Ideas/Activities for Promoting Student Use of Mathematical Language

1. Plan with all teachers of mathematics in your building the mathematical language and notation that will be required of students at each grade level.

2. Give tasks that elicit mathematical language beyond computation.

3. Model use of mathematical language and notation in other subject areas.

4. Use the templates to assist in the planning instruction of mathematical language.

5. Give students highlighters to illustrate the use of their mathematical language. You might use one color to highlight language beyond computations of task and another to highlight other mathematical language beyond computation.

6. Give students transparencies to place on their work and use Vis-à-vis® markers to highlight work. (Have clipboards available to clip the overhead and work together.)

7. After students have had an opportunity to work a problem, have them brainstorm as a class all the mathematical language and notations that might be appropriate to use when communicating their solutions to that problem. Leave the words posted for easy access.

8. Create class dictionaries by content standard as a reference. Have students enter the term and then its definition. Students can also show examples of the term’s use, draw a picture of the term, etc. Use a notebook to create this class or personal reference. By using a notebook, you can rearrange content standard pages in alphabetical order as new terms are discovered.

9. Add math words to spelling lists.

10. Play Concentration or Jeopardy using cards with words and definitions.

11. Share the benchmarks with students.


13. Wear a math word and be ready to educate others as to its meaning.

14. Collect Mathematical language found in magazines, newspapers, etc., and record them by content standard in a notebook. You may wish to use the notebook format here as well.
15. Interview people representing a variety of occupations and record the mathematics they use. Students will soon discover that most occupations involve math. Begin with people in your school, the cook, janitor, secretary, etc.

16. Have a central display in the school to post unusual math terms and ask students to find their meaning.

17. See how long a student can “survive” without using mathematical language (i.e. Telling time, what day of the week, or number of recess milks, etc.). Try to record all the events in a “typical” school day that require and understanding of mathematical language.

18. Keep classroom charts of various standards and highlight the vocabulary learned.

19. Have quick quizzes.

20. Have a Mathematical Language Bee similar to a spelling bee.

21. Put mathematical language on index cards and their definitions on other index cards. Give each student a card and ask them to find their partners.

22. Offer word searches and crossword puzzles.

23. Write a mathematical word on graph paper and find its area and perimeter.

24. Provide opportunities for students to peer conference and then share their understanding of mathematical language.