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Math, Singapore Style

by Alanna Berman | [January 2012](#), [Popular Stories from SDJJ](#) | [Post your comment »](#)



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Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School is the latest school to join the ranks of prestigious private schools to adopt Singapore's national math curriculum, and the Orthodox Jewish day school has already seen incredible results. In fact, in the school's first year under the new curriculum (last year, almost all teachers chose to switch to the new curriculum, this year, Singapore math was rolled out to the entire elementary school, grades K-5) standardized test scores soared, and reaction from students and teachers was just as positive.

"I was stunned that six and eight weeks into the school year, teachers were at my door telling me how much they loved the program," Director of Studies Allison Gardenswartz says. "I have never seen a response like that in all the years and programs I've brought on."

Gardenswartz is responsible for general studies curriculum development at Soille and says this is the first time Soille’s teachers have taught math using the same curriculum model across grade levels.

The program, which was first introduced in the early 1980s to improve math performance among Singaporean students, was developed by Marshall Cavendish in cooperation with Singapore’s Ministry of Education. Since the program was instituted, Singaporean students have ranked first in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study four times since 1995. (The survey is conducted every four years to compare math and science achievement across countries.)

“In Singapore math, there is less drill and practice,” Gardenswartz says of one main difference between traditional American methodologies.

Through Singapore math, essential concepts are built upon earlier, with less need for re-teaching of key concepts at the start of new lessons.

“[In this program,] students understand the concepts and make connections between the numbers, learn how to do mental calculations and as a result are able to not have to review, drill and practice to learn the necessary math to move on [to the next lesson]. They are able to understand math at a different level.”

Visual elements, including model-drawing and picture-based problem solving are what Gardenswartz says make the program so kid-friendly.

“It’s interesting because the program is very child friendly, pictorial and very simple,” she says. “The program has a kid-friendly language. It’s all about understanding the ‘why’ and the concept of the math, instead of the rules.”

The fact that the program moves from concrete to pictorial to abstract representation of math topics is what has teachers at Soille so excited about the new curriculum.

“The students are given great visual tools, such as number bonds and bar models that visually explain the relationships amongst numbers,” says Renee Kaplan-Nadal, who teaches third grade at Soille. “The students are constantly challenged to really think as they do math, and because they can’t just race through the problems, they find it mentally stimulating.”

Says Gardenswartz, students have responded well to the change in curriculum, gladly drawing their way to the answers to their math problems.

For more information about Soille and Singapore math, visit www.hebrewday.org.



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The overriding lesson of the parsha is that we must identify our abilities and actively harness them to improve ourselves, our families, our community and people with the hope that the “blessing of Yaakov” comes true: “The angel who delivers me shall bless the children...that they increase in the land like fish.”

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- [September 2006](#) (11)
- [September 2005](#) (12)
- [September 2004](#) (13)
- [July 2010](#) (21)
- [August 2010](#) (20)
- [September 2010](#) (24)
- [October 2010](#) (21)
- [November 2010](#) (20)
- [December 2010](#) (22)
- [January 2011](#) (23)
- [February 2011](#) (20)
- [March 2011](#) (24)
- [February 2010](#) (1)
- [January 2010](#) (1)
- [April 2011](#) (20)
- [May 2011](#) (20)
- [June 2011](#) (20)
- [July 2011](#) (19)

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 - [August 2011](#) (21)
 - [September 2011](#) (25)
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 - [November 2011](#) (20)
 - [December 2011](#) (22)
 - [January 2012](#) (21)
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