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Dear Parents:

We are pleased to announce that Monday night, the Pelham Board of Education, approved our recommendation of *Math in Focus: Singapore Math by Marshall Cavendish* as our new textbook series starting in grades 3-5 for the 2014-15 school year. In February 2013, the District Math Task Force called for the establishment of a district level committee “to research a new math series for the elementary and middle school programs that will be aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards.” A Math Textbook Review Team of teachers and administrators commenced its efforts to fulfill this promise in October 2013.

The Process & Challenges

The Math Textbook Review Team included representatives from each school and grade level, including principals Dr. Richard Limato, Dr. Robert Roelle, and Mrs. Tonya Wilson. An evaluation rubric was used to examine the most recent elementary and middle level math textbook programs on the market. We then divided into smaller groups to pilot several programs, including *enVision*, *Go Math*, *Math Expressions*, *Math in Focus*, *Big Ideas*, *Digits*, and the recently released *Math Modules* from EngageNY.org (model lessons aligned with the Common Core and commissioned by NY State). After thorough and deliberate evaluation and pilot phases, the team narrowed its options to *Go Math*, *Math in Focus*, *Math Modules* (grades K-5), and *Big Ideas* (grades 6-8).

It was a bold challenge to explore, examine, and pilot new textbooks series in a divisive educational climate. The Common Core continues to be embroiled in poor media and political exposure due in part by the rapid pace of the State’s implementation of the CCLS, new standardized tests, and its connection with accountability measures that have clouded its effectiveness. In addition, recent studies question the true alignment of textbooks that have been written for the Common Core. We also recognize that a strong desire to provide children with a text-based option exists. For these reasons, we needed to reflect on which program truly addressed the needs of our children and teachers as math learners in the 21st century. Which math series could provide us with a researched-based math series that best supports a world-class program?

Why *Math in Focus* in Grades 3-5

We discovered that *Math in Focus* is the best choice based on its proven pedagogical and learning theories, research-based methods to teach children math concepts, computational skills, and problem-solving skills, with relevant application of math to life. *Math in Focus* also provides us with a sense of independence while still connected with the Common Core Learning Standards. The foundation of the Common Core was born from the tenets of Singapore Math.

The *Math in Focus: Singapore Math* program “teaches concepts using a concrete–pictorial–abstract learning progression to anchor learning in real-world, hands-on experiences.” It is supported by the integration of eBooks, Interactive Whiteboard activities, online student activities, online manipulatives, and a bar modeling app. Materials from *Math in Focus* are adapted from *My Pals are Here! Maths*, the most popular series in Singapore schools.

Principal author Dr. Fong Ho Kheong described the *Math in Focus* program in greater detail, explaining how it adopted both Eastern and Western approaches to critical and creative thinking,

The Eastern style of teaching focuses on drill and practice to ensure mastery of facts, computation, and problem-solving skills. The approach is related to Piaget’s cognitive learning theory, which states that it is not sufficient to just assimilate ideas but also to accommodate ideas learned through drill, practice, and reflection. The Western approach complements this structured style of learning through peer interaction to stimulate critical, enquiry-based, and creative thinking.

Grades K-2

2014-15 will be a year of transition as we introduce *Math in Focus* in the upper elementary grades while implementing the Singapore-based Common Core in Kindergarten through 2nd grade.

We will use the Modules as a *guide and reference* to help us continue our work to align our curriculum to the Common Core in grades K-2. This alignment with the new standards will provide a smooth transition to *Math in Focus*. We feel this dual method brings many implementation challenges; however, with careful planning, time, and support, we will be able to integrate these new approaches into our elementary program. During this transition phase next school year, we will survey parents and students to gather valuable feedback on our efforts and progress. Additionally, we plan to conduct several math parent night events to introduce the new programs. Our goal will be to push the *Math in Focus* program down to the primary grades over time. Data collected in the next school year will help inform the pace and strategy of this next phase.

Recommendations to Mr. Giarrizzo and the Board of Education

Below were the specific short and long-term recommendations under consideration.

1. Implement *Math-in-Focus: Singapore Math* in grades 3-5
2. Develop a Common Core aligned scope and sequence using the Modules as a reference to personalize the learning experiences in grades K-2
3. Transform *Math Textbook Review Team* to the Math Advisory Group, with its purpose to provide continuous feedback, support, and advice to the district on Math programs and learning experiences for students and teachers
4. Allocate a portion of Federal grant money and district budget funds to math professional development over the next few years
5. Seek assistance from neighbors using MIF: Bedford, Pleasantville, Rye-Neck
6. Expand the Elementary Staff Developer position (0.5 to 1.0) – an essential element for necessary teacher support, professional development, and growth
7. Provide unit and lesson design professional development for all elementary grades
8. Design common math assessments in grades K-5
9. Survey parents and students to gather valuable feedback on our efforts and progress
10. Conduct parent math nights in the fall to introduce the programs

Grades 6-8

While our 6-8 math program already provides a rich, engaging, and diverse learning experience for all children, we will continue to refine our Common Core aligned scope and sequence and personalize the learning experiences to Pelham in grades 6-8. Furthermore, we will extend our efforts to examine and review secondary math textbooks and programs next year. We will pay particular attention to a transition from *Math in Focus* to the middle school years. We still have a commitment to moving towards a middle level text series in the future as we continue our study.

Words of Appreciation

We would like to thank each member of the Math Textbook Review Team for their professionalism, flexibility, resilience, and commitment to excellence for all our children.

Kate Alix	Meryeme Gashi	Jeneane Salerno
Christina Altero	Priscilla Goldsack	Alissa Schaps
Lisa Buzin	Emily Kayser	Missy Schluter
Claire Cavalli	Joanne Lombardi	Diana St. John
Kevin Clune	Katie Marra	Nicky Starvatow
Jennifer Denet	Nancy Montano	Christen Williams
Debbie Doherty	Laura Pelin	
Trish Galloway	Jenny Polsky	

A very special thanks to Elementary Math Staff Developer Mrs. Beth Finkelstein and Secondary Math Supervisor Mrs. Jessica Vitale for their exceptional leadership throughout the entire process. We greatly appreciate Mr. Giarrizzo and the School Board's guidance, support, and desire to ensure we provide all our children and teachers with the resources and materials necessary for continued success.

I wish you and your family a safe, healthy, and wonderful summer!

Sincerely,



Steven M. Garcia, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Personnel