

INTRODUCTION TO STAIRWAY TO MATH

Many parents find it challenging to understand how Math is taught these days because it is so different compared to when they were in school. You may have found yourself in this situation. You may be frustrated and wonder if you should leave your child to the whims of the school system or get personally involved by helping your child to master the everyday Math basics that will be used for the rest his/her life. If you are among the few parents whose children are taught by a very special teacher who truly understands how to teach real Math, you are fortunate indeed. However, this may last for only a year, and then you might be faced with what steps you will have to take, if any, for the sake of your child's future.

If you choose to help your child, both you and your child will likely be faced with a conflict between genuine skill development and what is happening in the classroom where inefficient busywork is standard fare. This will test your relationship with your child who may resist the real Math work that you have planned when the easiest thing is to be part of the classroom status quo. One of the encouraging signs that your child is not alone in doing extra Math is the possibility that a classmate may be participating in Kumon Math or some similar user-pay extra-curricular program. You will find that you may have to do double duty by doing what you know is important, while at the same time trying to stay on good terms with your child's teacher by helping when necessary with the classroom Math homework. It will be a real challenge at first but if you are successful in establishing a consistent Monday to Thursday after-school routine with your child, your efforts will be rewarded--a solid foundation in the Math basics and, over time, a Math advantage.

Compared to 20-30 years ago, the proliferation of subject resources, including Math, is a clear indication that the educational establishment has failed its teachers and parents to varying degrees. Publishers have responded by providing teachers and parents with a bewildering array of resources that can be found at places like Costco, bookstores, office supply stores, grocery stores and, if you are fortunate enough to live near one, teachers' supply stores. These can be useful in giving you some direction in making sure that all the essentials are covered, but it may be challenging to synchronize the grade levels with what is happening in your child's classroom. Sometimes these materials lack clear explanations and the kind of practice that ensures mastery.

You may have heard some teachers say negative things about drill, rote and practice as it relates to Math skills. A favorite is, "Drill & Kill", but it is highly unlikely that any teacher would say the same thing about a former student striving to compete in the Olympics. So much drill and training is necessary over four years of preparation that one wonders that there is not more publicity about repetitive action injuries suffered by aspiring Olympians. Four years of Olympic drilling usually results in just a few performances that may last for a few seconds or minutes with no guarantee of a medal. However, several school years of genuine Math drill will guarantee a lifetime of accurate calculations for everything from weight watching to taxes.

Stairway to Math provides some Mathsheets that will help you work with your child in the foundational areas of everyday Math. This is not an effort to reinvent the wheel by presenting a comprehensive course for the elementary grades. This has already been done by others with Math degrees who have taught for many years and have been able to devote much more time, energy and resources than I have. However, as a teacher with an Arts degree who has taught for 25 years, I am offering you some practical helps that you may find useful when working with your child. My hope is that there will be a degree of satisfaction should you find these materials helpful in guiding your child along the road to Math competency.

The Mathsheets are sometimes concentrated with information, but do not let this discourage you. Take your time and resist the temptation to rush. It is important to work on only one new concept at a time, and this may mean that you work on only one section of a particular Mathsheets for several sessions until the new concept has been mastered. Also be prepared to return to these Mathsheets from time to time for review or consolidation. Seeing and learning the patterns that are found everywhere in the world of numbers is a wonderful way to overcome the "I hate Math" syndrome. The sequence of the Mathsheets has been designed for a natural progression or a coherency that may be difficult to find elsewhere. Feel free to use a sequence that you think is best for your child. You may even find that some Mathsheets are not as useful as others for your child – so feel free to skip them. However, I have included them because at some future date it is hoped that their natural progression will be more fully appreciated.

These materials are being made available free of charge for your personal use. Please print or copy them for practice or even modify them as you see fit to benefit your child. I hope they will be an inspiration for you to develop some ideas of your own to help your child. One of the joys of teaching is the learning that the teacher acquires.

No effort has been made to assign grade levels to these materials because students in various grades may need help in some or all of these foundational areas. The success that you will achieve with your child will be determined by the chemistry between you and the consistency you maintain. It is better to work 15 minutes a day for four days each week than to have a one-hour session once a week, but for some parents the one-hour session may be the only option. You know your child best, and your success may require modest incentives at the beginning. The best reward for both of you is the self-esteem that always comes with the mastery of something that is truly worthwhile.

Your response to these Mathsheets is appreciated because there is always room for improvement. Also, you may want to suggest additional topics for expanding the current collection of Mathsheets. Please contact me through the Society for Quality Education, info@societyforqualityeducation.org.

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March 2009