



Family Information – February, 2017

Instruction

Grades K – 4 will be moving into the “B” chapters soon after midyear. This generally indicates that the number-concept instruction from the first half of the year shifts to application of those concepts in measurement, geometry, graphing, money, and time. We cover these concepts in accordance with the PA Core Standards, so not every grade level is instructed in all those topics equally. There may be some additional number-concept instruction after midyear, but it will always build upon skills that were previously introduced. Procedural skill is still a goal, but the application of calculations is equally as important.

Math in Focus instruction is built around problem solving. You may have noticed that standard “clue words” don’t always lead to a single operation in problem solving. Students are challenged to dig deep into the meaning of the problem before planning a strategy for solving it. This approach will help students become much more powerful problem solvers.

In grades 3 and 4, there may be more shifting or compacting of chapter instruction in the “B” chapters, allowing teachers to cover key topics before the PSSA testing occurs at the end of April. We will continue normal instruction up through, during, and after the PSSAs. The best preparation for state testing is a solid foundation of skills (rooted in conceptual understanding) and reasoning, all of which are the goals of *Math in Focus* instruction.

Assessment

The assessments in *Math in Focus* test for deep understanding of the chapter content. Students are asked to demonstrate procedural skills as well as apply content understanding in a variety of forms. This builds flexibility in computation and in reasoning, which increases student success in solving complex problems.

Assessments measure mastery at 3 levels: Basic (tests ability to perform computation and basic problem solving without the support of concrete materials), Direct Application (tests ability to directly apply skill and understanding in routine situations), and Novel Application (tests ability to apply concepts in ways not directly applied from previous exposure).

During implementation, we are experiencing some growing pains with regard to the increase in critical thinking expectations. This is normal and understandable. Methacton chose to adopt *Math in Focus* because of its emphasis on teaching students why math concepts work. We are confident that this level of instruction will benefit our students moving beyond elementary math classes. Teachers at all levels, are already seeing growth in the level of reasoning with unknown values, which is the first step in working with algebraic concepts.

Because we recognize the challenge involved in the *Math in Focus* assessments, retesting may be offered after additional reteaching to give students another opportunity to demonstrate their growth in understanding the chapter content. In this case, your child’s teacher will send home both tests and indicate the final score being used for grading purposes.

Helping at Home

Use resources to help:

- Think Central has online access to the student book for you to see how concepts are approached (via your child’s login). You may also use previous student book problems for additional home review.
- www.methacton.org/mathinfocus has information about the *Math in Focus* resource and parent videos by chapter to inform you of the key mathematical concepts being taught. There are also bar modeling videos that walk you through sample problems so that you can understand better how the bar model pictorial representation is used to aide students in understanding problem solving situations.

Work with your child

- Ask your child’s teacher for suggestions on how to best support your child at home.
- Practice math facts with your child. A student who is fluent with math facts is able to devote more effort in reasoning during problem solving.
- Contact your child’s teacher if you see/hear frustration during homework/reviewing for a test.

Attend the upcoming *Math in Focus* “**Parent University**”

- This will be held on **March 8th, from 6:30 – 8:00 PM**, in the **Arcola auditorium**.
- This meeting will be interactive and informative and will be delivered by a Math in Focus trainer. The content will include topics from the teaching and learning taking place in the 2nd half of the year.
- In addition to the trainer, there will be Methacton teachers of each grade level K- 4 attending, as well as our elementary math support specialists, to answer your grade-level specific questions.

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