

What's next:

The district will present a plan to the school board on August 22, 2011 that will outline ways to remedy the concerns and implementation issues addressed in the report. The plan will focus on three main areas of improvement, which are professional development, communication with staff and parents, and curriculum.

Ultimately, it is up to the board whether to continue the current math program. Changing the math program will take at least one year to acquire and could take an additional year to implement.

Regardless of the board's decision, the current math program will be used for the 2011-12 school year. In that time, the district must continue to address the needs of students and staff and focus on math achievement.



Anchorage School District

K-8 Math Review

ASD has heard concerns regarding its K-8 math program. For those reasons, the district asked for a review of its program from an external group of educators.

The review was conducted by a team made up of members from the Council of the Great City Schools. Members were from districts across the country who have expertise in math, general curriculum and instruction, and language and cultural knowledge.

During the team's investigation, it interviewed nearly 100 people, including board members, administrators, principals, teachers, parents and community members. The team reviewed more than 650 surveys submitted by ASD teachers and principals. The team also analyzed a significant amount of student data.

In June 2011, the review team provided a report that laid out its recommendations on improving K-8 math achievement in the district. The full report can be read at www.asdk12.org/depts/math.

The review team emphasized the distinction between programs and curriculum. Everyday Math and MathScape are programs that help the district deliver the curriculum, which is based on the standards defined by the state. The team recommended the district keep the current Everyday Math and MathScape programs to support implementation of the math curriculum.

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Michael Casserly, executive director of CGCS, said, “Much of what needs to happen here involves the district's ability to support the program it has. If the district can't support its programs, a new one won't help.” In order for ASD's current math practices to be more effective, the team suggests the district improve its professional development for staff and communication with both staff and parents.

www.asdk12.org/depts/math

This is a brief summary of an extensive report.

Program successes:

- ASD students perform at a relatively high level in math.
 - Student scores are equal or better than their peers statewide.
 - Student scores are on par with the national average and significantly higher than other large cities.
 - Elementary students who stayed in ASD for three consecutive years showed substantial gains in math scores. ELL students also showed solid gains in math in the same time frame.
- Most schools have standardized and uniform math textbooks which are beneficial for a district with high mobility rates.
- ASD's RTI initiative will benefit the district's math efforts.
- The district's administration and Anchorage School Board are committed to working together to make gains in student achievement.
- Parents and community groups are engaged in the district's efforts.
- ASD has clear goals and the superintendent is held accountable for progress on the strategic plan.
- Teachers appreciate support and professional development.
- District uses research to create action plans and student placements.
- Benchmark assessments are used for elementary students.
- Middle school math support classes for struggling students work well.
- The Newcomers' Center math program is beneficial to its students.
- There is strong collaboration between preschool program and ELL staff.

Program concerns:

- There are substantial alignment issues between ASD Grade Level Expectations and state math standards.
- Professional development for K-8 math is inadequate to build staff capacity in math or use assessment data effectively.
- There are not enough math coaches to provide professional development, data interpretation and/or technical assistance.
- Most math programs are not implemented equally districtwide.
- The district lacks proper monitoring tools for the math program.
- Communication is lacking with teachers and parents.

Rationale to keep current math program:

- The program was not the determining factor of whether progress was made. Rather, the systemic supports are weak, not the program itself.
- All programs have strengths and weaknesses; there is no perfect program that will resolve the district's math issues.
- Replacing the program, along with necessary supplemental material, textbooks and professional development, would be expensive.
- The transition to new math programs would be complex and time-consuming. Staff time could instead be devoted to creating and implementing supports to make the current program work.
- New math programs are being developed nationwide and changes now could make a new program and textbook adoption irrelevant in just a few years.



Recommended areas of action:

The following are merely suggestions made by the review team. They are not a plan of action or checklist for the district to complete. The district is developing an improvement plan it will present to the school board.

- Make math a priority, both districtwide and school by school.
- Provide more coaching, technical assistance and professional development for math. Teachers, principals and ELL staff should benefit from additional professional development.
- Allot more time for math instruction in the classroom.
- Develop long-term goals in math that go beyond NCLB targets and safe-harbor projections.
- Provide feedback to staff, parents and the community on how the district is responding to their comments, concerns and recommendations regarding the K-8 math program.
- Utilize only the state standards.
- Revise and enhance the curriculum documents for teachers, including the pacing guides.
- Build and implement math supports to assist transitioning students from elementary to middle and from middle to high school math curriculum.
- Create a team to identify features of high-performing classrooms to find differences that could improve the overall program.
- Ensure that language development and math vocabulary is infused across curricular areas.
- Expand current mid-year assessments to occur 2-3 times each year and use results to strengthen instruction.
- Develop an early warning system to track progress and assist transient students.

