

8TH GRADE ALGEBRA

BACKGROUND

There is considerable controversy escalating over 8th grade Algebra 1 for all students and there is a chance the state education leadership will lower the 8th grade standards. This is because of the federal requirement under the No Child Left Behind Act that all 8th grade students be tested on 8th grade standards as defined by the State of California. In California that means Algebra 1. However, California has been using two math courses and two different tests for the 8th grade— one for Algebra 1 and the other for an easier course called General Math which tests 6th and 7th grade math standards.

WHAT DO WE DO?

- 1) We should not perpetuate a two-track system of high standards for some students and lower standards and expectations for the rest. State course taking data shows that students in the lower level 8th grade math courses are disproportionately minorities and economically disadvantaged students.
- 2) Algebra 1 is a gatekeeper course to access Geometry, Algebra 2 and Probability and Statistics which are necessary to enter college and the work force. This must begin no later than the 8th grade, otherwise the students fall too far behind to complete the required course sequence to enter college. More focus is needed in the earlier grades to support struggling students and to provide them with the foundational pre-algebra skills.
- 3) We must stay the course and support the brave step that California took several years ago to require that 8th grade math be based on Algebra 1 standards only. This set in motion a huge increase in the number, and diversity, of students taking Algebra in the 8th grade. From 2003 to 2007, the number of students taking Algebra I increased by 88,000 students, while the number of students taking General Math decreased by 66,000. The fact that the pool of students taking Algebra increased by 58 percent shows that students can and will rise to the challenge. Students placed in lower level course have not increased their proficiency; they have remained at about 23 percent proficient over the five year period.

“At my school, all of our 8th graders take at minimum Algebra 1. To expect anything less is a disservice to our kids. My students are all disadvantaged minority kids and we expect them to excel academically. In four years we have gone from two 8th graders being proficient in Algebra 1 to more than 80% proficient today. We don’t even offer a general math course.”

Jorge Lopez, Executive Director
Oakland Charter Academy
CBEE Foundation Honor Roll School

We must keep the expectations high and stay the course that all students take Algebra in the 8th grade.

The following link provides 8th grade math data over time: <http://jftk-ca.org/special/8thgrmath>