

Got Math?

Southern Nevada
Regional Professional
Development Program

NACS MINI-SERIES
#1

A Newsletter from the Secondary Mathematics Team

Nevada Academic Content Standards - Understanding Mathematics*



The Nevada Academic Content Standards for Mathematics based on Common Core define what students should understand and be able to do in their study of mathematics. Asking a student to understand something means

asking a teacher to assess whether the student has understood it. But what does mathematical understanding look like? One hallmark of mathematical understanding is the ability to justify, in a way appropriate to the student's mathematical maturity, why a particular mathematical statement is true or where a mathematical rule comes from. There is a world of difference between a student who can summon a mnemonic device to expand a product such as $(a + b)(x + y)$ and a student who can explain where the mnemonic comes from. The student who can explain the rule understands the mathematics, and may have a better chance to succeed at a less familiar task such as expanding $(a + b + c)(x + y)$. Mathematical understanding and procedural skill are equally important, and both are assessable using mathematical tasks of sufficient richness.

Number and Quantity

Numbers and Number Systems. During the years from kindergarten to eighth grade, students must repeatedly extend their conception of number. At first, "number" means "counting number": 1, 2, 3... Soon after that, 0 is used to represent "none" and the whole numbers are formed by the counting numbers together with zero. The next extension is fractions. At first, fractions are barely numbers and tied strongly to pictorial representations. Yet by the time students understand division of fractions, they have a strong concept of fractions as numbers and have connected them, via their decimal representations, with the base-ten system used to represent the whole numbers. During middle school, fractions are augmented by negative fractions to form the rational numbers. In Grade 8, students extend this system once more, augmenting the rational numbers with the irrational numbers to form the real numbers. In high school, students will be exposed to yet another extension of number, when the real numbers are augmented by the imaginary numbers to form the complex numbers. With each extension of number, the meanings of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are extended. In each new number system—integers, rational numbers, real numbers, and complex numbers—the four operations stay the same in two important ways: They have the commutative, associative, and distributive properties and their new meanings are consistent with their previous meanings. Extending the properties of whole-number exponents leads to new and productive notation. Calculators, spreadsheets, and computer algebra systems can provide ways for students to become better acquainted with these new number systems and their notation. They can be used to generate data for numerical experiments, to help understand the workings of matrix, vector, and complex number algebra, and to experiment with non-integer exponents.

Quantities. In real world problems, the answers are usually not numbers but quantities: numbers with units, which involves measurement. In their work in measurement up through Grade 8, students primarily measure commonly used attributes such as length, area, and volume. In high school, students encounter a wider variety of units in modeling, e.g., acceleration, currency conversions, derived quantities such as person-hours and heating degree days, social science rates such as per-capita income, and rates in everyday life such as points scored per game or batting averages. They also encounter novel situations in which they themselves must conceive the attributes of interest. For example, to find a good measure of overall highway safety, they might propose measures such as fatalities per year, fatalities per year per driver, or fatalities per vehicle-mile traveled. Such a conceptual process is sometimes called quantification. Quantification is important for science, as when surface area suddenly "stands out" as an important variable in evaporation. Quantification is also important for companies, which must conceptualize relevant attributes and create or choose suitable measures for them.



Math Resources

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