

Bend-La Pine Schools
Bend, OR 97703
January 12, 2017

Regular Meeting 4:00 p.m.

The Board of Directors of Bend-La Pine Schools will meet in a regular meeting on January 12, 2017 at 4:00 p.m. in room 314 of the Education Center, 520 NW Wall Street, Bend, OR.

Agenda

Call to Order	Chair Kinkade
Pledge of Allegiance	Cheri Helt
Review of Agenda	Chair Kinkade
<i>Public Input</i> This is the time provided for individuals to address the Board. Visitors who wish to speak must sign up prior to the beginning of the meeting on the sign-up sheet provided. Please state your name and topic when you address the Board.	Chair Kinkade

Discussion

Ends Report / Superintendent Evaluation	Chair Kinkade & Superintendent Mikalson
Bond Recommendation : May 16, 2017 Election	Chair Kinkade & Superintendent Mikalson

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – December 13, 2016 Reference: ORS 192.650 and ORS 332.057	Chair Kinkade
Approval of Personnel Recommendations Reference: ORS 332.505	Deputy Superintendent Jay Mathisen

Reports

Financial Report	Zhai Logan
Superintendent's Spotlight of Success : Education Foundation	Superintendent Mikalson

Action Items

Board Member Commitment to the Education Foundation	Chair Kinkade
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Board Work Plan

Parent Engagement (article link: When Parents are the Ones Getting Schooled by the Common Core)	Chair Kinkade
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Board Comments

Adjourn

Accessible Meeting / Alternate Format Notification

This meeting location is accessible. Please contact Bend-La Pine Schools at 541-355-1001 if you need accommodation to participate in the board meeting. Please call at least three days prior to the scheduled meeting date. Thank you.

Bend-La Pine Schools
Bend, OR 97703
January 10, 2017

Executive Session 4:30 p.m.
Regular Meeting Immediately Following

The Board of Directors of Bend-La Pine Schools will meet in an executive session on January 10, 2017 at 4:30 p.m. under ORS 192.660(2)(i) and (2)(f) followed by a regular meeting in room 314 of the Education Center, 520 NW Wall Street, Bend, OR.

Agenda

Call to Order	Chair Kinkade
Pledge of Allegiance	Cheri Helt
Review of Agenda	Chair Kinkade
<i>Public Input</i> This is the time provided for individuals to address the Board. Visitors who wish to speak must sign up prior to the beginning of the meeting on the sign-up sheet provided. Please state your name and topic when you address the Board.	Chair Kinkade
Superintendent's Spotlight of Success : Education Foundation	Superintendent Mikalson

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – December 13, 2016 Reference: ORS 192.650 and ORS 332.057	Chair Kinkade
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Action Items

Board Member Commitment to the Education Foundation	Chair Kinkade
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Reports

Financial Report	Brad Henry & Zhai Logan
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Discussion

Bond Recommendation : May 16, 2017 Election	Chair Kinkade & Superintendent Mikalson
Ends Report / Superintendent Evaluation	Chair Kinkade & Superintendent Mikalson
Parent Engagement (article link: When Parents are the Ones Getting Schooled by the Common Core)	Chair Kinkade

Board Comments

Adjourn

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**Bend-La Pine Schools
Bend, OR**

The Board of Director of Bend-La Pine Schools met in a regular meeting on December 13, 2016 at the Education Center, 520 NW Wall Street, Bend, OR 97703.

Board Members Present

Peggy Kinkade
Nori Juba
Andy High
Stuart Young
Julie Craig
Ron Gallinat
Cheri Helt *arrived at 5:20 p.m.*

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 p.m. by Chair Kinkade. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Review of Agenda

Chair Kinkade noted the updated agenda which included a discussion about the Budget Committee.

Public Input

Marilyn Burwell shared a handout with the board regarding Measure 98 including key questions and answers. Burwell asked that the board agenda each month include the number of homeless students in the district. She noted FAN would be an excellent resource to provide this information. Research shows that homeless students are at risk of not graduating and/or becoming incarcerated. Burwell said there are state funds that are designated to reduce incarceration rates and encouraged board members to talk with local law enforcement and find out how schools can access some of those dollars for at risk students. Chair Kinkade thanked Burwell.

Spotlight of Success

Superintendent Mikalson thanked Burwell for her advocacy. Mikalson then introduced Mark Molner, current coordinator for the district's Chinese teacher exchange program. Molner introduced three teachers from China who are teaching at Bend Senior High, Mt. View High and Sky View Middle School. Each of the teachers shared a bit about their experiences teaching and what they are working on in their classrooms this school year. Abigail, a student at Bend Senior High, shared about her experiences being a student in the Mandarin class over the past year and a half and about her travels to China this past summer where she enjoyed the culture and was able to improve her speaking skills.

Callie Pfister, Bend-La Pine teacher who traveled to China the past year and taught shared about her experiences and what she was able to bring back to her classroom. Pfister thanked the district and board for the support of the exchange program. Molner noted Doug and Diane Brown, teachers at Bend Senior High, will be leaving to teach in China in February.

Molner shared about the Mandarin Exchange program and the Confucius Classrooms that just started in the district this year. The Confucius Classroom program is fully supported by the Chinese Government and this is the first-year Confucius teachers have taught in the district. Molner would like to see the programs continue and expand. Molner said he has enjoyed his time as coordinator but is passing the torch to a soon-to-be-hired replacement and is hopeful for continued success.

Superintendent Mikalson thanked Molner for his contribution and work to bring more and more teachers to our schools, and sending district teachers to China. Nori Juba asked what district and Chinese teachers are learning from their teaching time in foreign countries. Molner said, for him, much of the experience of teaching in China

was about culture and he came home thinking about ways to raise the bar and challenge our students to do more. Pfister said she was impressed with how much value is placed on education and the efforts families will go to in order to support their children. She noted Chinese classrooms are leveled, which provided a very different classroom teaching experience for her. Cheri Helt asked if Molner or Pfister thought there would be any sort of shift in the near future to Chinese classrooms being more about learning opportunities for students. Molner felt that parents and teachers understand the need for that shift, but they are up against history and tradition. Chair Kinkade thanked all for sharing about their experiences.

Consent Agenda

Chair Kinkade amended the minutes on page four, regarding the 2016-17 Board Work Plan, to read that the chair and co-chair will focus on public agency outreach, while other board members work to connect with adopted schools and new administrators as agreed upon. **Andy High moved to approve the minutes as amended. Ron Gallinat seconded to motion. Unanimous approval.**

Action Items

2016-17 Board Work Plan

Chair Kinkade noted the updates and proposed calendar she and Andy High developed since the last version. Timeline by month include:

- January – Parent engagement with emphasis homework
- February – Education advocacy
- March – Charter position paper
- April – Board self-evaluation

Kinkade asked for any feedback or suggestions. High shared his appreciation for the work done thus far to create this template and structure. He suggested this work plan be an 18-month plan and adjusted as needed. Cheri Helt agreed with High and suggested an annual review of dates, but not structure. **Stuart Young moved to adopt the 2016-17 Board Work Plan as an 18-month plan with a review period at the beginning of the next school year. Ron Gallinat seconded the motion. Unanimous approval.**

OSBA 2017-18 Legislative Priorities and Policies Resolution

Chair Kinkade summarized the board's discussion from the last board meeting including High's reservations to the resolution because of how broadly it is written. Kinkade thanked Cheri Helt for her work as a member of the Legislative Policy Committee.

Kinkade shared her reservations about the resolution, and while it is not perfect, it does provide a strong framework with an emphasis on what OSBA should advocate for. Kinkade feels OSBA has become more credible in the legislature and they are focusing on the right things in their advocacy efforts. This resolution provides a good framework she is supportive. Stuart Young agreed with Kinkade, he will support the resolution and feels it is a good platform and addresses the needs of the state, however, does lack specifics in certain areas. Ron Gallinat agreed and is supportive as well. High added his support but continues to have the same reservations he stated in the last meeting.

Nori Juba asked what happens if a majority of districts support or do not support the resolution. Helt said the document was written to direct lobbyists to advocate on behalf of the state. If it is not supported by a majority of districts, then OSBA would not advocate. She explained the work of the LPC and how the document was created and feels OSBA is doing good work and, at the same time, understands and respects the concerns and reservations mentioned. Juba asked who from OSBA will be the main spokesperson. High said Jim Greene, OSBA's Executive Director, but noted Greene does not have a vote in the legislature. **Young moved to approve the OSBA 2017-18 Legislative Priorities and Policies Resolution as written. Ron Gallinat seconded the motion. Nori Juba abstained from the vote. Board approval with six votes in favor.**

Reports

Sites & Facilities : Final Report

Brad Henry reviewed the history of the Sites & Facility review process. The plan looks at facilities, needs and enrollment projections for a planning horizon of 20 years. The district refreshes the plan every five to six years, it was last refreshed in 2010 with small updates in 2012 prior to the 2013 bond levy.

In the fall of 2015 the Sites and Facilities Committee looked at the needs in current facilities, and enrollment projections provided by Portland State. An initial report was created and provided to the board in May 2016. Since that time, a smaller team has been working to narrow the list of nearly 800 projects, to what is needed within the next five to six years. The project list was narrowed down to just over 150 projects, including a new high school and new elementary school. Henry provided the complete project list to the board and added it will also be available on the district's website.

Henry noted the two biggest projects are a new high school and elementary school. Current district high schools are over capacity and a new, full comprehensive high school, could potentially open with 1,400 students. The new high school would be located in South East Bend. Another elementary school is needed and the areas of North East and North West Bend provide the greatest need as of now. He said the district will wait for October 2017 enrollment and available land to make the final location decision. Other major projects include a full renovation at Pilot Butte Middle School, an interior remodel at Amity Creek Magnet at Thompson Elementary, and multi-use areas would be added at Juniper, Bear Creek and Jewell Elementary.

Andy High asked about size and potential cost of the new high school. Mike Tiller said the initial plan is to build a 260,000-square foot high school and a median price range of \$280 per square foot was used to estimate construction costs. This cost is a hard construction cost and does not include off site, ADA, etc. Julie Craig asked how long the remodel at Pilot Butte Middle School could take. Tiller said a majority, if not all of the work, would be done in the summer months while school is not in session.

Henry explained there really is only one way in the state of Oregon to fund these types of projects, which is done through a bond levy. The committee recommends that the board place a bond measure on the May 16, 2017 general election ballot for \$268.3 million .

Cheri Helt asked about safety upgrades. Henry said secure entries are the main focus of upgrades, noting the list of projects includes those locations that will be updated. Other safety recommendations and projects came from a safety consultant's evaluation.

Chair Kinkade asked how the original list of 800 projects were reviewed and paired down to the recommended list. Henry said the immediate needs within the next five to ten years gave priority. Kinkade said the report is now public and asked all board members to review and be prepared in January to take action on the recommendation made by staff.

Superintendent Mikalson thanked the board, district staff and sites and facilities committee members for their work and appreciates the proactive measures to do what is best for students and the community. 500 students joined the district this school year and from his seat, every project list presented tonight must be addressed as soon as possible. He is proud of this work and is confident in the recommendation. Chair Kinkade agreed and thanked all involved for their work and time.

Executive Limitation 6 – Staff Evaluation

Superintendent Mikalson reviewed Executive Limitation 6 – Staff Evaluation policy monitoring report in the board packet and the reporting process that has taken place over the past year and tonight completes the first full cycle of executive limitation reporting. Mikalson reviewed the work of district staff and the evolution of the evaluation of staff in various employee groups. He noted the use of student surveys is something he feels there is room to improve upon and that data could be used to help teachers in their goal setting process. Mikalson offered to answer any questions.

Cheri Helt shared her appreciation of the work done with the PASS program and asked if there are plans to continue the PASS beyond the current MOU. Mikalson reviewed the work that continues to take place between district and union leadership in a collective effort to continue to move and grow the PASS program. One of the challenges is getting more access to more teachers, specifically around logistics and time.

Chair Kinkade thanked Mikalson for the report and is appreciative of the collaborative work being done with district and union leadership.

Discussion

2016 OSBA Convention Reflections

Chair Kinkade asked any board members to share about the OSBA Convention all board members attended in November 2016.

Ron Gallinat attended a session about board-staff relationships, working with bargaining groups, etc. and was interested to hear how various districts approached negotiations. He is thankful and appreciative of the relationships the district has with our unions and the ability to work through difficult conversations.

Kinkade attended a session on student voice in bond planning and appreciated the perspective students brought to the programming process of a new school. With the potential of a new high school, the district has a unique opportunity to include students in the programming and focus on the importance of fostering an atmosphere for students to share about what they value and desire in a school.

Andy High felt the two general session keynote speakers were excellent. Julie Craig agreed and appreciated the perspective and inspiration each brought. She added the building support for our schools academy was interesting and would like to explore the idea in our district as a way to engage the community and invite them to learn more about what the district is doing. Cheri Helt agreed with both High and Craig and said she attended a session on school nursing and, while there is much work to be done, our district has a great model and is far ahead of many others in the state.

Stuart Young appreciated the keynote speakers and the conversations amongst peers. The conversations emphasized the common funding struggles all districts face. He noted the growth of our district is something to embrace as it provides an opportunity to look at the future, which some districts are not able to do at this time.

Nori Juba appreciated the keynote speakers' message and thought the designing schools session was interesting as well, specifically around listening to student voice in the process. He also attended a session on performance reviews, conducted by Greater Albany School District, who had outside consultants review their district, from teaching to operations. Consultants came up with hard-hitting recommendations, which shows the value of review. Even if a district is the best in the state, there is still something to be learned and ways to continue to improve. Superintendent Mikalson agreed and noted the district's partnership with AdvancedEd and the path to have them take a deep look at the district in the same fashion as Greater Albany. Juba shared his appreciation in district leadership taking a serious look at best practices and ways to continue to improve. Kinkade agreed and shared how important it is for all to continue to learn and do their jobs better.

Budget Committee

Andy High gave an overview of the process he and Stuart Young used to consider the three applications received for the open Budget Committee seat. Melissa Allen, Troy Reinhart and Bruce Reynolds each applied and were interviewed by High and Young. High said each of the applicants were impressive and would all be a great asset to the district. Although there is only one open seat on the Budget Committee, he'd like to be able to find a way for each of them to be involved with the district. Young agreed and said he and High are prepared to bring forth a recommendation.

Chair Kinkade thanked High and Young for their time and asked for any other questions from the board. High nominated Bruce Reynolds to fill the open Budget Committee seat. Young seconded the nomination and would like to invite Reinhart and Allen to participate through the budget process in case there are future openings on the committee. Nori Juba asked the length of the term. Brad Henry said three years and Superintendent Mikalson noted Matt Hillman's term is also up and he has expressed interest in continuing to serve.

Chair Kinkade asked for a vote to appoint Bruce Reynolds to the Budget Committee. Unanimous approval.

Cheri Helt moved to reappoint Matt Hillman to the Budget Committee. Ron Gallinat seconded the motion. Unanimous approval.

Board comments

There were no board comments.

Chair Kinkade recessed the regular meeting at 7:10 p.m. and announced executive session would start after a five-minute break.

Chair Kinkade resumed and adjourned the regular meeting at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Wilson
12.13.16



HUMAN RESOURCES
Education Center
520 N.W. Wall Street
Bend, Oregon 97703-2699
(541) 355-1100
Fax: (541) 355-1109

DATE: January 5, 2017

TO: Shay Mikalson, Superintendent
Board of Directors for Bend – La Pine Schools

FROM: Jay Mathisen, Deputy Superintendent
Jon Lindsay, Director of Human Resources - Certified

RE: Administrative and Licensed Recommended Hires, Resignations, and Retirees

The Human Resource Department recommends approval of the following hires, resignations and retirees at the school board meeting on January 10, 2017. All hires are subject to successful drug testing, background check, and Oregon licensure.

CERTIFIED HIRES

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	STATUS	HIRE DATE
Janin-Brohamer, Stefanie	Music @ .05 FTE 106441	Silver Rail ES	Temporary Full-time	01/10/2017
Kulinsky, Kira	Primary 106103	High Lakes ES	Temporary	01/10/2017
Tebeau, Bryan	Social Studies	TBD	Regular 2017/18	01/10/2017
Wilhelmsen, Stacy	Primary Teacher 106103	Juniper ES	Temporary	01/10/2017

ADMINISTRATIVE RESIGNATION

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	HIRE /RESIGN DATES
Tebeau, Bryan	Assistant Principal	Bend Sr High School	07/01/2015 – 06/30/2017



HUMAN RESOURCES

Education Center

*520 N.W. Wall Street
Bend, Oregon 97703-2699
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January 5, 2017

TO: Shay Mikalson, Superintendent
Bend-La Pine School Board of Directors

FROM: Jon Lindsay, Director of Human Resources – Licensed Staff
Debbie Watkins, Director of Human Resources – Classified Staff

RE: Classified Recommended Hires and Resignations

The Human Resources Department recommends approval of the following hires and resignations at the School Board meeting on January 10, 2017

Classified Hiring

Name	Position/Posting No.	Location	Temp/Regular Position	Hire Date
Boswell, Anthony	#106489 Custodial Crew I Rover	Maintenance	Reg 8 hrs / day	12/6/16
Bryant, Shanon	#106486 Consulting Registered Nurse	Special Programs	Reg 8 hrs / day	12/21/16
Card, Bruce	#106471 Building Services Journeyman Electrician	Maintenance	Reg 8 hrs / day	12/1/16

Classified Resignations

Name	Position	Location	Resign Date
Bogue, Monica	Media Manager	Cascade	8/28/06 – 1/20/17
Boswell, Anthony	Custodial Rover I	Maintenance	12/12/16 – 12/13/16
Bryant, Julia	EA- Student Instruction	Pine Ridge	9/10/97 – 3/24/17
Laurens, Terry	Nutrition Server I	High Lakes	8/24/12 – 1/9/17
Mayfield, Kimberly	Speech Language Pathology Assistant	High Desert / Silver Rail	8/30/16 – 12/16/16
Stomner, John	Building Services Control Technician	Maintenance	2/16/05 – 1/18/17



Business Office
520 NW Wall Street
Bend, OR 97701
Phone: (541) 355-1000
Fax: (541) 355-1129

January 3, 2017

To: Mr. Shay Mikalson, Superintendent
From: Zhai Logan, Business Manager
RE: Financial update for school year 2016-17

Mr. Mikalson,

Following you will find a financial update for the 2016-17 school year. This information includes actual data through December 31, 2016, with projections to the end of the school year. As you are aware, one of the resources available for 2016-17 is the ending fund balance from 2015-16. The 2015-16 financial audit is complete and the beginning fund balance reflects where we ended the 2015-16 school year.

There are no major changes on revenue projections from the last report.

On the expenditure side, as we get more actual data from 2016-17, we are able to estimate expenditures closer and we are projecting \$200K more expenditures than the prior financial update, mainly due to costs related to recent winter storms.

We project that our fund balance at the end of 2016-17 will be \$8.8 million. As always, we will continue to work hard throughout this year to push resources into the future to help offset the higher costs of PERS rate increase in 2017-19.

Please let me know if you have questions or comments.

Zhai

Bend-La Pine Schools
Statement of Revenues and Expenditures
Fiscal Year to Date as of December 31, 2016 with projections to end of year
General Fund - Operations Sub-fund

	FY 2016-17		
	Adopted Budget	Projection to Year End	Budget Variance
Resources:			
Beginning Fund Balance	8,113,526	8,905,434	791,908
<u>Revenue</u>			
Formula revenue:			
Tax Revenue	70,835,158	70,482,732	(352,426)
State School Fund	74,054,059	75,197,726	1,143,667
Federal Forest Fees	144,250	-	(144,250)
Common School Fund	2,000,000	2,177,681	177,681
County School Fund	175,000	175,000	-
Total formula revenue	147,208,467	148,033,139	824,672
Earnings on Investments	150,000	150,000	-
Local Sources - Other	1,837,500	1,837,500	-
Intermediate Sources	2,300,000	2,300,000	-
State non-formula resources	460,000	460,000	-
Federal non-formula resources	28,000	28,000	-
Total Revenues	151,983,967	152,808,639	824,672
Total Resources	160,097,493	161,714,073	1,616,580
Expenditures:			
Salaries, payroll costs and benefits:			
Certified	53,755,339	54,704,521	(949,182)
Classified	20,376,921	20,426,787	(49,866)
Administrators and supervisors	7,159,366	7,181,478	(22,112)
All other salaries	1,978,682	2,068,682	(90,000)
Total Salaries	83,270,308	84,381,469	(1,111,161)
Payroll Costs & Benefits	41,925,581	41,650,668	274,913
Total salaries, payroll costs and benefits	125,195,889	126,032,137	(836,248)
Utilities & Purchased Svcs	16,043,448	16,123,448	(80,000)
Supplies, Texts, Tools	5,626,081	5,711,081	(85,000)
Equipment	74,480	74,480	-
Dues, Fees and Liability Insurance	806,698	806,698	-
Transfers	4,085,671	4,085,671	-
Total expenditures	151,832,267	152,833,515	(1,001,248)
Excess of Revenues over Expenditures	8,265,226	8,880,558	615,332
Fund Balance, Ending	8,265,226	8,880,558	615,332
Projected ending fund balance June 30, 2017		8,880,558	
Fund Balance as a percent of revenues	5.16%	5.49%	

The Atlantic

When Parents Are the Ones Getting Schooled by the Common Core

Grownups are hitting the books and taking classes just so they can help their kids with their math homework.



A mother helps her 6-year-old daughter with her Common Core-aligned math homework at their home in Berkeley, California.

AP Photo

ALIA WONG | AUG 5, 2015 | EDUCATION

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Like *The Atlantic*? Subscribe to [the Daily](#), our free weekday email newsletter.

“It feels like a dark time,” wrote the comedian Louis C.K. in a tweet last April. “I’m pissed,” he wrote in another, a few minutes later. C.K. was, indeed, very, very angry. And this time, it wasn’t [his own “yucky” existence](#) that was making him fume. Rather, it was a different kind of “massive stressball” irking him: the Common Core State Standards.

In his [now-famous rant](#), the middle-aged father of two lamented the controversial academic benchmarks and the accompanying onslaught of rigorous testing in New York City’s public schools, where his daughters were enrolled. Specifically, C.K. was exasperated by the Common Core’s [overhaul of math](#)—a subject his kids, he noted, once loved. “Now it makes them cry,” he tweeted, posting [pictures](#) of his then-third-grade daughter’s apparently mind-boggling homework. “Thanks standardized testing and common core!”

Yes, the cynical, self-loathing comedian was stumped by the Common Core. And if the flurry of responses [commiserating with C.K.](#) is any indication, so are thousands, if not millions, of other child-rearing adults across the United States. As [The Washington Post](#) noted last year, parents are finding themselves “flustered” by their inability to comprehend their kids’ homework. The Common Core standards stress “[the application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills](#)” in math and reading and, [although they technically don’t prescribe curriculum](#), they have incentivized schools to adopt new materials and instructional tactics designed to be more in sync with the new standards. That’s why “old-fashioned” arithmetic methods such as the [carry-and-borrow technique](#) are being phased out. That’s also why, in large part, the country has seen an outbreak of [desperate Facebook pleas](#), indignant op-eds,

[talk-show commentary](#), and [mass testing boycotts](#) from parents seeking nothing short of a Common Core apocalypse.

Parents are going back to school—or somehow continuing their education—just to try and make sense of it all.

But amid all that handwringing, another curious and perhaps amusing phenomenon has emerged: Parents are going back to school (or somehow continuing their education) just to try and make sense of it all. School districts across the country [are hosting parents' nights](#) to get them acquainted with the new academic strategies. Nevada's Clark County School District, for example, has offered [twice-monthly, taxpayer-funded seminars](#) devoted to helping parents understand Common Core math. On top of [Khan Academy's resources](#), parents also have at their disposal a plethora of [how-to videos](#) and [tip sheets](#), [practice exercises](#) and “[road maps](#).” There's *[Common Core Math For Parents For Dummies](#)* (with accompanying online videos) or the more general *[Common Core Standards For Parents For Dummies](#)* (sans videos). Or, to change it up, there's *[Parents' Guide to Common Core Arithmetic: How to Help Your Child](#)*. For those who really want to master it? At least one institution—Suffolk County Community College—offers a \$108-a-person Common Core math course for parents that runs a few weeks long.

As *Education Week* [has reported](#), it's not uncommon for new math methods to cause panic among America's parents. Take the federally sponsored,

Sputnik-inspired “New Math” movement of the 1960s (a favorite among satirists such as Tom Lehrer), for example, or the 1989 standards initiative aimed at promoting “mathematical literacy and technical agility in the age of information” (which prompted what some commentators described as “The Math Wars”). Still, this likely marks the first time in American history that education reform has prompted such an intense and proactive reaction from parents. The question is: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Depending on how you look at it, the degree to which parents are investing their time and energy and sanity in learning the Common Core’s newfangled methods—for the sake of keeping their kids’ grades up—could be more depressing than it is exciting.

* * *

“Perhaps the most disconcerting issue, for us, is the distance the Common Core has created between parents and their children’s education,” wrote the Lifehacker writer Melanie Pinola. “It’s like having a nightmare where you’re trying to help your child over some hurdle but you’re given foreign instructions like ‘use a multiplication fact as place value as another way to multiply by a multiple of 10.’ (That’s a real math problem.)” The new strategies come with catchy names like “skip counting” and “drawing an array” and “making 10,” among a range of other tactics students are encouraged to master. One way to figure out a subtraction problem, for example, is called “counting up.” Say a question asked a student to subtract 29 from 248. Using traditional methods, you and I might do something like this:

$$\begin{array}{r} 318 \\ - 248 \\ \hline 29 \end{array}$$

f

Now, however, kids would instead employ series of alternative methods to arrive at 219, such as “counting up”:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 29 \\
 + \quad 1 \\
 \hline
 30 \\
 + \quad 70 \\
 \hline
 100 \\
 + \quad 100 \\
 \hline
 200 \\
 + \quad 48 \\
 \hline
 248_f
 \end{array}$$

In other words, students would be asked to count up to 248 using numbers that are easy to work with—numbers that they’d then add up to arrive at the difference.

Still, for many parents, that new approach may look like pure nonsense—or just a lot of extra work. Erick Erickson, a parent and the editor in chief of the conservative political blog *RedState*, [lamented](#) last year that the Common Core-style learning amounts to “insanity”: “This is maddening and angering and frustrating. This is why so many parents are so upset,” he wrote. “They cannot help their children. The math makes no sense and seems to offer no practical purpose other than it is new.”

But Common Core supporters such as Nina Leonhardt, the associate dean for continuing education at Suffolk County Community College and creator of the \$108 course for parents, argue that it offers a more practical approach to thinking about the equation. The standards encourage kids to calculate the arithmetic in their heads using tangible, visible concepts—much as they would in the real world. Educators say getting students acquainted with these strategies early on can help them [develop the skill sets they need when they're faced with increasingly complex math](#). A recent [RAND Corporation study](#) of 17 state standardized tests, pre-Common Core, found that 2 percent of math questions assessed students on “cognitively demanding” skills.

The standards encourage kids to calculate the arithmetic in their heads using tangible, visible concepts—much as they would in the real world.

“You always hear people say, ‘I can’t do math, I don’t like math. Why do I need it?’” said Leonhardt, emphasizing the practical value of these new strategies for today’s adults. “The reality is that if they understand how it is applied to the real world ... then perhaps it’s not so ancillary; it’s a basic skill that should be acquired. There are applications to daily life and to the workplace and to the critical-thinking skills cited over and over again by employers.”

Some observers point to how poorly the country’s students perform on

standardized math assessments, particularly relative to places like Singapore, whose [world-famous math](#) approach is comparable to the one promoted by the new standards. Just one in three U.S. eighth-graders performed proficiently on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2012. And it's worth noting that math proficiency levels in the U.S. have always been on the low side: Based on extrapolated NAEP data, [the average eighth-grade math score in 1973](#) was 266 out of 500 (compared to 285 in 2012).

With all that in mind, some previously skeptical parents have conceded that there may be merits to the Common Core. The elementary-level arithmetic most of today's adults likely learned is based largely on rote memorization and other superficial methods designed to help kids land on an answer. The way I mastered my multiplication tables (in 1998, as incentivized by prizes such as special post-lunch popsicles) involved *JumpStart* computer games and a few shortcuts I gleaned from my teachers—the [hand trick](#) for multiples of nine, for example.

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Meanwhile, the prospect that parents are likely striving to keep up with their kids' learning as never before indicates a degree of engagement that, in itself, is beneficial for their achievement—at least according to some research. The widely cited [Harvard Family Research Project study](#) by William Jeynes, now an education professor at California State University, Long Beach, suggested that parental involvement in homework can boost a student's academic performance.

But other, more recent research suggests outcomes that are quite contradictory, as *The Teacher Wars* author Dana Goldstein [reported for *The Atlantic* last April](#). “Most measurable forms of parental involvement seem to yield few academic dividends for kids, or even to backfire—regardless of a parent’s race, class, or level of education,” she wrote, citing an extensive, longitudinal study by sociology professors at the University of Texas at Austin and Duke. “Once kids enter middle school, parental help with homework can actually bring test scores down, an effect [the UT researcher Keith Robinson] says could be caused by the fact that many parents may have forgotten, or never truly understood, the material their children learn in school.”

Goldstein pointed out that the federal government has since the 1960s incentivized parent involvement, primarily for low-income youth, a trend that continued under No Child Left Behind. While some habits do seem to have a positive impact—such as reading aloud to young children or discussing college plans—little evidence suggests that intensive involvement in school-specific activities is helpful, she wrote.

Regardless of whether parental involvement in homework hurts or helps a student’s achievement, though, the Common Core-inspired continuing-education movement among parents could simply be symptomatic of Americans’ growing emphasis on having a competitive edge, what Brookings economists recently dubbed “[The Rug Rat Race](#).”

“In more competitive circumstances, children are increasingly seen as projects to be

perfected.”

Steven Mintz, a history professor at the University of Texas at Austin who directs the UT system’s Institute for Transformational Learning, said the trend demonstrates “that parents are full partners in their children’s education,” which he said sharply diverges from his upbringing, “when my schooling was entirely my own responsibility.” According to Mintz, this type of reaction is “a recent phenomenon”: “Now that education is one of the keys to a child’s future class status, and now that there is a widespread consensus (at least among the more affluent) that parental investments (whether in terms of cultural capital, social capital, or education) in children pay off, many parents worry that a lack of involvement will have long-term negative consequences,” he said in an email, echoing Goldstein in pointing out that the onus is increasingly on parents to give their kids an advantage in school activities like [science fairs](#). “To put this bluntly: In more competitive circumstances, children are increasingly seen as projects to be perfected (and other children are seen as threats to be managed or outperformed).”

But it’s not just about competition, necessarily. Mintz also pointed to a simultaneous trend in which adults are increasingly participating in “DIY learning opportunities,” such as MOOCs. “What I’m implying is that parents aren’t simply helping their children,” he said. “They are seeking to broaden themselves.”

The problem with all this engagement, [wrote](#) the middle-school math teacher and writer Anthony Cody last month, is that it risks widening socioeconomic disparities in academic achievement. Pointing to the \$108 course at Suffolk County Community College, Cody asked in a recent blog post, “Any guesses as to the socioeconomic status of the parents who will find the time to take special courses like this?” It’s true—it often takes a little

extra cash for parents to brush up on things like new Common Core skills, regardless of how engaged a parent is. “Most parents will not be taking these classes, and will be helpless—even embarrassed,” Cody wrote, “when their second graders bring home work that looks arcane.”

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