

TAL MATH FORUM MINUTES
OCTOBER 26, 2011

TAL hosted a parent forum regarding the district's math acceleration policy and the needs of accelerated learners. 52 attendees participated, including Howard Wallach and Karen Bolsen, both school board members; and a school board candidate, George Gurrola.

Welcoming remarks were made by Tammy Luty, Farmington PTA Council President; Tina Yoder, TAL Co-Chair; and Catherine Murphy, TAL Advocacy Committee Leader.

Catherine Cost, Asst. Superintendent – Instructional Services and Jon Manier, Executive Director – Instructional Services gave presentations and fielded questions from parents.

Catherine Cost Presentation

How we got to this point:

- 4 years ago started a change in our acceleration process. Used to be 7/8 grade only
- Did not have curriculum that supported differentiation within classroom
- High school and middle school teachers said accelerated students were spending inordinate amount of time on homework or were falling back into regular track curriculum

Now:

- Bridges and CMP2 curriculum – supports collaborative work, understanding “why” behind the answers, investigating patterns. Less memorization.
- Curriculum is aligned with Common Core Standards; FPS is in process of phasing those standards in.
- These factors led district to implement a new grade acceleration process last spring. Dr. Cost: “We believe in grade acceleration. We don’t want to hold any student back.” New curriculum supports more in-class differentiation. This goes till 7th grade; then there are more options for acceleration (in different classrooms).

Jon Manier Presentation

- In the past, the parent needed to surface the need for acceleration. Now, “We created a process where we screen every student, every year.” (IOWA test). Also look at MEAP results and grade level testing. The new process has identified some students whose parents had not requested acceleration but who meet the criteria.
- In the past, there was an inconsistent application of the criteria – between classrooms, schools, etc.
- It is NOT true that a non-accelerated student will be denied access to the highest level courses in middle/high school.

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The following advanced-track classes are available to all students, starting in 7th grade.

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Class</u>
6	CMP2
7	Pre-algebra (or Math Reasoning, if self-select less challenging track)
8	Algebra 1
9	Honors geometry/statistics
10	Honors algebra 2/trigonometry
11	Honors pre-calculus/principles of engineering
12	AP Calculus BC

Other accelerated options after AP Calculus BC = online options, dual enrollment at a college

Catherine Cost and Jon Manier – Joint Discussion

Michigan state law now requires that high school students have the opportunity to test out of any course the school offers. FPS offers this option twice a year. If students test out of a course, they may take the next level course a year earlier.

- FPS is considering placement testing after 6th grade to let advanced students skip pre-algebra. This is not an option presently.

“Teachers have options to ensure that students are challenged” – Catherine Cost. FPS has two math coordinators who can work with that teacher. If you have concerns on your student you should follow a process of meeting with the teacher. Then talk with principal/counselor, and if still not resolved then the next step would be to meet with Jon Manier or Catherine Cost.

“It is our expectation that teachers will provide this challenge.” – Jon Manier.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Can teachers split levels of kids for math within a classroom or among team-taught groups of students?

A: Jon Manier said yes; parents say they have been told this is not allowed.

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Q: We want to have an honors class, especially for grades 5-8, where students can move at a faster pace.

A: [No answer given] However, an informal poll was taken to gauge interest in an Honors program at the K-8 level and approx. 80% of the population in the room wanted an Honors curriculum at those levels.

Q: How were cutpoints set for IOWA test?

A: Consulted with test provider, other local districts that use the IOWA test, and assessed what other practices are used nationally. FPS made the decision to use 96%.

Q: Is 96% the right cutpoint?

A: That's a good question. We will never satisfy everybody. We began by doing research with University of Iowa. The district is considering a change in its practice...change from looking at national norms to local norms, based on recommendation from University of Iowa.

"We recognize that parent and teacher perspective needs to be a part of this process." District doesn't know what this looks like yet; need to develop some rubrics. (Catherine Cost)

Q: Does FPS use any other universal screeners?

A: We don't use any other universal screeners for mathematics. MEAP is not considered most reliable or valid. In high school, we do Explorer/Plan ACT/MME. For lower grades FPS uses end of year test.

Q: In the meantime, while you evaluate the IOWA cutpoints and create the teacher rubric, etc., don't you think there should be an opportunity for exceptions to accelerate students?

A: "We are committed to meeting the needs of every child. Right now we will meet their needs in the classroom they are presently in." (Catherine Cost)

Q: What is the acceleration process for 1st grade students (who don't take the IOWA test in kindergarten)?

A: Administer 1st grade IOWA test earlier for them, more on individualized basis.

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Q: What are the logistics of moving a child to another building for acceleration?

A: Bus the student to other school; take 60-70 minutes of math; bus back. In some schools they miss recess or specials. "There are logistical problems... social costs, time costs." – Jon Manier

Q: Why don't we go past BC Calculus in our high school curriculum?

A: We don't have the student pool. Would need 25-30 students to support. If we get that many, we would consider it.

Q: Bridges math new curriculum -- is there any data about it? Some teachers say they don't like it.

A: It's in the first year of being fully implemented. Took 2 years to implement. We continue to support teachers through professional development. Last year had 6 half day in-services. We are one of 2 school districts in Michigan to use Bridges (Country Day is the other one). Other districts are considering it.

With Common Core Standards, MEAP will disappear. Bridges puts us in a much better position for new common core testing. Dr. Cost says standardized test scores are improving over last 2 years and we are closing gaps between students who are behind and those who aren't.

Q: What is criteria to select teacher who accelerated students get?

A: It's a school based decision.

Q: What role does 5/6 building logistics play in deciding the percent cutoff for acceleration?

A: Building logistics does not play any role in the acceleration criteria (Manier). [Also, if we have enough accelerated students in one building] we try to cluster students together to teach the accelerated curriculum without having to transport them to next building.

Q: What are the "other resources" to challenge our kids?

A: Some teachers start students on next level of curriculum. Some teachers use Compass Learning (online program). Some re-group with other teams of teachers to level classes. Math coordinators give ideas to teachers. FPS is looking into other resources, like online courses.

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Q: Is there a pre-A.P. program?

A: (Manier) I am not aware of a specific program. (Dr. Cost) The current high level math track does that.

Q: Does a lower grade in a high level math class affect GPA?

A: In elementary and upper elementary, students do not have GPAs so it does not have an effect. In high school, yes, but colleges also look at what course you take.

Q: What if parent is dissatisfied with lack of acceleration this year?

A: Talk to Jon Manier and Catherine Cost. However, there is no appeal process; students will not be "exception" accelerated this year.

By request of a parent attendee, the group took a vote regarding parent preferences for accelerated learner math options.

- About 2/3 of the group preferred a faster paced instruction within the student's current grade level / age peers.
- About 1/3 preferred acceleration where a student is placed in the next grade/age level class.
- Some wanted both.

Note: There is a parent forum on November 28 at Highmeadow about how Bridges works.