

If you are interested in a balanced picture of Central Linn math practices please consider the following:

Three major things have changed from the time that most of us went to school; increased graduation requirements, Common Core Standards that demand problem solving skills, and our commitment to have learners ready for their next steps in life not just getting them through high school (the current state focus).

In 2007, the Oregon Legislature significantly increased the requirements for graduation including exit exams in Reading, Writing, and Math. They also increased the amount of working knowledge that it would take to pass those exams. The credit requirement for math went from two credits (years) of math at any level to three credits at Algebra I or above. The political cry at the time was that we were not graduating learners that were ready for the next step; recently the focus has shifted to getting them through in four years, two ideas that are in opposition to each other for a number of learners. This has caused anxiety in schools and in homes. We at Central Linn still contend that it is best that the learner actually know the material rather than being pushed through it.

In 2012, Oregon instituted the Common Core Standards that demand learners can take the knowledge that they have and apply it to new situations to solve problems. This is often interpreted by the learner as 'being stuck' when in reality it is a natural part of developing higher level thinking skills. They and their parents are still too focused on 'getting the right answer' and moving on regardless of having a full understanding of what they are doing. We are focused on meeting each learner's needs where they are at, acknowledging that they do not all learn at exactly the same pace. In our appropriately paced math lab we are committed to provide individual teaching to that individual learner at the point that they are 'stuck'. We learned last year in our 7th grade lab that to do that effectively we needed at least one teacher or math assistant for every 10 learners and that is the ratio we are operating on this year. It is also important to note that Common Core is divided into three major standards groupings: K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. It is not as important to 'finish' 7th grade standards in 7th grade as it is to enter high school ready to learn the tougher material. In fact 7th grade standards are almost twice as much material as is required in 8th grade, these should be seen as one continuum without getting too wrapped up in one year's achievement.

Our commitment is to get them ready not just get them through. Squeaking by a class with a D is not preparation it is appeasement.

We have recognized that some students need more structure and we will be offering some teacher driven classes next year; but this does not change the higher requirements or the level of understanding expected in the Common Core. I anticipate a level of frustration in meeting these goals on a stricter timeline; but we are committed to offering options none the less.

We are also working hard to develop courses that are at the Algebra I level or above that are not the traditional Geometry and Algebra II. The traditional Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II is really a pre-engineering track that not all learners need, but the state has put in place.

In short, there are many reasons for frustration but only our delivery system is highly visible. I still believe in individualizing education and do not believe all of our learners would be successful if we simply 'go back to the way it was'. That never worked for all learners and I anticipate that it would be even less successful considering the change in expectations we have put upon our young people.

Brian Gardner
Superintendent
Central Linn School District