

Sales rep may have picked P.A. math text

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A Palo Alto school board member is questioning whether a salesperson for a textbook publisher picked the math textbook the board would consider.

Board member Melissa Caswell complained at Tuesday's board meeting that, "The vice president of sales at McGraw-Hill decided which textbook to give us, and decided to send us 'Everyday Mathematics' rather than 'SRA/Real Math.'"

Both are published by subsidiaries of McGraw-Hill.

Different teaching styles

"SRA/Real Math" was the first choice of a number of parents and teachers.

"Everyday Math," the book the school board is currently considering, has drawn fire from parents who complain it relies too much on calculator use at early grade levels, doesn't adequately teach kids how to multiply and divide, and presents an array of techniques that does not allow students to master one skill before going on to another.

In her remarks Tuesday, Caswell referred to an e-mail sent in early March by Sharon Lane, vice presi-

dent of sales of the SRA/Wright Group, an arm of McGraw-Hill, to Staci Stoveland, a teacher in the district, who was on the textbook selection committee. Stoveland had written Lane because parents were upset that they couldn't review the teacher version of the "SRA/Real Math" textbook.

Revealing e-mail

Lane's e-mail said, "As an officer of a company representing both 'Everyday Math' and 'Real Math,' I made the decision that 'Everyday Math,' with proven success throughout the country, would be a better fit in Palo Alto."

The choice is important because many parents are now vociferously objecting to the teachers' recommendation to select "Everyday Math" and because publishers are not, by the state code, allowed to make a choice.

The California Education Code states that a textbook publisher may "not in any way, directly or indirectly, become associated or connected with any combination in restraint of trade in instructional materials."

Lane did not return phone calls, but McGraw-Hill education spokeswoman Mary Skafidas told the Post that her company is

willing to provide samples of both textbooks.

"Our role is to consult with school districts and offer them a range of books. Our role is that of a consultant."

Skafidas had no comment on Lane's e-mail.

Not a strong California choice

In response to Caswell's inquiry, Assistant Superintendent Ginni Davis said the district had been told by the publisher that "SRA is not making sales in California, and that this is not a very strong market. We were told we could not (provide sample) materials for SRA."

Superintendent Kevin Skelly agreed: "We were told they would not provide the (pilot) materials."

Skelly defended the teachers' committee decision to recommend "Everyday Math" and pointed out that many districts are using it.

Skelly asked rhetorically, "Who drove the textbook decision? I am not sure it matters. It was the right decision (by the teachers). We would have chosen 'Everyday Math.'"

Caswell responded that it seems to her that the district didn't make the decision, but it "was made by a sales rep at the company."