

## My years with Saxon Publishers

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One of the first things I learned about [Washington Latin Public Charter School](#), even before I joined their board of directors, is that they utilize [Saxon Publishers](#) text books for math. This is ironic since when I started volunteer tutoring at [Cesar Chavez](#) almost 10 years ago the school was also using Saxon books for math, although these would be dropped a year later. "Too much memorization," commented the school's founder Irasema Salcido. But my relationship with this company goes back much further.

When my kids were in elementary school (they are age 21 and 24 now) there was a principal who went with educational fads. When my youngest was in kindergarten she threw out phonics instruction for the whole language approach. My wife taught her reading at home. Then when our oldest reached the fourth grade, a critical year for learning math, the school introduced a text series aimed at increasing the self-esteem of women and minorities. When you opened up one of these books there was scarcely any math in them. My wife practiced multiplication and division with her using flash cards.

I was so upset regarding the math curriculum that I searched for an alternative. I read one day in the Washington Post about a school district in Maryland that had adopted Saxon because of their back-to-basics approach to learning. So I called up the publisher to see if I could bring their products to Fairfax County schools.

"Let me see," said a vice-president of the company. "[Fairfax County](#) it says here is the 12th largest school system in the country. I have no chance of getting my textbooks adopted there."

Shocked at his immediate dismissal of my goal I challenged him. "What do you mean?" I shot back.

"Let me explain," he said calmly. "If I call a school system and I can reach the superintendent directly then I have a 100 percent chance of them buying my books. If I call and there is a switchboard I have a 50 percent shot. But if when I dial the telephone there are area superintendents and math and reading curriculum specialists then I have a zero probability of them using my products. These large systems go with fads."

Of course, he was right. This I had already learned. About 15 years later the same Saxon vice president was a speaker at a CATO Institute forum. I went up and introduced myself and he had a clear memory of our previous conversation. We had someone take out picture together. You can hear Saxon's Mr. Wang talk about the problems of textbook adoption at the CATO conference [here](#). I'm in the front row.

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