

Dr. Rasmussen's message to the School Board

June 24, 2009

The need to delay

- Our ultimate goal is to adopt high-school geometry and algebra materials to give teachers the best tools to help all students succeed. I am very disappointed that the state has interjected itself into the process causing much consternation and virtually paralyzing districts' ability to select math materials and move forward at this point.
- The state continues to waffle and create more uncertainty rather than less. Consider:
 - OSPI has issued conflicting reports about high-school math curriculum and refused the Issaquah School District's invitation to come defend its contradictory messages.
 - The State Board initially recommended three curricula, including *Discovering*, and asked for additional study to reconcile the differences in the two reviews conducted by OSPI and SBE.
 - The Superintendent of Public Instruction likewise stated more research is needed, but no funding is available.
 - He has also said: "It is not the role of OSPI to direct which curricula a school district may or should select," yet OSPI has created an incredibly challenging position for districts by recommending only one curriculum.
 - There have been subsequent legal entanglements for districts going through math adoptions and threats of litigation in neighboring districts.
 - Curriculum publishers are suing the state over alleged flaws in the state's curriculum-adoption process.
 - The Superintendent of Public Instruction has asked the legislature to possibly postpone end-of-course assessments a year until 2012.
- Obviously it has become increasingly apparent that we are in a state-level quagmire.
- In the midst of this, our highly qualified teachers on the high-school math adoption committee have conducted a thorough, thoughtful selection process—quality work. They have remained objective during the political debate, and I have NO doubt the *Discovering* materials they have recommended would serve our students well.
- Despite a solid teacher recommendation, the District would be remiss to get out ahead of this political and legal maelstrom. I'm not willing to put our limited resources at risk.
- Therefore, I am postponing the high-school math adoption. As such, I have removed the recommendation from the Instructional Material Committee's process *for now*. Again—this is no reflection of the expertise of our teachers.

The process to move forward

- First things first: I want to reiterate that our students continue to excel in mathematics by all available measures. We will persist this fall with the same expectations for all students and high-quality instruction. We will work with our math teachers to give them tools to bolster the existing curriculum as a stop-gap measure until this is resolved.
- However, we can't minimize the urgency of a high-school math adoption. We cannot rest on our excellent math scores because they are not good enough for *all* students and they are not good enough to meet our mission and Ends. Our teachers have recommended a new curriculum that will take us to the next level of achievement. While the actual math textbook is important—it's the teacher-led adoption process and the resulting implementation that creates renewed focus, collaboration, accountability, and commitment to best instructional practices.
- After allowing some time for the dust to settle at the state level, we will ask the teachers on our high-school math adoption committee to revisit the current recommendation of *Discovering* sometime mid school year. At that point, we will consider whether there has been any clarity around high-school math and move forward.
- While we have followed our typical adoption process, I recognize that in this environment, we have not done enough to engage our public. We will continue our conversation with our parents and community members around this curriculum recommendation and math instruction in general in the Issaquah School District. We want to gather feedback about students' current math experiences and use the information to continue our goal of helping ALL students succeed in math.
- In the meantime, I recommend that the School Board work with administrators to write a letter to the Superintendent of Public Instruction expressing our frustration about the ambiguity of their communication and the position that it has placed districts in.
- Overall: The teachers on the adoption committee have done thorough, diligent work, and we are not losing that. It is prudent to wait for some dust to settle—and that's beyond our control. But with new state math standards, our far-reaching district mission, our out-dated current curriculum, and looming end-of-course assessments, our students cannot afford to wait beyond next school year.