

# Should All Eighth Graders Learn Algebra?

*By Diane Trautman*

Right now there is a raging legal battle over a state requirement to teach Algebra to all eighth grade students. Though I believe students should be provided with the tools to excel, I have serious concerns about a one-size-fits-all standard that doesn't consider the individual student or the repercussions of early failures on future learning.

In July 2008, the California State Board of Education (CBE) voted to make Algebra a required course for all students in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. For now, the Algebra requirement is on hold. The CBE's action was swiftly challenged in court and it is currently going through the appeals process. Critics pointed out that even though more 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are taking Algebra and passing the standards test in junior high, a considerable number of students fail and have to retake the course in high school.

While experts debate the pros and cons of this change, parents and students may ask why it is important for all students to master Algebra and why there is a push to complete the course in junior high.

Educators believe that Algebra helps students develop logic skills and introduces abstract thinking that can be applied to mathematical equations or real-life situations. The ability to work with symbols in increasingly complex and changing formulas teaches students to look at problems in new ways and to organize their thinking.

Problem-solving and critical-thinking skills are extremely important in our knowledge-based economy, whether a student pursues a technical apprenticeship or a college degree. Algebra is a prerequisite for an Associates Degree. It is the first of several mathematical disciplines required for acceptance to the UC and CSU systems. And completing Algebra before high school better positions the student to take a rigorous series of high school math and science courses prior to the college application process.

As the discussion continues, I will keep you informed. In the meantime, please call us if your child needs assistance.

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