

Disarm Math Warriors

Summary

Assemble a broad public and professional consensus behind a statement such as the Math Wars Peace Treaty. This will help staff and others stick to a winning message that disarms hawks from either extreme by taking away issues that arouse the public and the pragmatic observers within the system.

Challenges addressed

Math Wars. How can you keep your district from becoming a battleground of the math wars so you can get to work and solve some tough implementation problems?

The strategy

This approach is to build on the considerable common ground among people who are actively interested in mathematics education. The Peace Treaty can be adopted as a policy of the district, circulated to the press, or spread by any other means of getting it to the public as a representation of what the district math leadership believes about the issues spelled out in the Treaty.

The *letter* and *meeting agenda* are designed for building a balanced mathematics community, not just the math warriors, around the text of the Peace Treaty.

Background

You are making changes to upgrade mathematics instruction in your district or state, perhaps involving new instructional materials with linked professional development. You have been attacked by math warriors. Some members of the public and/or press and/or the School Board are joining in the attacks or asking loaded questions. How can you keep your district from becoming a battleground of the math wars so you can get to work on the always-tough problems of successful standards-based improvement?

Principles

Changes can scare people. Some, particularly those with extreme views, will react strongly – as you and others have so painfully experienced. Nonetheless, a broad spectrum of mathematicians, mathematics educators and teachers can work together to make schools better despite disagreements. There will usually be much to agree on – for example, that the status quo must change, and improve. The Peace Treaty aims to be a concise statement of the large areas of general agreement and rational and mutually respectful processes for resolving other issues.

Implementing the strategy

Work with your colleagues to achieve the following:

- bring together the various elements of making the case for the improved curriculum, featuring summaries of evidence on effectiveness of curricula;
- assemble a broad consensus behind a statement such as the Math Wars Peace Treaty – this will help staff and others stick to a winning message that disarms

hawks from either extreme by taking away the issues that arouse the public and the pragmatic observers within the system;

- to build such a consensus, it is important also to bring in mathematicians and others from the local academic community who are interested in mathematics education in schools but have not adopted extreme positions – engage with a few sympathetic research mathematicians from local universities, discussing the case for improvement including summaries of *evidence on effectiveness of curricula*, aiming at their bringing on board other mathematicians and professionals (physicists, engineers, business people).

Evaluative evidence

This strategy has been used by a number of systems as part of their response to attacks by Math Warriors.

Strengths

- It helps establish the 'middle of the road' credentials of the system leadership
- It can help recruit mathematicians of good sense

Likely challenges

- It is unlikely to satisfy people at either extreme

Tools

Math Wars Peace Treaty includes an exemplar *treaty*, a *letter to mathematicians* and *agenda for a meeting*. The *Peace Treaty* is a disarmament tool – a brief statement of common beliefs that the non-specialist public can understand.

Evidence on effectiveness of curricula summarizes the current state of research on the impact of standards-based curricula on student performance.