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The role of socialist competition in the Soviet mathematics curriculum reform of the 1960's and 1970's

In 1958 the Soviet government led by Nikita Khrushchev initiated a major reform of education in order to bridge the gap that then existed between the school curriculum and the practical needs of the state. Prominent mathematicians and educators (including Andrei Kolmogorov) were involved in re-writing the mathematics curriculum. However, the content of the new curriculum proved to be unsuitable for the general audience of students who were not highly interested in mathematics a priori. There are numerous academic factors that influenced such an outcome, but it is also important to explore the ideological context in which the curriculum reform was taking place. Socialist competition was one of the most prevalent ideological phenomena in the 1950's which influenced social and academic life of the state. In this talk we will focus on the role of socialist competition in the math education reform which often gets overlooked in the literature. We will define the socialist competition on international, inter-state and interpersonal level, and explore specific examples of manifestation of the socialist competition in high school and elementary school setting.