

FOX Focus: Singapore math

Reported by: [Torie Wells](#)

Email: toriewells@fox23news.com

Videographer: M. Wickham

Published: 5/18/2011 7:38 pm

Updated: 5/18/2011 11:38 pm

Here's a word problem for you: If China and Singapore are consistently out-scoring the United States in math, what do educators need to do to make America's students more competitive?

For some schools, like The Albany Academies, the answer was a new approach.

"There have been a lot of government initiatives to improve our math education," said Bob Bischoff, the math chair at The Albany Academies.

The formula that school chose: group work, plus model drawing, plus critical thinking, divided over a longer period of time. That equals Singapore math, based on that country's primary math curriculum.

"It's not as broad in terms of the number of topics it covers but with each concept or topic

it goes deeper into its exploration," said Bischoff.

"It gives them the chance to think critically," said Theodora Lois, a fourth grade teacher.

"You do, say decimals and then geometry, but you still use decimals during it," said Donald Jones, a fourth grade student.

The teachers say the main difference between the two programs is that their old program was more of a spiral approach, hitting on topics and then coming back to them later. But Singapore math is more of a building process, making sure the students have mastered one topic before moving on to the next.

"We know we are confident in what we are doing," said Grace Helm, a third grade student.

"If you have a hard time it steps you through it," said Morgan Ingerson, another third grade student.

"Their understanding of concepts is so much more in depth," said Sandi Hanifin, a third grader.

The hope, the teachers say, is that by aiming for depth not breadth students will form a strong base and even work a grade ahead.

"The skills we need in the lower school for when the kids move into the middle and upper school will be in place so they will be more successful," said Bischoff.

The Singapore Math Company says Albany Academy is one of about 2,000 schools nationwide using its primary math books. Two thirds of the 2,000 are public schools the other third is a split between charter and private. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt says about 100 New York Schools are using their version, Math in Focus, more than 800 nationwide.

The Singapore Math Company says interest in New York spiked after the Common Core Standards were adopted. Catskill Elementary says this math approach aligns well with that. They are training staff on Math in Focus now, to be implemented next year.

FOX23 News called several other districts in the area. Many knew about the program, some were even looking into it. But at a time when schools are crunched for cash, some were concerned changing a math program could be too costly.

So far, the teachers FOX23 spoke with say they have seen a change.

"I've seen tremendous growth in my boys since September," said Lois.

"The girls have learned so much more than previous students in third grade," said Hanifin.

"It makes me feel proud of myself," said Helm.

The teachers hope that feeling is part of the equation for lifelong success.

The schools that are implementing these math programs say they are doing it in intervals. That helps with cost and helps transition older grades into this new approach.

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