Fall 2019

Connections

A Publication Dedicated to Informing and Involving the FPSD91 Community

Message from
Superintendent Dr. Cavallo

As we begin the school year, we want to share with you our goals for having our students meet and exceed math competency expectations.

We believe that by collaborating with parents we can improve. Our focus this year is math. As we all know, our math scores on standardized testing are below where we want them to be. The district has put a lot of things in place to improve our students' competency on mathematical practice. We have a new curriculum, increased the amount of time for math during the school day, hired math coaches for our teachers and provided on-going professional development.

This year, all staff will also receive professional development on equity to ensure that everyone has a core belief that, regardless of skin color, all students can achieve high levels. We have also developed strategies to assist parents/caregivers with helping students with math at home.

While we are confident that all of these ongoing efforts will have a positive impact on math competency, we also know we cannot do it alone. We ask that parents/caregivers assist us by taking time every night to talk to their children about what they are learning in math and, using the tools we provide, assist with homework.

If we all work together, we can accomplish our goal of having our students meet and exceed math competency expectations.

Dr. Louis Cavallo

Dr. Louis Cavallo
Superintendent of District 91 Schools
lcavallo@fpsd91.org

School Board President **Kyra Tyler**

The start of the school year brings all things new: teachers, peers, supplies, maybe even a new building. As a fellow D91 parent and the President of the School Board, I am excited to also be diving into a new school year full of fresh experiences, curiosities and the opportunity to engage with the school community.

It is no secret that math continues to be a priority for improvement in our district. As such, we are committed to working toward solutions. One of those solutions is how we can best support our students around math once they are finished with the school day, and settled in at home.

In our house, we try to see math in all the ways it exists in the real world. Now that my student is older, figuring out the tip at a restaurant or calculating sales tax is something I have her assist me with. We also have discussions around responsible ways to use her allowance, allocating a certain percentage for saving, spending and charitable acts. For older students, maybe it's helping shape the grocery list around a certain budget or figuring out how many hours they will need to babysit in order to buy a coveted pair of sneakers. Even little ones can join in: have them count the items in the grocery basket or find an appropriate gift in the allotted price point for their classmate's birthday celebration.

Math is everywhere, and by talking about it and putting it into practice in our everyday lives, you will help our students delight in all the fun ways we can use it. I look forward to our District's Math Journey this year!

Forest Park School District 91
School Board Members

Kyra Tyler Board President
Kim Rostello Board Vice President
Shannon Wood Board Secretary
Eric Connor
Mary Win Connor
Monique Cotton-Yancy
Katherine Valleau

Math Coaches Help Teachers Translate Concepts into Action

Cognitively Guided Instruction, or CGI, is an approach to teaching mathematics that builds on how students understand math. When teachers know more about how students are thinking about math, they are then more able to help students apply those strategies to new learning and deepen students' understanding of the subject matter.

Last summer a group of teachers and administrators from District 91 attended the National Biennial Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Lisa Emond, a primary math coach who works with teachers at both Betsy Ross and Garfield, was part of a team that made a presentation at the CGI conference. Their session, *Growing Math Communities Across Schools*, highlighted efforts of teachers from Betsy Ross and Garfield primary schools working together and learning from one another to expand their teaching through CGI.

LIsa Emond is very passionate about her role as a primary math coach in District 91. "Getting students excited about math means getting teachers excited first," explains Emond. "That's our job."

Originally a professional dancer, Emond began her educational career in the New York public schools before eventually coming to District 91 a few years ago. She says the role of the math coach is all about communication, establishing trust with teachers and translating concepts into action.

"We are not the math police," says Emond. "Our job is to support our teachers through observation and assessment, while at the same time offering up innovative strategies to try out in their classrooms, ideas that may actually push teachers a bit out of their comfort zone at times."

When it comes to new ideas, Emond's advice to D91 teachers is simple. "Just give it a try," she says. "Take the risk. The worst thing that can happen is it doesn't go like you thought it would. And that gives us something to talk about. What didn't go well? How would you do it differently? It's all good!"

Lisa Emond
Primary Math Coach
Betsy Ross and Garfield Schools

Emond appreciated the opportunity to attend this year's CGI conference, which centered on equity in the classroom. "The equity focus was very timely," says Emond. "It fed directly into what we're doing in District 91."

As an example, Emond cited a primary level workshop, *Exploring Children's Early Fraction Understanding*, a session that discussed going beyond the use of pictures by simultaneously providing children concrete opportunities to solve problems requiring fractions which have multiple entry points for students.

"This approach allows all children success based on where they are in developmental understanding," points out Emond. "And this workshop was very helpful because it gave the participants an opportunity to practice identifying where a student is in their understanding and next steps."

This year, District 91 math coaches will continue their CGI development, training that will help to support the eventual vertical alignment of coaching math across all grades at the primary, intermediate and middle school levels.

"This is really important," says Emond. "It may take some time, but ultimately we want continuity and success for math at every level."

Improving Mathematics Outcomes in D91

With the 2019-2020 school year well underway, the district has a laser focus on improving math outcomes for students at every grade level. While teaching and learning is complex and ever-changing – indeed from one moment to the next – the district has identified critical areas of focus.

James Edler
Director of
Innovative Instruction
FPSD91

Equity

Equity is a common theme for all six critical areas, as the district's equity initiative is the center-piece of our strategic planning and the lens through which every aspect of teaching and learning is considered.

The district's equity initiative as applied to mathematics can be described as "…practices that take into account the way(s) mathematics education perpetuates oppressive norms and therefore actively seeks to erase them, so that all students can participate meaningfully in mathematics learning and create their own mathematical knowledge." (Chao, Murray and Gutierrez, 2014).

In other words, the district seeks to engage students in learning math in a way that will make every student recognize that they are a valued member of a math community in their classroom. Students also come to us with experience and knowledge from both school and at home that plays an important role in learning new math concepts and stretches their current understandings.

Curriculum and Assessment

The district is committed to providing students a consistent and comprehensive learning experience from pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade, ensuring that students from one year to the next see themselves advancing in their learning and strengthening their own math identity.

One way this is supported is by connecting math concepts to previous learning and deepening a students' understanding as they prepare for future learning. For example, when a student recognizes they already know a lot about math, they have the confidence to preserve that knowledge as they are challenged to think in new ways and develop more effective and efficient approaches to problem solving.

Throughout the year, the district will be developing a new report card based on priority learning standards that seek to accomplish two goals: first, grading practices that accurately assess student learning relative to the most important learning at each grade level; second, a report card that will provide more specificity to families and communicate, in a meaningful way, exactly where students are meeting the learning expectations for their current grade.

Individuals who may be interested in getting involved in the development of the standards-based report card should contact James Edler, Director of Innovative Instruction, at *jedler@fpsd91.org* or 708-366-5700, ext 306.

Materials and Resources

One of the district values is providing innovative instruction, programs and learning opportunities for each individual child within and beyond the classroom that results in improved academic achievement. In alignment with this value, Forest Park Middle School is completing a pilot of a new math textbook – *Big Ideas Math*. This textbook is also available to students as an electronic resource they can access using their Chromebook. Also part of the *Big Ideas Math* program, students can also access additional resources, a video library, as well as a live tutor to help them with homework.

> "The district seeks to engage students in learning math in a way that will make every student recognize that they are a valued member of a math community in their classroom."
>
> JAMES EDLER, DIRECTOR OF INNOVATIVE INSTRUCTION

Teaching and Leadership

An important part of teaching is modeling learning. This summer, district math teachers and administrators attended the national conference on Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI). At this conference, educators from across the district came together to learn about how students naturally think about mathematics, ways to listen to what students are thinking and engage students in activities that encourage them to see themselves as powerful math learners. More information about CGI will be shared during school-based math nights at all schools in the district.

Families and Strategic Partnerships

The 2019-2020 school year offers exciting new opportunities to connect with families and develop partnerships with organizations to improve math learning for students. To this end, every school will be hosting two math nights throughout the year where parents will be invited to join our wonderful teaching staff to engage in math activities. These activities will not only help families understand how students are learning math, they will also provide ideas on ways families can support their students at home, from homework to encouraging discussions about math they encounter in everyday life.

New this year, families can look forward to more regular communication through a quarterly math newsletter offering information on how to access additional online resources and ways to support their students in current and upcoming math concepts. The district is also working to update the Teaching and Learning section under the Parents/Guardians tab on the district website. When completed, these updates to the website will provide families with a powerful tool to become more knowledgeable about what is happening in the district as well as ways to continue to be involved in their child's math education.

Over the summer the Board of Education committed to supporting the district in rekindling a partnership with the Metro Chicago Math Initiative (MCMI), a partner of the University of Illinois at Chicago. This partnership will support teachers, math coaches and administrators as they extend their expertise to improve teaching and learning and create a common vision of math across the district.

Sharon Bork (left) and Elizabeth Seery, second grade teachers at Betsy Ross School.

Second Grade Math:
Teaching Students to be Problem Solvers

Sharon Bork and Elizabeth Seery are second grade teachers at Betsy Ross School. Sharon has taught in the district for 26 years. Elizabeth Seery has been in the district for 17 years.

How does a school year start out when you're teaching math?

Bork: In second grade, it's about reviewing procedures, introducing the math toolboxes, setting expectations for the students and just getting students comfortable with the math tools and using them properly.

Seery: Yes, the expectations need to be established upfront so the students know what's expected of them. We spend the first week simply distinguishing between math tools and math toys.

Bork: And we refer to our students as mathematicians. They like that.

How difficult is the transition from toys to tools?

Bork: Second graders understand the concept of "tools". Using math tools makes the students feel grown up. And it's easier for them to take ownership that way.

Seery: Right. And students like having a choice – they get to choose the tool they use to solve a problem.

Bork: Exactly. Because there's not just one right way to solve problems. The other day, I had a student solve a problem in a way I hadn't thought of before. I learned something new. Students can be teachers, too.

What are the math objectives for second grade?

Seery: One of the big ones is fluency with basic math facts. Realistically, second graders go on to double digit and triple digit addition and subtraction with regrouping; basic math facts are essential in order to do that.

Bork: We also want to make students become more comfortable with math strategies. For some students it takes a lot of practice both at school and at home.

Seery: Absolutely. And we have strategies in place to assist slower students – teacher interventions. We share an aide who works in small groups, which gives us more time for the interventions with individual students.

Bork: The bottom line is we're are always observing students and assessing where they're at and adjusting our instruction throughout the year to meet student needs.

> "Mistakes are good. That's how we learn."
>
> SHARON BORK, SECOND GRADE TEACHER, BETSY ROSS SCHOOL

What's the ultimate goal?

Bork: We're teaching our students to be problem solvers. We're giving them the thinking skills and communicating skills to be able to solve the problem and then communicate to someone else how they did it and why they did it and why they know they're correct.

Seery: And we specifically pick kids to share their work. It's very strategic. And their classmates will respond by asking, "Why did you do it this way?" They learn from one another, which really helps bring them up to the next thinking level.

Bork: It's very important that we create a safe learning environment for all our students, so they don't feel intimidated or ashamed if they make a mistake.

Seery: Mistakes are good. That's how we learn. And our students correct one another in a respectful way.

Bork: Learning problem solving extends to other subjects as well. So it's a win-win!

By the Numbers

District 91 is committed to providing all students a consistent and comprehensive learning experience from pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade, ensuring that students from one year to the next see themselves advancing in their learning and strengthening their own math identity.

William J. Milnamow *(Betsy Ross)*
Mathematics allows students to strengthen their logical thinking, their intuition, their analysis and their reasoning by making connections to things that make sense in their world.

Dr. Tiffany Brunson *(Field-Stevenson)*
All of our children are mathematicians! We have a duty to provide them equitable access to quality instruction and create opportunities for each of them to showcase their brilliance.

Jamie Stauder *(Forest Park Preschool/Garfield)*
Our work with WCMI and now the MCMI is to help our children become mathematical thinkers and doers and not just calculators.

Tinisa Huff *(Forest Park Middle School)*
My role as an assistant principal in supporting the Math initiative is to support the teachers in whatever capacity that is needed, whether it's through classroom observations or just simply making sure they have the necessary materials to do their job effectively.

Joseph Pisano *(Forest Park Middle School)*
The work with MCMI is a hugely important initiative that will provide support to teachers in the planning and execution of their math lessons. As the building Principal it is essential to sustain the momentum of this initiative through continued coaching and support of our math teachers to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our students.

Roger Beauford *(Grant-White)*
Why do children dread mathematics? Because of the wrong approach. Because it is looked at as a subject.

District Resources Support Improved Outcomes in Mathematics

Edward Brophy, Assistant Superintendent For Operations

District 91 continues to support student learning in mathematics by directly allocating financial resources to extensive professional development for teachers to ensure that students are learning at high levels.

Last year, District 91 designated eight early release days specifically for professional development on formative assessment practices. Formative assessment that occurs during instruction as students demonstrate their learning tells us about the effectiveness of our teaching. These are the snapshots of learning that show us the progress that a student is making toward a specific learning goal. This is critically important as teachers are adapting strategies during instruction to build student knowledge gains.

This year, District 91 has reconvened its partnership with the Metro Chicago Mathematics Initiative (MCMI) to receive professional development on mathematics instructional practice with a continued focus on formative assessment and cognitive demand. Teachers and the three math coaches in District 91 are working with an external coach from MCMI to receive onsite observation and immediate feedback on mathematics instructional practice. Teachers will analyze student work together to gain insight into student thinking to support student learning. The instructional practices include prioritizing the opportunities students have to make sense of mathematical ideas and concepts, and deepen their understandings. The practices also demonstrate how to support students without removing the complexity of the work they are engaged in. This professional development ultimately helps teachers translate their learning and the coaching they receive into practice.

Teachers will also participate in the MCMI Mathematics Professional Development Consortium. This consortium is comprised of school districts throughout Cook County and provides opportunities for cross-district collaboration on mathematics instructional practices. District 91 teachers will attend workshops provided by the consortium throughout this school year. These workshops are the venue for collaborative conversations among teachers to talk about how we will know students are learning, how will we respond when students need additional support, and how will we enhance the learning for students who are proficient.

District 91 is fortunate to have the financial resources that are needed to implement and sustain this commitment to improve outcomes in mathematics. The support from the community makes these improvement initiatives possible. The district is also complementing this focus on improving learning outcomes in mathematics with its work on equity to remove barriers to access and opportunities for students to succeed in and outside of our classrooms.

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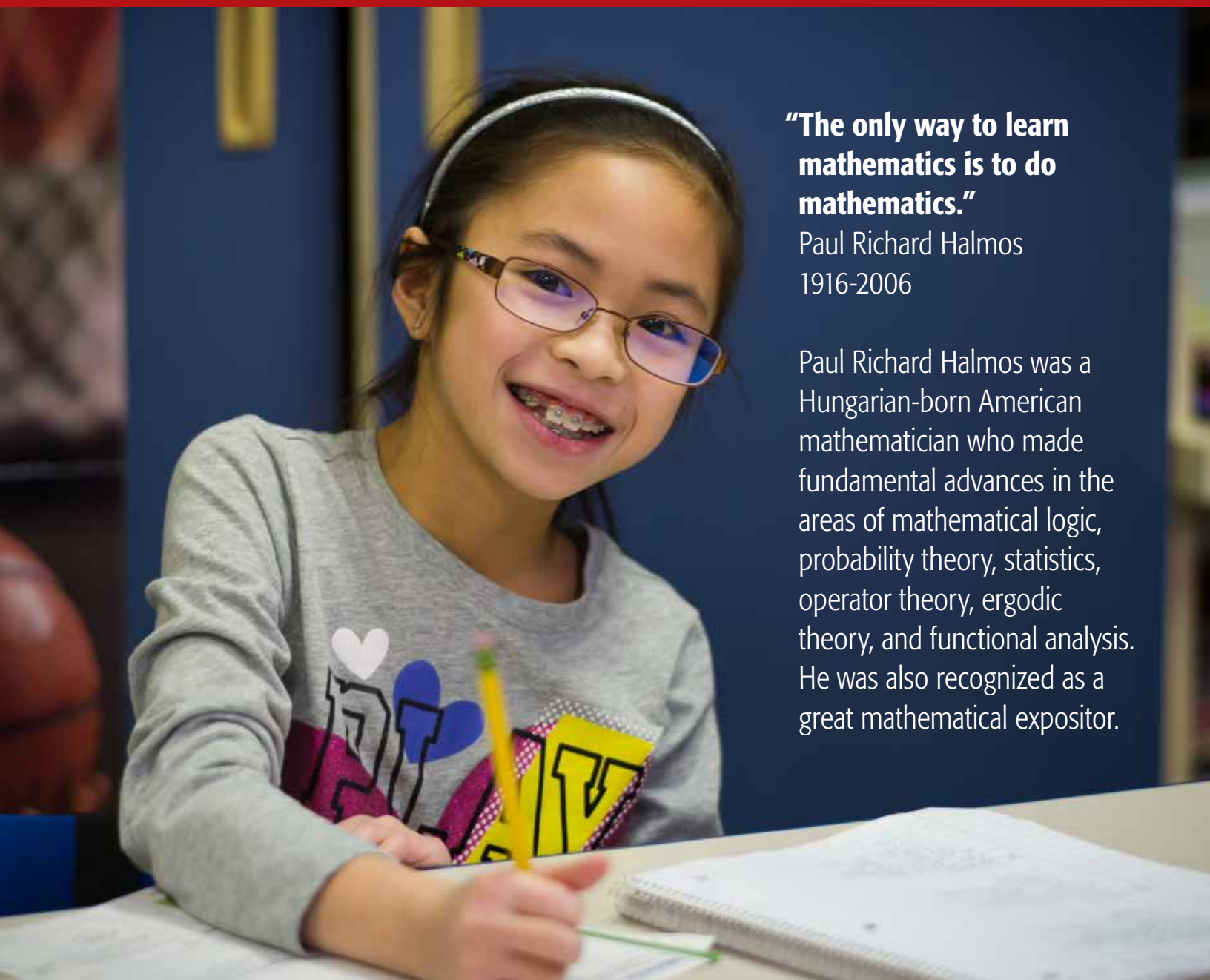

"The only way to learn mathematics is to do mathematics."
Paul Richard Halmos
1916-2006

Paul Richard Halmos was a Hungarian-born American mathematician who made fundamental advances in the areas of mathematical logic, probability theory, statistics, operator theory, ergodic theory, and functional analysis. He was also recognized as a great mathematical expositor.