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Mathematics – We're Counting on Help from Parents

By Barbara Snyder M.A. Ed.

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Please don't give your child an excuse to dislike math by making comments about your own school experiences with it or your distaste for it. It is important for parents to be positive, active supporters of the learning process to help encourage a child. A parent's attitude can and will influence that of their offspring. Don't undermine your child's potential by exposing them to your prejudice toward subjects in school that may have given you difficulty.

Parents need to be aware of and consider the following five areas that relate to mathematics in today's schools. Giving these ideas some time and thought can provide an overview of the current situation and the role that parents can play in assisting their children in becoming successful in mathematics.

1) Think about how mathematics has changed over the past few decades. Think about how there has been, and rightfully so, a greater emphasis on mathematics and science. In our technological world there is an ever greater need for students to graduate in those fields, and that need will not go away. In fact, the future top careers will call students being prepared with the skills that they learn in their math and science classrooms. Guidance in career direction from parents into those fields can be encouraging to youngsters.

2) A parent does not have to be a "math wiz" to help a child become interested in mathematics at an early age. The many things that parents can do at home include the following general categories that lend themselves to games and activities: counting games, using common household items; rhyme songs about numbers, helping to reinforce prior knowledge; grocery store shopping adventures; trip planning, exploring distance and gas mileage, coin counting, helping to recognize value and basic facts; probability, as in heads/tails predictions; and making flash cards to reinforce basic math facts. There are many more categories and dozens of activities for each category that can be easily done at home. Parents can learn of these many activities from the classroom teacher, parent booklets, and the internet.

3) If parents visit a math class in today's schools, they will see some differences in the math instruction compared to when they attended. The approach to mathematics has undergone some positive

changes that parents should be aware of. There is an emphasis on the following: the different ways in which a problem can be solved; skills concepts, using mathematical language and knowing why; students as risk takers, participating without fear; talking and writing about mathematics, keeping math journals; working in groups or with a partner; more frequent formal assessments; mental math, reinforcing the need to be able to do math without paper and pencil; and more use of computers and calculators to support math.

4) Calculators are readily available for students in their math classes. However, the trained professional knows when to allow calculator use and when not to. Students need to know basic facts and not solely rely on a calculators, charts, or cards. However, these aids can be used to assist in the learning and memorization of the essentials of math. Students in advanced math classes will use calculators on a more frequent basis to save time in some of the computations. Sure they could do the

computations by hand, but they can get to the heart of matter more quickly with a shortcut. The bottom line is that teachers don't want students to take that shortcut until they have an understanding of how to do the mathematical operation (the long way) without the calculator.

5) Consider the two subjects in which student most often have homework – reading and mathematics. Think about the reasons for and benefits from homework assignments: practices prior learning; helps develop mastery; builds self discipline; encourages time management; teaches independent work; and teaches responsibility for one's own learning. These are lofty goals which can be attained through parent support. Research tells us that students who spend more time on homework will be more successful in school. The parents' job is to monitor the homework time and to help the student have a good attitude about it. It shouldn't be thought of as a punishment, nor should it be a battle between parent and child to get it done.

These are just a few things that parents should consider. Again, parents should visit the school and become familiar with the state mathematics standards. They should try to everyday math at home and in the car and encourage more involvement in technology. All of these things can be positive steps in optimizing the chances for student success in mathematics. Educators are counting on parents to play a significant role in supporting the educational process for children.

You can find the acclaimed series "Helping Your Child Learn" at http://www.sbmag.org/Help_Your_Child_Learn

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Euler's Identity and the Eucalculus

By Charles Douglas Wehner

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People find mathematics – particularly higher mathematics – difficult. This is perhaps due to a lack of VISUAL IMAGERY with which to bring the concepts to life.

As a professional technical author, I decided to use graphical techniques to simplify the understanding of such things as Euler's equation.

This allowed me to guide the reader into a study of the Fractional Factorials – which Euler called the "GAMMA FUNCTION" – and introduce a brand–new extension to the Calculus. This I call the Eucalculus.

But one does not rush headlong into uncharted territory. Warnings are issued that there may be pitfalls in the established Art of mathematics, let alone in this cutting–edge development.

See <http://www.wehner.org/euler/>

Charles Douglas Wehner

Born in 1944, Charles Wehner is an electronics design engineer and technical author working in so many fields linked to electronics that he was obliged to investigate the fundamentals of the mathematics that he used.

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