

August 17, 2015

Slouching Toward Mediocrity: Making Deer Path Middle School Truly Middle of the Road

www.lakeforestschoolswatch.com

(This article may be reproduced in its entirety as long as attribution is given)

Deer Path Middle School Students (grades 6-8) will have a new mathematics sequence and new curricular materials for the 2015-2016 school year.

Unfortunately, both the standards to which the new curriculum is aligned and the new math program itself are demonstrably sub-standard according to many professional mathematicians, including one who was asked to develop Common Core Standards.

District #67 is adopting the “Connected Math Program” (CM3) for grades 6-8, which was developed by the Connected Mathematics Project (CMP) at Michigan State University, was formerly published by Dale Seymour, but is now published by publishing behemoth [Pearson](#) (which sells other Common Core curricular materials and PARCC tests).

Connected Math has been roundly criticized for many years as a “fuzzy math” program that is woefully inadequate for preparing students for a high school math sequence that would allow them to pursue STEM majors or gain admittance to more selective colleges.

Among the many critics of CMP is R. James Milgram, professor emeritus of Mathematics at Stanford University. He served on the validation committee for the Common Core State Standards in mathematics as the only mathematics subject matter expert. He refused to approve the ultimately devised Common Core math Standards and has been a vocal critic of both Common Core Standards and various math textbooks or programs that seek to track to the Standards.

First, a bit about Common Core Math Standards....

As many know, Illinois has adopted Common Core State Standards, controversial federal standards for K-12 education that many believe lower the bar for Lake Forest and Lake Bluff students.

Regarding Common Core math standards, [Professor Milgram asserts](#) “...Core Standards in Mathematics have very low expectations” and that these standards were written “[a]s a result of all the political pressure to make Core Standards acceptable to the special interest groups involved...”

See more at: <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/james-milgram-on-the-new-core-curriculum-standards-in-math/#sthash.j8OITKiD.dpuf>

[Milgram has also shown](#) that high school Common Core standards for “college readiness” mean something very different for students aspiring to more selective colleges.

One of the writers of those Common Core math standards was pinned down and admitted the “fuzzy” definition of “college readiness” was in reality “a student who passed Algebra II”—and not even a complete Algebra II course. This CC standards writer admitted that by this definition of “college readiness” a student would not be sufficiently prepared for a STEM major or selective college, aspirations shared by many students attending LFHS.

Milgram’s discussion of Common Core high school math standards is helpful in ascertaining just how low they truly are. See more at:
<http://dianeravitch.net/2013/09/11/james-milgram-on-the-common-core-math-standards/>

Deer Path’s New “Connected Math Program” gets an “F”....

Nevertheless, in another leg of Superintendent Simeck’s “Race to the Middle” for Lake Forest public school students, he has done away with Quest programming and implemented [Connected Math](#) (CMP).

The breadth and depth of the criticisms of CMP can be easily accessed at a variety of websites compiled by NYCHOLD (New York City Honest Open Logical Decisions on Mathematics Education Reform) (www. <http://www.nychold.com/who-we.html>) and elsewhere [here](#), and [here](#), and [here](#), to list only a small percentage.

A few examples follow:

--“this book [CMP 7th grade] is completely dedicated to a constructivist philosophy of learning, with heavy emphasis on discovery exercises and rejection of whole class teacher directed instruction. [...] Students are busy, but they are not productively busy. Most of their time is directed away from true understanding and useful skills.”

--[Mathematically Correct](#) math program reviews of 11 middle school math programs gave Connected Mathematics an “F” and rated it the “worst of the lot”, noting it “unlikely to allow any significant number of students to meet the criteria for even pre-pre-Algebra”.

--[According to Professor Milgram](#) in a detailed analysis every middle school parent should read: “If one visits the web site of the [\[CPM\] program](#) ...one finds two preprints...that are advertised as showing the benefits of CMP. Unfortunately...both studies are fatally flawed and deceptively presented. [...] “ Milgram continues: “Overall, the [CMP] program seems to be very incomplete, and I would judge that it is *aimed at underachieving students rather than normal or higher achieving students*. In itself this is not a problem unless, as is the case, the program is advertised as being designed for all students. In fact, as indicated, there is no reputable research at all which supports this. [Emphasis supplied].”

Professor Milgram continues: “The philosophy used throughout the program is that the students *should entirely construct their own knowledge* and that calculators are to always

be available for calculation. [For an interesting view on calculator use, [click here](#)] This means that

- *standard algorithms are never introduced*, not even for adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing fractions
- precise definitions are never given
- repetitive practice for developing skills, such as *basic manipulative skills* is never given. Consequently, in the seventh and eighth grade booklets on algebra, there is *no development of the standard skills needed to solve linear equations, no practice with simplifying polynomials or quotients of polynomials, no discussion of things as basic as the standard exponent rules*
- throughout the booklets, topics are introduced, usually in a single problem and almost always indirectly -- topics which, in traditional texts are basic and will have an entire chapter devoted to them -- and then are dropped, never to be mentioned again...
- in the booklets on probability and data analysis a huge amount of time is spent learning *rather esoteric methods* for representing data, such as stem and leaf plots, and very little attention is paid to topics like the use and misuse of statistics. ... [Emphasis added, See: <ftp://math.stanford.edu/pub/papers/milgram/report-on-cmp.html>]

“The first four bulleted items above, particularly the second and third, indicate areas where the program *does not do an adequate job of developing basic skills necessary for students to continue with more advanced work in mathematics*, leading to possible careers in technical areas. [Emphasis added]”

At the July 22, 2015 [Board presentation](#) unveiling the choice of CMP (“Connected Math 3”), Susan Milsk, DPM’s Director of Student Learning, seemed pleased that CMP tracked to the (low) Common Core standards. It appears that, with Pearson selling DPM both the math curriculum and the PARCC testing on that curriculum, teachers will be able to “teach to the test” and reap test scores designed to assure parents their children are learning something. That “something” will apparently be Common Core math standards which reflect “very low” expectations, according to the only subject matter expert devising those standards, Professor Milgram.

According to Milsk’s [6-slide Power Point](#), six teachers and six administrators “participated” over six days in order to select this new math program. If this latest version of Connected Math is as bad as those that went before, and there is no reason to believe otherwise, the DPM parents and students should prepare for the worst.

Did those 6 teachers and 6 administrators study the math curricula used in the [top math-performing countries](#) of the world (among them Singapore, Hong Kong (China), Taiwan, South Korea and Russia)? Did they even examine textbooks freely available in the US, like [Singapore Math](#)? If not, why not?

Why did the selection of these new math materials take only six days? Is CMP truly the best middle-school math program for Lake Forest students, or one that simply allows this administration to align to (low) Common Core Standards and view its job as over? *Does this even approach a world-class methodology in curriculum development and textbook choice in a District that [spends over \\$15,000](#) per middle school student?*

Perhaps attempting to manage parent expectations, Milsk declined to define what the success of this new math program would look like in response to a Board member question during her [presentation](#), answering only: “That’s a fair question” (at 14:50). She opined about an “implementation dip” (in measurable student achievement) which may happen when the math sequence is “realigned”.

We submit any “dip” in testing or true math knowledge has nothing to do with “realignment” and everything to do with the substandard choice of Connected Math and the apparent attitude among the DPM administration that top math-performing countries have nothing to teach them.

In conclusion, unless it has radically changed from its previous iterations, credible and unbiased experts unanimously condemn Connected Math as one of the least successful programs in preparing students for the type of high school sequence that would allow them to pursue STEM courses of study or admission to more selective colleges.

###