

Singapore Math takes problems out of word problems

11 HOURS AGO • BY VALERIE WELLS -- H&R STAFF WRITER

DECATUR — “Word problems.”

The very phrase can strike terror into the heart of a student whose math skills are a tad shaky.

Yet at French Academy, word problems aren't so scary anymore, thanks to Singapore Math.

“I had actually worked with Singapore Math prior to coming here, and saw what it did for our students in Texas, and helped them with word problems, so I wanted to bring that here,” Principal Rolanda McKenzie said.

Simply put, the method requires the student to read the word problem through; restate the problem in a new way; determine who and what is involved in the problem; draw bars to break down the problem; fill in the pieces of the problem on the bars; compute and solve the problem; fill in the answer in their new sentence and check to make sure it makes sense.

A lot of steps, but it helps students learn to sort through the word problem for the necessary information to solve the problem.

“Sometimes they give you information you don't need (in word problems) just to trick you,” said Bobbi Clark, who teaches first grade at French.

Teachers in primary and intermediate grades teamed up for a math night for parents at French this week, to introduce parents to the Singapore method so they would be able to help their kids with homework. Parents received a packet with sample problems and instructions and practiced the method for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division under the teachers' watchful eyes.

The method also will work for the tougher, algebraic questions coming up in middle school, said Ashley Jennings, who teaches third grade. By the time students get to that point, they'll be comfortable with the Singapore method and less intimidated by word problems in general.

Katara O'Neal said her son, Kemonie, who's in fourth grade, has been bringing home his work and tried to explain it to her.

“I came (to math night) to see for myself,” she said. The method seems confusing at first until someone who understands it goes through it step by step.

McKenzie asked two teachers who have had training in the method through the Regional Office of Education to come to French to teach her teachers the method.

“Everything we teach our students, we want our parents to learn,” she said. “Our students will go home and talk about it, and our parents will know what they're talking about and be able to help

them.”

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