

A friend sent me a math question today. It read like this:

“Peter’s age is five more than triple Philip’s age. How much money does Peter have?”

Think about it. Write an algebraic equation representing the answer.

This question is from the second page of the eighth grade college prep math packet in our district. It was brought to my attention by a parent whose son already struggles in math. Should typos in questions be caught and corrected before distribution? Does it matter that it's just a summer math packet? What if it was a question in a graded assessment? What if it was in a fifth grade placement exam? At what point is it more than just a typo? It does matter, especially when our district has a policy of not allowing access to tests, and there have been errors that make a difference.

But I am not here to nitpick math packet typos. I am here to present to you comments and concerns regarding bigger issues within the math program. If you follow social media and talk among parents in the community, you already know that math placement and math levels have been widely discussed recently, especially as the school year ended. The South Orange Maplewood Parents for Quality Education group posted an online google doc at the end of June, where community members have commented over the last month. We present to you tonight a few of the highlights of the comments that are on the google doc. We will email the full comments to all board members later this evening. Here are the highlights:

1. Policies and procedure, and communication. There should be easy-to-understand documentation, communicated directly to parents, that explains math levels. This should include what is learned in each level, by grade, and the process for level changes year to year. We need clear explanations regarding how level placements are made. There should also be a clear procedure communicated to parents for level placement **appeals**. While there is an appeal process described in the district policy manual, the dates are vague, and the appeal process is not adhered to by administrators.

Level placement and step-up program information (such as dates, times, and locations) is not given to parents with enough time for parents to be able to consider placement decisions. Parents need to schedule the child’s summer activities well in advance of the summer. Students are left out of step up programs because of scheduling issues. Placement and programming letters should be distributed to parents in **early spring**. Parents’ preference should drive placement until/unless a child shows he/she cannot handle a specific class. Whatever happened to **Contract for Choice**?

There are also extensive delays in, or complete lack of, response by supervisors when parents contact them. The excuse used for long delays in responding to parents should **not** be that they received “hundreds of emails.” If hundreds of emails are being received, there is an obvious problem in proactive communication of policy and procedure.

The fifth grade placement test. Parents want transparency regarding the fifth grade placement test. Parents should be informed early in the fifth grade year, explaining the process and procedure for placement, the test, and its impact. The “multiple measures” used for placement are unclear in terms of

weight and importance. While the District says grades and recommendations are important, in the end, it all seems to hinge on one **unannounced** test. In addition, parents want **access** to the tests. Who creates them, and why can't they be seen?

Calculus. Provide an opportunity for all interested Honors students to be able to graduate from CHS with a Calculus course. Create greater access to Algebra 2 and Pre-Calculus so that students will be able to take Calculus by senior year.

Project Ahead. Project Ahead is an extra math support class that students are assigned to, based on low standardized test scores. It is supposed to provide curriculum support and review of concepts, and it is given separately from the student's regular math class. It **should not be a graded** class that a struggling math student can fail. There needs to be an established curriculum for this course.

A few additional items. Please consider the upcoming class years that **lost pull-out and math enrichment** in the elementary grades, due to budget cuts. These students have had no access to anything but grade-wide math. Get the process right for them as they go to middle school. Finally, please consider that eighth grade advanced honors classes should be taught in the middle school, rather than the high school, especially given the upcoming lengthening of the middle school day.

Thank you.