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An Expert's View

The Post spoke with Donna Watts, math coordinator for the [Maryland State Department of Education](#).

Q) What's the importance of algebra and geometry?

A) Algebra is the language of mathematics. If you want to go anywhere in any level of mathematics, you've got to understand its language. Geometry really is the mathematics that connects to the real world. There's so much in our world, our physical world, that is geometric, from seashells to the way a tree branches out.

Q) How has geometry instruction changed?

A) We used to concentrate a lot more on the two-column proof. The two-column proof was, "Given this, then this, therefore that." For each statement, you have to have a postulate that supported your premise. There has been a movement away from that very strict two-column proof; we're not as rigid in how we approach it. What they need to understand is that given a situation, you can go from the situation and kind of connect back to make a valid conclusion.

Q) What's the future of math instruction?

A) What I don't see is mathematics going away. If anything, I see that the students of the future, just given what I've seen change in my lifetime, have to understand even more about mathematics. Not for the mathematics' sake, but for where they want to go, what they want to do. If people understood statistics and compound interest better, we may not have had the meltdown we're having now. We've got to strive to have all our students have a fundamental understanding, and hopefully more. We can't continue to have kids be terrified of mathematics.

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