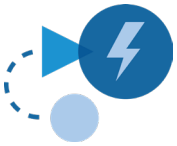
THE MATH NARRATIVE PROJECT

MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS: **Parents**

These recommendations are intended for people communicating directly with **parents**. They are meant to support professionals, including teachers, instructional designers, district leaders, curriculum developers, content developers, and others who work to engage, motivate, and enable students to learn math.

There are six messaging recommendations for parents. The first three recommendations should be applied across all messaging, so that all messaging interventions elevate student agency and acknowledge the real-world context and emotional nature of math learning. This approach helps prime audiences to be more receptive to messaging based on the other recommendations.



ELEVATE STUDENT AGENCY: Messaging should elevate student agency and center students' emotions and experiences, which are critical to their math learning.

- Encourage parents to get curious about their child's math learning experience by equipping parents with questions they can ask to get their child to share more about their experiences learning math.
- Show parents how children can exercise agency in their math learning.

ACKNOWLEDGE REAL-WORLD CONTEXT: Empathize with students, teachers, and parents by acknowledging and naming the real-world challenges they face.

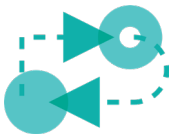
- Affirm parents' desire to be a "good parent" implicitly or explicitly.
- Acknowledge the factors that may influence how parents feel about supporting their child's math learning, including parents' own experience with learning math, the shift to Common Core, and adolescent development.
- Emphasize the ways parents can support their child's math learning with other resources rather than needing to be able to help them directly.

ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONS IN MATH LEARNING: Normalize the emotional nature of learning math and provide examples of how negative emotions can be reinterpreted.

- Help parents reduce their stress and manage their own negative emotions about learning math by showing how they can provide support to their child(ren) without passing down their own negative emotions.
- Acknowledge negative emotions and affirm struggle as a normal part of children's math learning process. This can help debunk the notion that some students are naturally good at math and help to reduce parents' stress about their child's math learning.

MAKE MATH RELEVANT: Deliver credible and motivational messaging on the utility, relevance, and value of higher-level math for students' lives, desired careers, and futures.

- Share credible examples with parents of how higher-level math is relevant for students' current lives, future careers, financial literacy, and agency.
- Effective examples for parents about the relevance of math connect to contexts that they and their children understand and believe are real, such as keeping career options open, preventing your family from getting scammed or cheated, or understanding interest rates and loans.
- Frame higher-level math as opening more career paths to young people rather than being a requirement for a good career or specific jobs (i.e., "higher-level math helps students have more choices about what they do in their lives").
- Avoid exacerbating parents' stress around higher-level math by pairing messaging about relevance with messages that reassure and connect parents to different types of resources available.
- Avoid messaging that focuses exclusively on how higher-level math is a prerequisite to future education goals, refers to the value of math in abstract phrases like "math is a universal language", or lists specific jobs that use higher-level math.



ENCOURAGE HELP-SEEKING: Build student confidence to seek the help they need to learn math and equip parents and teachers with messaging that supports and encourages students to seek help.

- Affirm parents' desire to be "good parents" who can help their child learn math, even if the help is not providing direct support for homework.
- Build confidence among parents to seek resources and support for their children when learning math feels hard by acknowledging the challenge of raising adolescents and featuring both education experts and parent messengers with shared experiences who can describe how they helped students persist or get help.
- Provide parents with lists of resources that include a diversity of options with varying levels of financial cost and time commitment and which are accessible to a wide range of families.

REFRAME STRUGGLE AND CAPABILITY: Reframe struggle from a sign of lacking capability to a sign of needing support.

- Motivate parents to encourage their children to persist when learning math gets hard by elevating three core messages as a package: 1) higher-level math is relevant and valuable, 2) anyone can get better at math with the right support, and 3) effective resources are available.
- When possible, deliver messaging during the actual moment of struggle, as it is particularly impactful.
- Tap into parents' existing beliefs about the value of persistence and apply it to learning higher-level math (i.e., "With exercise, if your muscles are sore afterward, it just means you're challenging your body as you strive to get stronger.").
- Encourage parents to praise a child's hard work and effort, rather than praising them for "being smart" or getting things quickly, which can inadvertently discourage them from taking on challenging work.
- Do not provide generic affirmations or simplistic advice about struggling with math (e.g., "just keep trying") without also offering concrete ways to get help.