

Math Course Pathway Parent Guide: *Four Years of Math, Nothing Less Will Do!*

This educator guidance for *Four Years of Math, Nothing Less Will Do!* provides examples of how to make the most of the math course pathway parent guide in your school or district. It also informs educators about the research underlying the “What the Experts Say” section of the parent guide.

Making the most of the math course pathway parent guide

Whether on their own or in partnership with a teacher or counselor, parents and their student can use the guide to get information about the importance of middle and high school math and to map out a math course pathway, including support and acceleration options, to strengthen the student’s preparation for postsecondary opportunities.

The following are tips for educators to make the most of the parent guide:

1. No matter how you decide to use the guide, be sure to share information with parents about local course pathways, placement criteria, and acceleration and support options. Also tell parents where they can turn if they have questions or need additional help.
2. Include the guide in the school’s orientation package. Mail it to parents or send it home with students.
3. Use the guide during a middle school or high school orientation meeting to help incoming parents and their students understand the importance of students’ math courses for college or career preparation.
4. Many schools, districts, and community-based organizations offer classes or topically based meetings for parents. The guide could be the curriculum for a session.

5. Use the guide during a college and career day for students and their families.
6. At the beginning or end of the school year, share the guide with students and ask them to work with their parents to map out their math course pathway, and discuss changes they might need to make or support they may need in order to meet college and career goals.
7. Counselors and other educators can use the guide directly with students to help them plan their math course pathway and be ready for college or career education.

What the experts say

Each bullet in the parent guide is based on recent research. References for each bullet are shared below.

1. With effort, every student could be a math person; no one is born a math expert.¹
2. A strong performance in middle school math prepares students for success in later grades, but it’s never too late to improve.²
3. Find out what information is used to place students in math classes in your school and make sure the most current test scores are used.³
4. Help your student choose the right math courses to achieve college and career goals; there are many pathways to choose from.⁴
5. If students are accelerated too quickly and they have to repeat the class, they do not improve by much.ⁱⁱ



6. There are many math acceleration and support options available to students during the school year or over the summer. Be sure to ask what has been most successful at your student's school.⁵
7. Performance on the high school state math tests could make a difference in college math course placement. Tell your student to take these assessments seriously.⁶
8. Do not let your student skip math senior year; students who take four years of math in high school can advance more quickly through their college program.⁷

For more information about the importance of math courses at the right time, please download the *Opening a Gateway to College Access* research brief from REL West.⁸

Endnotes

¹ Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Ballantine Books.

² Fong, A. B., Jaquet, K., & Finkelstein, N. (2014). *Who repeats algebra I, and how does initial performance relate to improvement when the course is repeated?* (REL 2015-059). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

³ Huang, C. W., Snipes, J., & Finkelstein, N. (2014). *Using assessment data to guide math course placement of California middle school students* (REL 2014-040). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

⁴ Finkelstein, N. D., & Fong, A. B. (2008). *Course-taking patterns and preparation for postsecondary education in California's public university systems among minority youth* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008-No. 035). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>; Finkelstein, N., Fong, A., Tiffany-Morales, J., Shields, P., & Huang, M. (2012). *College bound in middle school & high school? How math course sequences matter*. Sacramento, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning at WestEd.

⁵ Snipes, J., Huang, C.-W., Jaquet, K., & Finkelstein, N. (2015). *The effects of the Elevate Math summer program on math achievement and algebra readiness* (REL 2015-096). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

⁶ Leal, F. (2016). *Smarter Balanced scores show more California 11th-graders "college ready."* Mountain View, CA: EdSource.

⁷ Jaffe, L. (2014). *Mathematics from high school to community college: Using existing tools to increase college-readiness now* (Policy Brief 14-1). Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).

⁸ Snipes, J., & Finkelstein, N. (2015). *Opening a gateway to college access: Algebra at the right time*. San Francisco: REL West @ WestEd. This report is available online at <http://relwest.wested.org/>

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