

# Middle School Math Placement Process

Presentation to School Committee

November 26, 2019

# Middle School Math

**We recommend discontinuing the practice of allowing middle school students to take a test to skip a year of middle school math.**

# Middle School Math Courses

Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Grade 6 Math	Grade 7 math or Grade 7 compacted math (gr. 7 standards + half of grade 8 standards)	Grade 8 math or Algebra 1 (half of gr. 8 standards + algebra 1 standards)

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Some students took a placement test to skip grade 7 compacted and take grade 8 Algebra 1 in 7th grade. Some also took a second test to skip two years of math.

## How did this practice evolve?

- Began in 2010 to support students whose math content and skills was considerably above grade level
- A test was developed to assess for an advanced placement
- 5-10 students met the criteria to skip a year of math
- Students were integrated into existing math sections
- Over time the opportunity was offered to any student who wanted to take the test

## How did this practice evolve?

- Additional placement tests were added to provide new opportunities to advance
- A full grade 8 math section was reserved for a Geometry section while students with more than one advancement attended morning class at BHS
- 100+ students take it annually
- The number of students placing in a higher math class has remained fairly constant even as the number of students taking the test has increased

# What challenges do we face now?

- Class sizes in all grades are higher → 8th grade Algebra 1 math classes can no longer accommodate the students placing in a higher math class
- The school has to use an existing grade 7 math section for the advanced grade 7 students, making all other grade 7 math classes larger
- Although we have been fortunate to add teaching staff each year for the last five, and even with that we are barely keeping up with the increasing enrollment

# What challenges do we face now?

- Many of the positions that we had originally hoped to add to the district with the 2015 override were not added; instead teaching and administrative positions were added as the enrollment continued to rise
- Those positions are still needed, as well as more positions to accommodate increasing class size
- Middle school team size should be 100; this year teams are:
  - 6th grade = 129
  - 7th and 8th grade = 120

# What challenges do we face now?

- Middle school is designed to support students' academic, social, and emotional development with grade level peers facilitated by a team of teachers working collaboratively to educate their team of students
- The placement test practice has unintentionally disrupted what we know to be best practice for students, academically, socially, and emotionally

## What challenges do we face now?

- The placement test practice has increased student stress and resulted in a sense of failure and disappointment among students who take the placement test and don't meet the score to be able to skip 7th grade math
- The Youth Risk Behavior Survey results point to areas of concern with middle school students' mental health and well-being

# What challenges do we face now?

- It was never the intention to create a test that students felt they had to study for.
- Middle schoolers are in a period of intense cognitive, physical, and social/emotional growth and we do them a disservice when they feel compelled to take a test, don't meet the criteria, and they feel bad about themselves

# What challenges do we face now?

- Changes to the high school schedule in 2019-20 (later start time) created a logistical challenge for those students going to Belmont High School for their math class
- In order to accommodate the challenge this year, students are missing part of a class in order to get to the high school for math

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