

September 17, 2009

Board of Education
Community Forum Comments

Good Evening President Brandman and members of the board. My name is Kathy Boehlert. At your August 27 business meeting I expressed my belief that many elementary teachers have not received the math education required to make them effective math teachers. I ended my comments with the statement that elementary teachers need support and I have some ideas.

I believe that one Math Content Coach should be assigned to every middle school's feeder elementaries.

Here is my vision: Unit by unit in grades 3-5, the math content coach would meet with and coach all teachers of a particular grade/course. The coach would start by giving teachers a review of the unit's concepts. He or she would be responsible for pulling unit information together, highlighting the important points to make, making connections for teachers among what is to be covered in the unit, what has previously been taught (last unit or last year) and what is coming up (in this unit or next year).

I think teachers are not able to teach the big picture because they don't see the big picture. The content coach would connect the dots for the teachers so they are equipped to tie it all together for our children. When children see how so many concepts are interrelated, math might not be so overwhelming.

I did some research on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards website and I would like to offer here a quote I found in the Standards by Certificate section.

From Standard III: Knowledge of Mathematics:

"Accomplished mathematics teachers have a deep and broad understanding of mathematics well beyond the level of mathematics they teach. Their knowledge emphasizes not the small details, rules and procedures of mathematics but rather the larger themes and connecting ideas that tie together the various strands of mathematics."

This deep and broad understanding is what our elementary teachers are lacking and what a Math Content Coach could help them establish.

How do we make it work in these tight budget times? One suggestion is to share personnel vacancies among cluster elementary schools. By that I mean that when one school ends up with a .2 intervention vacancy and another school ends up with a .2 focus vacancy and so on, they can pool those vacancies and share the person.

As for actually finding more funding for personnel, I have an idea for that too and I am just going to throw it out there: I think MCPS should do away with the second grade **Global** Screening and use that money to support this. These days, instruction is completely data driven, so there is no longer any real need for **Global** Screening to determine a student's appropriate instructional level for third grade or beyond. Second grade students take the M-class, IRI tests, standardized unit math tests and the TN2. There is so much data available that I think **Global** Screening is obsolete. However, I still believe we should provide screening on an individual basis for any second grader whose parents request it. I would even go so far as to say that MCPS could charge a small fee for this screening. But that's another story.

Thank you for your time.

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