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Evesham school officials tout new, improved math program for district students

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EVESHAM—Students in the Evesham school district will soon be learning math a new way—a better way, according to the school board and administration.

The school district will begin using a Singapore math curriculum called Math in Focus starting next school year. The district had been using Everyday Math, a program that had in recent months been criticized by parents in neighboring Medford Township for moving too quickly and not allowing students to master a concept before moving on to the next one. According to Director of Curriculum and Instruction Danielle Magulick, this new program will spend more time on fewer concepts, thus allowing students to master each concept comfortably before moving on. Magulick, who called Math in Focus “a balanced math program,” said the district spent time studying the revisions to the Common Core State Standards for math curriculum and best practices before deciding on Math in Focus.

“We didn’t see the depth in Everyday Math that the standards require,” Magulick explained to the board during a presentation of the new math program at the April board meeting. She said Math in Focus was most aligned with the new standards philosophy and best practices.

The district presented an overview of the new program to the math teachers who, according to Magulick, “overwhelmingly” responded in favor of the new program.

According to curriculum administrator Jenn Bland, the primary goal of Math in Focus is problem-solving by using five interdependent areas: attitude, metacognition, processes, concepts and skills. Manipulatives are used at every grade level to help the concept move from the concrete to pictorial to abstract. Bland pointed out that the use of visualization in the program also addresses language gaps that have caused problems for students in the past.

Bland described the program as using concepts in a “radiating spiral.” In other words, concepts are covered thoroughly, but in the problem solving, concepts learned in prior grades are reviewed as well, just on a higher level. At the end of each chapter, non-routine thinking problems draw on current concepts as well as those already learned.

According to the administration, Math in Focus also provides better continuity between the district’s elementary and middle schools and more opportunities for assessment.

Furthermore, the district was able to negotiate a contract where it will only be paying for student materials and the technology piece at a cost of just over \$400,000. The teacher materials are included at no cost, saving the district more than \$650,000.

Following the presentation, the board unanimously approved the new math program. Currently, the district will be rolling out the new program only from kindergarten to seventh grade. The eighth grade teachers will already be dealing with changes to the geometry and algebra curriculums for the coming school year. In an effort not to overwhelm the staff with new curriculum, Math in Focus will be rolled out to the eighth grade in the fall of 2013.

Superintendent John Scavelli Jr. said Math in Focus will teach students to think. "And if you can think, you can solve just about anything. It's not just about the math, it's also about the thinking."

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