

District adopting new math curriculum

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Greenwich students could be getting a new math curriculum starting this fall.

A committee of administrators, teachers and parents that began looking earlier this year at changing the curriculum is recommending a textbook, "Math in Focus: Singapore Math." It would replace the current Everyday Math curriculum, which parents say was not teaching basic skills.

The review took place as Greenwich begins implementing common core standards, national standards for language arts and math that are intended to encourage more analytical thinking and in-depth problem solving.

Irene Parisi, the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and professional learning, said of the programs the committee reviewed, Math in Focus is probably most aligned with the common core standards.

"We want to provide teachers and students with the appropriate resources for raising the rigor and closing the achievement gap," Parisi said during a Board of Education meeting Thursday night.

If the school board approves the new curriculum, it will be implemented in kindergarten through fifth grades this year, followed by sixth through eighth grades in 2014.

Four different textbooks were considered during the review, and the group narrowed it down to two. Committee members looked at the curricula other districts have been using.

Parisi said Math in Focus includes the mathematical practices up front, and allows teachers to set a pace and provide flexibility depending on their students.

Brian Peldunas, who has a daughter in fourth grade at Riverside School, has long pushed the district to begin reviewing the math curriculum. He was one of seven parents on the committee, which also included several teachers, principals and administrators.

Peldunas has said Everyday Math doesn't allow students to master basic skills. The curriculum continuously revisits topics without allowing students to master them, and doesn't give students enough practice in basic number facts.

Math in Focus, he said, devotes enough time to addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, and provides appropriately challenging world problems. The text book is also simple and focused, with little distractions, he said.

Peldunas said the review process worked well, and at times he worked directly with teachers to evaluate the programs.

"Could we have gone into much more detail and examined everything to the nth degree? Yes, but it would have taken us an entire year," Peldunas said. "Given what we had to accomplish, it was a very good process to get us to a conclusion."

School board member Jennifer Dayton said she was "thrilled" the district was making the change, but was disappointed that they were delaying the implementation in the middle school for budgetary reasons.

"Remember, those people had to go through Everyday Math for all those years, and are coming into a middle school environment that already looks different, in terms of mathematics," Dayton said.

Parisi said the district has already been doing work to align curriculum to the common core standards, and high school staff has been working with staff at the middle schools to help prepare students for taking algebra.

"We're still going through that transition and understanding how to bring the mathematical standards to life in our classrooms," Parisi said.

The school board will likely vote on whether to accept the new curriculum at its April 25 meeting.

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