

From the Mailbag . . .

Date	Message
11/12	<p>Dear Math Adoption Committee,</p> <p>I attended the International School information night. Thank you for having the presentation, it was very helpful. I have two kids in 5th and 6th grade and with seeing the low attendance, am trying to get word out to other parents to review the texts in the high schools.</p> <p>It was mentioned at the meeting, but I failed to write it down...</p> <p>What grades next year would the current students start in with the new curriculum? My understanding is it covers 8-10 grades but those students who are already into the existing curriculum will stay with the old curriculum. So, will the current 7th graders (8th graders next year)(or majority I should say as I know some kids test in higher) be the ones to start with the new curriculum, and not the current 8th graders (who will be 9th grade next year). I get so confused with the class names for math (or maybe acronym names would be a better description) starting in middle school.</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>*** ***,</p> <p>Response: For the 2010-11 school year: 8th grade students will take Algebra 1 with the new materials 9th grade students will take Geometry with the new materials Please let me know if you have further questions. Sharon</p>
11/12	<p>I attended the math adoption information night at Interlake High School this evening. I was gratified to see the thought and care that had gone into the process of evaluating textbooks. However, at the end I felt as if I had attended a wine tasting party where we looked at the bottles, sniffed the corks, observed the wine run down the side of the glass, and yet refused to take even the slightest sip of wine. If we have reduced the selections down to two choices, why did we devote no time whatsoever to any discussion of the relative merits of those series? Will there be a public discussion of these series later in the year, or are we actively trying to avoid having any sort of public forum on this topic before final recommendations in March?</p> <p>***</p> <p>Response: Hi ***,</p> <p>Thank you for your input and your colorful analogy. At this point we are soliciting input from parents via the parent pilot survey and the parent materials review surveys in the library along with the email address: MathAdoption@bsd405.org. We will bring your suggestion to the adoption committee to consider doing a public forum.</p> <p>Thanks, Steve Blatt</p>
11/13	<p>I went on line to view the Discovery and Holt text books. I need a "ClassPass" to view. How do I get a "ClassPass"?</p> <p>Thank You, ***</p> <p>Response:</p>

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	<p>If your son or daughter is enrolled in a pilot, you can receive a class pass to review the full materials from his/her teacher. Unfortunately, copyright laws restrict us from passing out access to these materials outside of the pilot. If you son or daughter is not enrolled in a pilot, then you have the option of viewing the sample lessons online following the links off the Math Adoption home page: http://www.bsd405.org/portals/0/curriculum/mathadoption/index.htm or view the hard copies of the materials in the high school libraries.</p> <p>Thanks, Steve Blatt</p>
11/23	<p>Hi,</p> <p>I am writing to let you know that I reviewed the Holt & Discovery text books, and strongly agreed with OSPI that Discovery series is not the right fit for our students. I urge the committee to consider selecting the Holt textbooks and drop the Discovery series from the selection. Thank you for your time.</p> <p>***</p>
11/29	<p>As a parent of 2 children in the BSD district, I'm e-mailing my opinion in support of the HOLT series for adoption. The direct instruction and clear examples are positives in this textbook series.</p> <p>Thanks for taking public comments! ***</p>
12/8	<p>Dear BSD HS math selection committee,</p> <p>There are many reasons I favor the <u>Holt</u> math texts over <u>Discovering</u>. Some are based upon the learning experiences of my 2 children, and others are based upon the nature of <u>Discovering</u> and its failure to make a dent in the achievement gap in the Lake Washington School District, where we used to live. I have attached a graph prepared by Dave Orbits showing insignificant reduction in this gap since <u>Discovering</u> was phased in, beginning in 2004. It should be noted that San Diego School District adopted <u>Discovering</u> and discarded it after only 2 years because it failed to address their achievement gap. A chart showing their data is also attached.</p> <p>I have heard it said that <u>Discovering</u> is not the problem, that other issues are at play-- for example, teacher buy-in and/or lack of professional development. I heard these exact same excuses from reform math guru, Virginia Stimson in response to concerns I had about the deficiencies of TERC. And by now most are willing to admit that TERC is an extremely weak math program. The problems have nothing to do with teachers. They have to do with the enormous lack of math content and the confusing discovery methodology.</p> <p>This was most certainly true for my 2 children, both of whom fell deeply into the achievement gap, thanks to TERC. We moved to WA from CA four and a half years ago. In CA my son was above grade level in math and considered it one of his 2 favorite subjects, Science being the first. Within half a school year in a Lake Washington TERC classroom he hated math and thought of himself as stupid. This worsened over the next several years. He never passed a math WASL. In his TERC classrooms he was not taught or allowed to do math as he knew and loved it. Instead it was a laborious and confusing process of devising and explaining strategies without ever knowing if he was on the right track. Last year he failed CMP2 7th grade math in a BSD middle school. He had completely lost interest in these classes where he couldn't engage in ways that worked for him, and he wasn't learning a thing.</p> <p>He is now in a private school where they tested him thoroughly and found his math computation skills to be approximately 3 years behind grade level. His math comprehension is still several years above grade level, as it always was. TERC and CMP2 cannot be credited for this. They can, however be blamed for his lack of computation skills. His teachers were not allowed to teach multiplication tables, long division, double digit multiplication, how to find common denominators, or convert fractions to decimals. He is now learning all the basic skills and repeating the pre-algebra he failed to learn last year in CMP2. By the end of 8th grade he</p>

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will have completed a very solid Algebra 1 in this private school.

If BSD adopts Discovering I will not place him back in this district. My daughter has an IEP and takes Special Ed math in BSD. She is learning solid math in a direct and unambiguous manner. It will serve her well, but I fear she will soon test out of it. This will cause another crisis for us, since she too failed to learn any math whatsoever in the confusion of discovery-based classes. I will not put her in a Discovering classroom.

Because Discovering has been used in Lake Washington for several years I have heard much about it. I run a math tutoring business with a number of parents in LWSD. We support students who are learning little in Discovering classrooms, and hear about its problems from many parents. Like other discovery-based curricula, it is verbally driven and requires good reading and writing skills. Students with good language skills can write their way through and learn very little math. Very typically, they get good math grades and then fail college math placement exams and are required to remediate. I cannot tell you how many times I've heard of this from parents. Discovering works against students who are not good readers and writers, and most especially those who are learning English. These students tend to do very poorly. It frustrates students who have a natural facility with mathematical language in the form of equations and algorithms. It is boring for highly capable students. I have not heard of any parents or students who think highly of Discovering.

The issue of mathematical soundness is very significant. Many are dismissing the final review done at the state level by Strategic Teaching, solely because the review done by OSPI reached a different conclusion. This makes no sense. The OSPI review was done for the very purpose of negating the Strategic Teaching review so that Discovering would be one of the recommended curricula. Dr. James King who reviewed Discovering for OSPI is on the payroll of the company that publishes it. Dr. George Bright was the other reviewer and he was an employee of OSPI at the time, with an unquestionable bias toward the curriculum. Neither Bright nor King reviewed Discovering-Geometry because it ranked too low to be considered for final recommendation by OSPI. And yet their review gives the whole series a thumbs-up for mathematical soundness. In spite of their efforts to override the "mathematically unsound" grade given by Strategic Teaching, Randy Dorn did not recommend Discovering. Why? Because the Strategic Teaching review was done by 2 mathematicians who had no vested interest in the OSPI recommendations. And they have no ideological bias. Their review was based upon the mathematical content of the texts. Dismissing their review shows ideological bias and an unwillingness to address current problems in math education. Mathematical soundness goes to the heart of them.

A mathematically sound curriculum such as Holt can be taught in a highly interactive mode that keeps students engaged, while also developing the levels of proficiency they will need. A mathematically unsound curriculum such as Discovering will require enormous amounts of supplementation in order to teach the content students need to become proficient. And given the time consuming nature of the discovery process it's unlikely that adequate supplementation will occur.

If Discovering is adopted we can expect little change in the achievement gap. Professional, higher income parents will continue to have their children tutored at current rates, which are very high. Low income parents will continue to be unable to assist their children, who will be mastering very little math in the classroom.

If Holt is adopted we can expect to see improvements over time. But there will be a need for remediation of students coming out of CMP2 who had TERC in elementary. Many of these students do not have basic math computational fluency, and this will make it very difficult for them to succeed in high school algebra and geometry. However, if remediation begins immediately they will be able to succeed in high school and will be adequately prepared for college. Without remediation prior to college many will fail college math placement tests – whether Holt or Discovering is adopted. This is the sad and sorry price they are paying for the failed experiment of curricula such as TERC and CMP2.

If Bellevue School District wants to close the achievement gap there must be a program to develop a strong

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foundation of basic math skills. This should be put in place at middle and high school levels as soon as possible. Even students who have succeeded in TERC and CMP2 classes lack basic math skills unless they have developed them outside of school. Those who fail are most certainly lacking in the essentials. It is highly unreasonable to expect them to master any real algebra or geometry without these skills. Adopting a mathematically weak curriculum, such as Discovering may help some of these students get better grades in high school. They will be allowed to use calculators to hide their lack of basic skills, and will score points for well written explanations without mastering solid mathematical knowledge. This will postpone a crisis for many students who will think they are doing well until they fail their college math placement exams. If this seems unfair criticism I would encourage you to look with a clear eye at what is happening in Lake Washington School District. It is highly unfair to our children to impose upon them a math program that will take up their time without providing them with the skills they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

Director of Program Development
Fast Track Math
www.fasttrackmath.com

Response:

Thank you for your thoughtful email. Your views will be shared with the math adoption committee this week.

Please be advised that whichever instructional material we adopt, it will be implemented with balance. Computation skills will be taught alongside problem solving and conceptual understanding. Students need all three.

We also are determined to make advances on the achievement gap. However, we know that the adoption of new math materials is not the solution. If only it were that simple! Currently our schools are developing instructional leadership teams that will be taking on the challenges of bridging the achievement gap.

Thanks again for your input,
Steve Blatt

12/9

Steve,

Thanks for responding. Please pass this on, too. It's a simplification of my other lengthy email.

My simple argument for Holt and against Discovering is that Holt is direct, clear, unambiguous. The teacher can interject discovery and interactivity in the classroom. In contrast, Discovering obscures the math being taught by making the process of discovery more important than the content. The only thing a teacher can do to be sure all students learn the math is to provide direct instruction of what is MISSING in the text. Giving teachers a text with missing information is not a good thing. The information will be missing in the curriculum and in what students learn. The text should provide all the content. The teacher should provide the learning activities (ie: discovery).

You assured me that the curriculum will be balanced and computational skills will be taught, whether BSD adopts Holt or Discovering. I read this as, "We will teach what is missing if we choose Discovering." This is exactly what I'm afraid of, because it won't be taught as well as it would be if Holt is used. What is missing from the text, students won't have at home, and it will be up to the teachers to supplement. Some may. Some may not.

Anyone who has observed a discovery based classroom knows that many students are not "discovering". And they know they don't need to because their homework is not graded, but merely stamped. The real discovery occurs when they do poorly on tests. Then parents discover how little their children are learning.

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	<p>And parents have also discovered they cannot help their kids with homework because the text gives them very little content or examples. The fact that kids don't want or need help with homework is another step in the discovery process, and it all makes sense when parents realize homework is not corrected or graded.</p> <p>All of this supports my simple argument for adopting <u>Holt</u>. Students, teachers and parents need a text that clearly demonstrates the math students should be learning. It needs to be a reference. The teacher can and should provide the learning activities, and discovery can be integral to the classroom process.</p> <p>***</p> <p>Response: Hi ***,</p> <p>Thanks again for your input. I think your position is very clear and I'm happy to hear that you value inquiry in student learning. Both choices, Holt and Discovery provide students with examples, definitions, homework problems and solutions. Both programs also offer parents resources to help them support their children at home. Regardless of curriculum chosen, as common instructional practice, the teachers should be providing students with ongoing diagnostic feedback.</p> <p>Your additional comments will also be shared with the committee. Thanks, Steve Blatt</p>
12/10	I strongly agree with OSPI. The Discovering Algebra-Geometry series is mathematically unsound. The Holt series is the mathematic curriculum that should be adopted for the Bellevue School District.