SFUSD Math Classes to Spend More Time on Key Concepts

New Standards Reflect Math Education of Leading Countries

For over a decade, research has shown that math education is done differently in countries whose students do far better in math than the U.S. Critics of math curriculum in this country say that the old approach, “a mile wide and an inch deep,” is too broad, with a tendency to rush students through concepts and skills, before most students develop a deep understanding of them.

Now, SFUSD has adopted the Common Core State Standards that have great potential to change how math is taught.

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WHAT DID YOU DO THIS SUMMER? Students Darren Easterling and Victoria Lam, left, go over construction site details with project engineer Will Spargur during their summer internship with URS Corporation. Each summer, students who are between their junior and senior years – and enrolled in one of the district’s career pathway programs – take part in paid internships to learn about careers in a variety of fields. This hands-on learning is coordinated by SFUSD’s Career and Technical Education program. Read what this year’s interns had to say about their summer jobs. SEE PAGE 2

‘Together with Everybody’ Instead of Doing it in Pieces

Restorative Practices in SFUSD

“If there is something wrong that happens in a class, it needs to be settled in class,” said Jonathon, an eighth grade student at Everett Middle School, during his class restorative practices circle. He was taking part in a new way to deal with a pattern of behavior that had been disrupting class.

“We talk about how to stop negative, loud behavior and get work done without having to be sent out of class.”

The teacher also got a turn to say something to the students. “I don’t want to yell at you, and I would like for you to get your work done.”

As the process continued, students talked one by one about what was happening, and many agreed that the trouble normally began when one student would antagonize another, who would then react in a negative way. Both students would end up in trouble and get sent out of class.

Jonathon captured the essence of restorative practices, one of SFUSD’s priority initiatives. Beginning as a board resolution in 2009, SFUSD embraced a new approach to dealing with student conflict and misconduct.

It also emphasizes the importance of positive relationships in building school...
What’s a Middle School Feeder Pattern?

This fall parents with children starting kindergarten in 2012 may also be considering the middle schools they will attend seven years later. And, for this year’s fifth graders who are vying for a space at a highly requested middle school, a new system of tiebreakers will now include whether or not an applicant attended an elementary school that is the “feeder” to their requested middle school.

School Times asked Darlene Lim, Executive Director of the Educational Placement Center, to explain.

Q: What are middle school feeders?
A: Every K-5 elementary school in the district is now matched with one middle school, known as their middle school ‘feeder.’

Q: What are the reasons behind establishing middle school feeders?
A: There are a lot of reasons but two really important ones are, 1) that students will have the option to stay with the same group of students and families from kindergarten through 8th grade, and 2) middle school teachers and principals will be better prepared to serve incoming 6th graders because they will know which schools students are likely to come from instead of getting students from dozens of different elementary schools as they do now.

Q: How will children get assigned to a middle school? Does a student have to go to his/her middle school feeder, or can parents still apply to another middle school?
A: The student assignment process for middle school will continue to be a choice process.

Between 2011 and 2016, when submitting their applications, outgoing fifth grade students will be able to request their feeder school or any other middle school. The choice process for middle school will give younger siblings the highest preference, followed by a preference for students enrolled in an elementary school that feeds into the middle school, and then a preference for students living in areas of the city with the lowest average test scores (known as CTIP1). These preferences, known as tiebreakers, will be used when the number of requests for a school is greater than the number of seats available.

Beginning in 2017, students who are graduating from 5th grade will receive an initial 6th grade offer based on the elementary school they attend before the middle school choice process begins. After receiving their initial assignment based on the elementary school they attend, students will have the opportunity to participate in an optional choice process which will give younger siblings the highest preference, followed by a preference for students living in areas of the city with the lowest average test scores (CTIP1).

What I Learned This Summer

Each summer, students who are between their junior and senior years — and enrolled in one of the district’s career pathway programs — take part in paid internships to learn about careers in a variety of fields. This hands-on way to get real-life experience is provided by SFUSD’s Career and Technical Education program. Here are some things this year’s interns had to say about their summer jobs:

Victoria Lam (Washington High) / URS Corp

Everyone I saw at my internship loves their job, they are happy to go to work every day. They have a strong passion for what they do, which makes them work even harder. I realized that, in this field, you are most likely going to work with the same person or company more than once in your life. Having past experience with them, and letting them have a good impression of you, will make them want to work with you again in the future.

Sabrina Wong (Burton High) / Spectrum Credit Union

I didn’t expect to be learning so much. Lots of people complain about how they have to go work and whatnot, but I can say that I’m not one of them. Internships are the best opportunity to learn and understand how the field works, so as interns, you need to take advantage of that opportunity, learn as much as you can, and ask as many questions as you can so that you can understand because the information they give you is priceless.

Genesis Alvarado (Burton High) / Transportation Management Association of SF

One of the most valuable things to me about this internship experience was what my supervisor, Nora Zappas, the Program Associate for TMASF Connects, talked about. She was very honest and straightforward. What impacted me the most was her choice of words. She was very professional. I asked her what past jobs or experiences led to her present position. She explained that after graduating college she received an internship to work with a non-profit which was exactly what she was interested in. I can be horrible at giving answers when I’m being interviewed, so she also gave me good pointers for interviewing for a future job.
Viewpoints

Board of Education President
Hydra Mendoza

Welcome back to school! We are excited to start the 2011-12 school year! In just a few short weeks, we already have a lot to celebrate.

Our summer was busy with repairs and modernization projects, which included great improvements to many of our schools like Cobb Elementary. The students, families and staff have a beautifully remodeled site that they deserve. The green and playground project at the newly merged Buena Vista – Horace Mann K-8 School has given our students a great space for recreation, exploration and creativity. Lincoln High School’s newly expanded environment bursts with natural light and energy efficiencies. A great big thank you to our incredible bond management team who carefully monitored each and every project so that they came in on budget and on time!

SFUSD was also fortunate to be one of the many agencies that partnered with Mayor Ed Lee and the City and County of San Francisco to apply for and receive a “Choice Neighborhoods” grant award for $30.5 million dollars. These dollars will help to rebuild the Alice Griffith Housing Development in the Bayview Hunters Point, and support improvements to the surrounding schools, such as Bret Harte Elementary.

We will also be working closely with our community partner, the San Francisco School Alliance, and the generosity of the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundations $3 million grant to implement the common core state standards in math. This will be a great boost for our students!

Here’s to a wonderful start to the school year!

Superintendent
Carlos A. Garcia

I recently met with the Board of Education in our annual retreat to review our priorities for this year. There are several reasons for us to make sure we have ongoing and open dialogue about our shared priorities. Our district has a strategic plan to align our work and we want to make sure that we are moving forward and realizing our goals.

Given recent trends, it looks like schools are going to have even fewer resources in the years to come, so we need to focus and coordinate our assets both human and monetary. The Board and I agreed that throughout our district we will be focusing on these three major priorities, which will help us reach the goals of our strategic plan:

- Creating a strong instructional core for college and career-ready graduates;
- Implementing supports and interventions for students; and
- Building a high-performing, school-focused central office.

First, our students need quality instruction and access to a strong instructional core, and secondly, they need a set of supports designed to address their unique challenges. Finally, our teachers, principals and parents need to know that the district will be attracting and developing the best educators and service providers for our children and leveraging limited resources to keep our schools running with clean and safe facilities, current technology, and other important services.

There are still many important change efforts underway - these three areas that the Board members and I recently discussed emphasize the integration and interdependence of our work. In this issue of School Times, you can read about some of our important initiatives, including the math core curriculum and restorative practices. We invite parents, teachers, and community members to share their questions and ideas – everyone’s support is needed to make our district even better.

It’s lunchtime: Do you know where your child’s lunch money is? Now you will. Pay online at www.MealpayPlus.com! View your child’s purchase history or pay via phone: (866) 438-7842. Please have your child’s student ID (HO number) handy.

SFUSD Fall/Winter Calendar

November 11
Veterans Day – NO SCHOOL

November 23-25
Thanksgiving Recess – NO SCHOOL

December 16
End of Fall Semester

December 19 - January 2
Winter Break – NO SCHOOL

January 16
Martin Luther King Day – NO SCHOOL

January 23
Lunar New Year observed – NO SCHOOL

February 17
Furlough Day – NO SCHOOL & ALL DISTRICT OFFICES CLOSED

February 20
Presidents Day – NO SCHOOL

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Math: More Time on Key Concepts

One of the fundamental changes in this approach to how math will be taught is that students will spend more time with key concepts early on and, instead of just focusing on getting math problems right, more of an emphasis will be placed on student problem solving and understanding why it is right.

“What you’ll see in class,” says teacher Kirstin Hernandez, “will be a whole lot of conversations among students, a lot of different tools being used to solve a problem, and not as much the teacher at the front of the room giving information.”

Hernandez, who taught math for nine years, is now the Math Coordinator for the Superintendent Zone Mission, a cluster of schools in the Mission area of San Francisco.

“They will be learning as much from the wrong answer as the right one,” says Hernandez. “And the kid who gets the right answer but can’t say why it is right...”

Language and Japanese teach this way – more time developing foundational concepts, mathematical reasoning, and using skills appropriately.

A National Movement

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematics Initiative, which produced the new standards, some of the most important math topics for college are covered by 44 other states in the U.S. and Washington D.C. along with California.

“We are going to be more rigorous than ever,” says Associate Superintendent for Academics and Professional Development Dee Dee Desmond. “This new approach is designed so more kids are doing better in math, and sticking with it longer.”

According to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics Initiative, which produced the new standards, some of the most important math topics for college are covered from sixth to eighth grade.