

## NESHAMINY SCHOOLS

# Math fun

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### contributed

Students in Lynnemarie Richmond's first grade class learn about re-grouping as part of the new Singapore Math program at Oliver Heckman Elementary School in Middletown Tuesday.

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By Christian Menno Staff writer | 3 comments

Inside several classrooms at Oliver Heckman Elementary School, smiles, laughter and enthusiasm were the norm Tuesday.

This was not during lunch or recess or show and tell — but in the midst of a math lesson, of all things.

While math might not usually be associated with smiling kids, Heckman teachers said such scenes are becoming more common since the district switched to a new curriculum that stresses a hands-on approach to problem solving.

Neshaminy School District officials and teachers understood that switching to the new program — Math in Focus: Singapore Math — would take some getting used to. But now, nearly a full school year into the program's implementation, they were ready to show how far they've come.

The publisher of the program, Marshall Cavendish, came from Singapore to see the techniques in action at the school Tuesday. The small Asian country has become renowned for leading the world in assessment tests for math.

Representatives from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the U.S. distributor of the program, also toured the school.

First-graders in teacher Lynnemarie Richmond's classroom gathered in groups as they put colored beans in columns to learn about regrouping. They seemed engaged and attentive — but most noticeably, they seemed to be having fun.

And, according to Richmond, that definitely makes her job easier.

“They get to move around. They get to look at pictures of things. Then they move onto the concrete words. There are things for them to manipulate and touch,” she added. “The kids are really understanding why they are supposed to do certain things (when working at a math problem).”

Officials said the program allows students to immerse themselves in math concepts with interactive lessons, so when they're confronted with a traditional word problem, they're able to draw from their own experiences to find the solution.

“Because this program goes from the concrete to the pictorial to the abstract, they can picture the different ways to solve the problem in their heads,” Richmond said. “They gain a different kind of relationship with numbers that makes it much easier to solve word problems.”

Indra Ang, a Marshall Cavendish representative, said she was pleased with what she was seeing in the classrooms, adding that the program can always be tweaked based on what techniques are successful in each school.

“And the thinking skills can actually be carried over into other subjects,” said Ang.

After 10 years in the Neshaminy district, Richmond said adapting to the Singapore program allowed her to connect with her students in a whole new way. “I learned (math) a certain way (growing up). I learned the old way,” she added.

Richmond said she and the students really pulled together on the program because they were all learning something new.

“(It helped) them to know that (I'm) human too and this is a brand new thing that I've never seen before,” she said. “That made it so that they were really much more willing to work with me and say, ‘we're all in this together.’”

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