

12 comments Kentwood schools new Math in Focus: Singapore Math curriculum adding up for students, teachers



(http://connect.mlive.com/user/mlscott/index.html) By Monica Scott | mscott2@mlive.com (http://connect.mlive.com/user/mlscott/posts.html) on September 20, 2012 at 10:20 AM, updated September 20, 2012 at 10:57 AM

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GRAND RAPIDS, MI - There were no collective groans or sighs by students at Kentwood's Bowen Elementary School



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Mary Campione, 5th grade teacher at Bowen Elementary School in Kentwood works with Aninayshia Johnson and Ashanti Love during class. Kentwood schools has implemented a new Math in Focus program, modeled after the success in Singapore. (T.J. Hamilton | MLive.com)

Kentwood schools has implemented a new Math in Focus program (http://photos.mlive.com/4469/gallery/kentwood_schools_has_implemented_a_new_math_in_focus_program/index.html) gallery (10 photos)



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(www.kentwoodps.org/) when given math tasks, not even for a word problem that began "The runway at an airport is 10,000 feet long."

The fifth-grade classes, of various levels of ability, moved confidently through their assignments using the school district's new curriculum, Math in Focus

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(http://www.marshallcavendish.com/marshallcavendish/education/contentview.php?article_id=135), based on a framework developed by the Singapore Ministry of Education in 1980.

The slowed-down, drill-down approach to ensuring students master a concept such as fractions is growing in popularity in the United States. Singapore students have consistently demonstrated exceptional math achievement on international tests. For example, on the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) given to 15-year-olds, Singapore had the second highest average score for math, 562, while the U.S. ranked 31st out of the 65 countries with an average score of 487.

Michael Pickard, Kentwood's executive director of elementary instruction and federal programs, said the district knew it needed to step up its math game with the new national **Common Core State Standards** (<http://www.corestandards.org/>), which focus on deeper understanding of basic concepts.

"This mathematical piece is the foundation we have to get to to build upon the skills that kids need for the real world to be college- and career-ready," said Pickard, who said the Singapore approach was piloted at Bowen last year. "This program was a great match for us because our mission is to get our kids ready for college and career, and with engineering, math, and the sciences you need to have a great foundation of mathematical skills to be successful."

"We are hoping that this Math in Focus program takes our students to that next level."

Singapore Math's framework parallels ideas in the Common Core and was examined by the Common Core Committee.

"I believe we can get our students to where they need to be with this program," said Mary Campione, lead math teacher at Bowen, who said the district needed to make a change. "With the Chicago Math program, I found we were not spending enough time on topics, and kids were not grasping the concepts."

Campione said instead of a teacher introducing a topic and spending a day or two on it and moving to the next unit, they may now spend a two to three weeks on a concept. She said the program allows for greater focus and emphasizes mastery of concepts and training students to connect the different mathematical ideas.

Teachers model the lesson, work with students together on the topic, students work with their peers in a group, and then independently on workbook assignments.

The program is being used by Kentwood students in kindergarten through sixth grade and piloted in seventh and eighth grades because those versions just became available in the U.S. and the district wanted study the progress like it did with the Bowen pilot. The district has around 8,500 kids.

Around 300 districts are estimated to be using the program in the United States, including elementary schools in Saginaw Township Community Schools.

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Teacher Maureen Kaczanowski watched as a group of students drew a runway on their worksheet to help with converting the word problem into a math equation, listened to them explain how they reached their answer, questioning and helping as needed.

"I love this program because it uses a lot of manipulatives (white board, counter discs, Netbooks, etc.), which helps with students mathematical understanding because they are not just talking about concepts but seeing it through hands-on activities," said Kaczanowski. "There are reteaching, right on point, and enrichment opportunities."

Pickard said if students master a concept, they move on to real-world applications with extension lessons, but if they struggle, they receive intervention, with the instructor going back to teaching the concrete skills.

"This program is concrete first, pictorial to the abstract and with that narrowly focused for mastery learning," he said.



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Pickard said they saw significant math gains at Bowen last year on its Discovery Education Test given three times a year, including 20 of 32 students in a struggling class demonstrating skills to move to grade level or above.

"Kids gaining confidence and the skills to move to higher groups within the same academic year using this program was a big selling point," he said.

Kentwood parents came out Tuesday to hear about how the new math program can be a game changer.

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Mary Waight

(http://connect.mlive.com/user/mary_waight/index.html)

I was the chief instructional leader for a Massachusetts public school district that implemented Singapore Math in 1999. Within 6 years, every student, grades K-8, was enrolled in the program. There was significant attention paid to the district (from, among others, the Asian Wall Street Journal, Hoover Institution, American Institutes for Research, National Math Panel), and student results were promising. There was, in addition, significant pressure to disprove our results, but we persevered. When I retired, to my disappointment, my successor chose to abandon this strong, successful curriculum.

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jonmche (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/jonmche/index.html>)

Are cram schools and tracking part of the new curriculum?

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kitty_cat (http://connect.mlive.com/user/kitty_cat/index.html)

Good for them for realizing the mistake they made using U of Chicago Math (Everyday Math). That programs leaves so many student behind and they never catch up and become proficient at basic math facts.

As MI moves to common core, I hope more districts realize the damage that Everyday Math leaves behind; most districts adopted it in hopes of improving MEAP scores.

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Monica Scott | msscott2@mlive.com (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/mlscott/index.html>)

Students take the MEAP in about three weeks and Kentwood is expecting to see gains from the pilot students just like they saw on Discovery Education Test. People have questioned the effectiveness of Chicago Math since it was introduced years ago.

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buckboy (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/buckboy/index.html>)

This curriculum, or parts of it has been used by high-end public schools and a lot of homeschoolers with a great deal of success.

Math isn't horrible tough to learn, but it can be hard to teach, especially when faced with a lot of kids with dubious math backgrounds.

This will be better.

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Monica Scott | msscott2@mlive.com (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/mlscott/index.html>)

Buckboy you raise an excellent point about how math can be hard to teach. That's particularly true when you don't have a curriculum that works for different levels of learners.

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birdmark (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/birdmark/index.html>)

Based on two decades of teaching various grade levels using "Chicago Math," in the Grand Rapids area, this Singapore program has to be an improvement!

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Thanks for your insight birdmark. Did you agree with Ms. Campione assessment of Chicago Math? What did you read that really resonated with you about Singapore Math?

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linney
(<http://connect.mlive.com/user/linney/index.html>)

For students, the first worst part is when they don't get it and want help but a) the curriculum requires the teacher move on to the next concept and/or b) the instructional pacing chart set by Central Office demands that the teacher leave half of the class in the dust. Even though reteaching is built into the curriculum, it comes at the wrong time for those students who did not master the concept at the time it was first taught. The next worst part is many of these students are provided extra help BUT it is offered during recess or when their class is receiving instruction in other areas such as Science, Social Studies, Music etc. It is no surprise that these students end up hating math. They have to deal with frustration and humiliation every day.


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linney (<http://connect.mlive.com/user/linney/index.html>)

THANK GOD for the introduction of this curriculum to the US!!!! I hope, for the sake of ALL students, it means the end of Everyday/Chicago Math madness? The upper 25% will learn no matter what curriculum you implement but the vast majority need something other than Everyday Math. Let's have a county-wide bonfire and burn all the Everyday Math materials.

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Thanks for taking time to comment Linney. The Singapore Math came to the U.S. in 1989 but districts started to embrace it as Singapore began standing out on the international tests. I think you are right on about gifted students mastering whatever program used but raising the understanding of concepts of the vast majority should be a focus.

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kitty_cat

(http://connect.mlive.com/user/kitty_cat/index.html)

I agree with you completely. My oldest did fine with EM but my more "average" child struggles every night with homework. Every night I ask "did she even teach this to you today?"

It moves too fast and doesn't reinforce anything! Success with EM depends on parents reteaching the concepts each evening and/or spending big \$\$\$ at Kumon or Sylvan.

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