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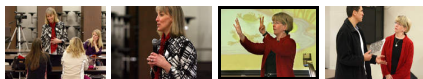
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Singapore Math transforms the way students learn

By: Bridget O'Shea | boshea@pioneerlocal.com | [@OSheaBridget](https://twitter.com/OSheaBridget)



Mathematics consultant Char Forsten talks to Barrington parents last winter during "Parent University Math Night" at Barrington High School. | Buzz Orr/Sun-Times Media

Since the way math is taught continues to change drastically, Barrington School District 220 brought in a specialist Monday to get parents up to speed.

Hoover Herrera, from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Math in Focus program, talked at Station Middle School about the most recent transformation: Singapore Math, which is a registered trademark of Singapore Math Inc., www.singaporemath.com (<http://www.singaporemath.com>).

He explained that Math in Focus, which is an American version of a program used in Singapore, is designed to help students become more confident and comfortable with math by covering fewer topics in a single year, but focusing more on each topic for deeper understanding.

"This allows time for students to practice, internalize and learn — not just memorize," Herrera explained.

Because of this approach, Herrera said Math in Focus has proved to be much more effective than the "mile wide, inch deep" way of teaching that previously dominated education.

"There's a progression of topics," said Herrera, who was an elementary and middle school math teacher in New Jersey. "We don't have to learn all in one year."

Math in Focus also puts more emphasis on visual learning and the application of math to real world situations. To do this, Herrera explained, Math in Focus prompts students to examine not just their answer to a problem but how they came to that answer.

"We want them not to just understand the procedure, but why the procedure works," he said.

Math in Focus, which works to address the spectrum of the Common Core State Standards, also places strong emphasis on processes, attitudes and concepts, among other factors.

"I thought it was really helpful," Barrington parent Jim Bang said of the informational session. "It was interesting to hear about the different approach."

Becky Gill-Schultz, District 220's director of elementary curriculum, said the new math curriculum was implemented at the elementary level last year.

"We've already seen a positive change," she said.

Gill-Schultz also shared a new attitude toward math: people who claim to not be good at math were probably not taught right. With the proper teaching methods, she said, any student can succeed in math.

"We want to prepare all our students to be comfortable with math," she said.

Singapore developed this math curriculum more than 30 years ago and has since been a top performing nation on international mathematics studies. Herrera said he saw first-hand how the Singapore curriculum vastly improved student success levels while he was teaching in New Jersey.

"Kids learn by doing, not by watching," he said.



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