

CMC Recommendations for Revision of Draft Math Policy based on membership feedback:

1. A standards revision process needs to involve stakeholders. Most particularly, the stakeholders should represent teachers and other educators who have been working to teach the standards for the last 10 years - they have a deeper understanding of the current limitations of our standards and the gaps that need to be addressed. Feedback and recommendations from the stakeholder group need to be honored and seriously considered in the revision process. The members of CMC expressed a need for the development of a transparent decision making process with demonstrated effort by the SBE to be used to solicit feedback. This concern comes as a direct result of the unexpected actions on July 8, 2008, at the SBE meeting.
2. Teacher Preparation programs need to be revised to increase the amount of mathematics content and best practice instructional strategies required for strong mathematics implementation. Our current credentialing program reflects an era where mathematics was not taught at the depth needed for today's students. Now, more than ever students need a full understanding of mathematics to function at a high level in our society. Instead, we are creating a generation with a great dislike of the subject who cannot see its relevance in our world. This is unacceptable. A dual focus of content knowledge and effective instructional strategies for incoming K-12 teachers is critical.
3. The dearth of professional development in mathematics was a common concern from our members. And, while there was agreement with the focus on mathematics content and pedagogy for upper elementary and middle school teachers and administrators, it still misses the mark. The feedback we received from our members suggested that the professional development focus for our state should be ongoing and available. Staff development should encompass content, pedagogy and math coaching as a means of improving instruction at all grade levels and of reducing the need over all for intervention and for algebra readiness programs. The focus on content was defined as developing number sense, critical thinking and problem solving. The rapid pace that the elementary program must work at to teach all of the standards has reduced mastery of number sense to arithmetic, thus crumbling the foundation for successful completion of algebra. Pedagogy included instructional strategies that lead students from the conceptual level of understanding to representation and finally to abstract experiences.
4. Our members were intrigued with the notion of an Algebra Success Plan. But without further details of how it would be developed, who would be responsible to develop it (would we ask elementary teachers who don't have a full understanding of Algebra 1 to figure out that plan?) and a variety of researched informed pathways to be considered for the implementation of the plan, the fear was that this would become a paperwork hurdle. If the recommendation for an Algebra Success Plan moves forward, it needs to be developed more clearly to ensure that is a helpful strategy rather than a time waster.
5. Our members support an accountability system that focuses on student growth. However, that kind of system would require a rethinking of assessment in our state.

There was clear direction that a multiple choice only format is limiting in many ways and is questionable at best in determining what students actually know about mathematics. We have suggested that California look to other states and countries that are experiencing success in assessing student growth. The focus on growth of student seems more relevant to the goals of education than that of successfully hitting an arbitrary target for proficiency as is currently prescribed. Too many schools can show great increases in test scores, and yet become program improvement schools because they did not hit an identified target. While we always want improvement, why would we not celebrate success when it occurs?