

Changes in Schools

By Gail Malay

Superintendent, Lake Havasu Unified School District #1

I sometimes hear voters and our representatives in political office make statements that schools need to change. Well, we are, and I would like to share with you our math initiative.

Looking at our data (how our students are doing) we found too many high school students were struggling with algebra. Algebra is a requirement for graduation. The State recently increased the math requirement for graduation starting with the class of 2013.



Superintendent Malay

In order to have a more rigorous curriculum we start in elementary school. This year we have changed our philosophy...we are doing less and doing it more in-depth. The reason is we want to make sure students understand mathematics before they leave elementary school.

Recently, I was observing mathematics instruction in some elementary classrooms. Students are doing a lot more talking about "how" they arrived at their answers. The teacher was explaining there is more than one way to do a math problem.

We know students must have their

math facts memorized in order to do well in algebra. They must also understand fractions. We have been helping some of our teachers understand fractions better and sharing the most effective practices in helping students with that understanding.

Middle School and High School math teachers have been getting together on Saturday mornings to discuss how we improve our results at the secondary level. The middle schools have agreed their curriculum must be more rigorous. Our goal is to increase the number of students taking algebra at the eighth grade level. All students must have at least pre-algebra before going to the high school if they are going to be on track to graduate.

We have to change the thinking we often hear from parents...*I never did well in math when I was in school.* If successful adults will reinforce with young people how important math is and it is a subject worth learning that will help us be more successful. When I am in classrooms I talk with students about how math is used in everyday life. Our teachers also teach the relevance of learning math skills.

Our staff knows math is a gateway class to higher paying jobs. We want our students to graduate with a skills

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set that will allow them to fulfill their dreams and keep as many options open as possible.

In addition, to working on math content, we have also been continuously working on improving instruction. All of our classrooms have objectives posted. Objectives share with the student what we are learning. Research (and common sense) shows when you tell students what they are suppose to learn, their chances of learning the information are increased.

We want our students engaged. When you visit any classroom K-12 you will see the use of individual white boards...this allows all students to participate. We do a lot more small group work. Again, this technique allows for much more participation. Learning has to be active, not passive.

Teachers share out loud with students what they are thinking during a lesson. A lesson is made up of three main parts: I do (the teacher teaches), We do (students are guided and given immediate feedback with the new learning) and You do (students now practice the learning). We believe

teachers are facilitators . . . making learning easier.

Learning is still hard work—that is why attendance is so important. Students cannot learn if they are not in school. Our community has a considerable amount of mobility, which creates a challenge for educators when students move here and are behind. We have put interventions in place for reading; right now we do not have the resources to put enough interventions in place for math. Families will have to help.

A successful education/learning experience is made up of many factors: a good school system, willing students, supportive families and communities. Lake Havasu Unified School District is committed to doing our part.

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