastering skills as they are presented so that underlying concepts will not have to be re-introduced to year after year.

Teachers who participated in the pilot programs that tested the alternatives to Everyday Math also made a presentation at Tuesday's meeting. A key emphasis for the teachers was the progression students take from the concrete, to the pictorial, and ultimately to the abstract.

In the classroom, teachers described students dealing with tangible relationships between physical objects, such as adding and taking away blocks from a pile. Students the progress to pictorial representations of the concrete math concepts, they have learned.

In the most advanced state, students move to the symbolic, which is what most recognize as traditional school math: numbers. equations and problems.

The program is designed so that when students reach the symbolic stage, they have retained the natural insight into the math they learned in the concrete stage, an understanding referred to as "number sense."

"In the past, I've always had students say the equal-sign means 'the answer is,'" said one teacher. "Now they know that it means 'the same as,' or 'is.' They approach it so differently."

The board was enthusiastic about the presentation, and voted 3-1 to adopt the program.

Chair Trisha Korkosz was the lone negative vote, noting that while she supported the program itself, she was standing by an earlier board decision to pay half the cost from a fund balance and the other half through the 2013-2014 budget, rather than foot the entire bill from the 2013-2014 budget as is now the case.

Vice Chair David Pearl spoke of Math In Focus as a program he hoped could "evolve" with the district, particularly given the amount of online content it includes.

"As a parent that's seen these programs come and go, and the cost, and the stress on the teachers having to re-learn a program, I'm hoping we can change this program as needed as things evolve, and not have to replace it in a couple of short years, because I think we've been there a couple times."

Hooksett purchased Everyday Math in 2006 for \$83,810. Mathscape was purchased sometime earlier. The school district could not immediately provide its cost.

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