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Newport-Mesa signs off on new math curriculum for sixth through eighth grades



A truck with a message opposing the Swun Math program was parked outside a Newport-Mesa Unified School District board meeting in 2016. (File Photo)

By HANNAH FRY | STAFF WRITER
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Newport-Mesa Unified School District trustees unanimously signed off Tuesday on new math materials for grades six through eight, replacing Swun Math for sixth-graders. Teachers and parents have long complained that the Swun program is full of errors.

Starting next school year, sixth through eighth grades will use [Illustrative Mathematics](#), a curriculum that implements Common Core State Standards that focus less on memorization and more on understanding the concepts of solving a math problem and real-world applications, according to educators.

The trustees' vote officially removes Swun Math from Newport-Mesa classrooms. The district implemented the program in kindergarten through sixth grade in 2013 but began moving away from it last year following complaints from teachers and parents about typos and other errors in the materials.

In May 2017, trustees approved the Math Learning Center's [Bridges in Mathematics](#) curriculum for kindergarten through fifth grade.

At the time, district officials held off on replacing the Swun sixth-grade program to allow other programs to be piloted in collaboration with middle school teachers.

In August, Newport-Mesa began evaluating and piloting Open-Up Resources' Illustrative Mathematics and Agile Mind's Middle School Mathematics in search of a new curriculum for grades six through eight. After seven months, teachers chose Illustrative Mathematics as the preferred program, according to the district.

Stephanie Marvicsin, a seventh-grade math teacher at Costa Mesa Middle School, piloted the materials in her class and said they help students with varying math skills understand the concepts.

"This curriculum is brilliantly written," Marvicsin told trustees. "After teaching this program, I really felt it met the learning needs of our students."

With previous math materials that focused on memorizing formulas, students often would ask why they were learning certain concepts and how those ideas could be used outside the classroom, teachers said. Now, they said, students can more easily apply math taught in the classroom to real-world activities such as cooking and shopping when percentage calculations and fractions are used.

"It's not about the formula, but instead students understand how to use what they already know to answer a question," said Emy Samir, a seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher at Corona del Mar Middle School.

Teachers who have not used Illustrative Mathematics are expected to be trained in the new curriculum over the summer, officials said.

It isn't clear how much the district is spending on the new program.

Emergency app

The school board voted 6-0 on Tuesday to expand to all district campuses the use of a smartphone app to communicate with school officials and police during emergencies.

The Titan Health & Security Technologies app, which has been used at district high schools the past three years, will be accessible to students, parents, teachers and administrators at all schools for two years, beginning in the fall.

Trustee Karen Yelsey did not participate in the vote because she is on the company's board of advisors.

The Titan app enables students or staff members with an iPhone or Android smartphone to transmit emergency alerts with the touch of a button.

Students can specify the type of activity occurring, such as a stranger or weapon on campus or drug use, said Titan founder Vic Merjanian.

The [app was first piloted](#) in Newport-Mesa at Corona del Mar High School in 2014.

Merjanian, a Cdm alumnus, said he offered the program to the district for free as a way to give back to the community.

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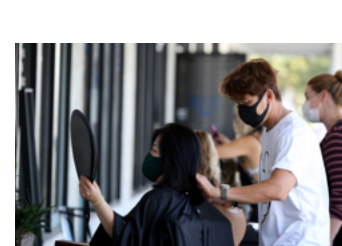
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Hannah Fry is a Metro reporter covering breaking news in California. She joined Times Community News in Orange County in 2013 where she covered education, Newport Beach city hall, crime and courts. She is a native of Orange County and attended Chapman University, where she was the editor-in-chief of the college newspaper, the Panther.

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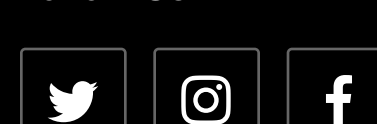
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