

Ogden district invests in Singapore Math program

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OGDEN — The Ogden School District is spending \$375,000 to implement an elementary school math program from halfway around the globe.

Teachers received training recently on the Singapore Math model. Students in kindergarten through third grades at Odyssey, Dee and James Madison schools began the Singapore method two years ago and have seen huge improvements in math test scores, officials say.

The program is not new.

In the 1980s, educators in Singapore started to research the best way for their children to learn math, said Char Forsten, a New Hampshire consultant and expert in training Singapore math.

Forsten conducted the training sessions for Ogden teachers and previously trained the Odyssey, Dee and James Madison teachers.

By the 1990s, the children of Singapore tested strongly in math, and by 1998, that way of learning began to be used in the United States.

The program teaches and follows the idea of understanding numbers using both pictorial teaching and abstract teaching.

“Too many children learn and forget (math),” Forsten said.

With Singapore math, she said, students learn and learn deeply.

Cheryl Losito teaches first grade at James Madison and attended the training sessions to get more information and tips on teaching.

She said she loves the Singapore math method of teaching and likes the way the program helps students see the relationship between numbers and that it’s not just about memorization.

Another James Madison first-grade teacher, Jessica Namovicz, agrees. She said the program teaches students how to manipulate numbers and to see numbers in concrete terms.

One of the keys to Singapore math is teaching students that 10 is a friendly number and how close or far away all numbers are from 10 or a group of 10.

Forsten said students are also taught to group things. For example, two groups of three makes six. To help the student learn that idea, it is shown in picture form.

As more concepts are taught, students begin to know and understand numbers, so by the time they are dealing with more complicated mathematical equations, they aren’t just referring to memorized equations, they understand what the equations mean, Forsten said.

“I often find that teachers are saying, ‘Wow, I wish I would have learned math this way,’ ” she said.

Leanne Rich, the district’s coordinator for curriculum and professional development, is excited to see the program adopted here.

Students in kindergarten through second grade will be immersed in the program this coming year, and the program will be slowly implemented in fourth and fifth grades, so the older students aren’t confused by a new teaching method.

Sixth-graders will not use the Singapore math program at all because the district is also adopting

the new Utah common core for math, and the sixth grade is in the process of that implementation.

Rich said the district chose to implement the Singapore math model in all elementary schools after the success it had with the three schools in the pilot program.

“We saw immediate, dramatic results,” she said of the three schools. “Now what we will have is independent mathematicians for all our students.”

One thing she has noticed with the program is that students don’t have to rely solely on the teacher for everything — they learn to think independently.

Of the various versions of the Singapore math curriculum, the Ogden district chose the California model because it is the more pure Singapore model.

The student workbooks also are much cheaper than the curriculum the district has been using — \$10 per book compared with \$35.

Namovicz has enjoyed seeing students catch the vision of Singapore math.

“I can watch them set it up in their heads,” she said.

Another thing she loves about the program is that Singapore math apps are available for the iPad. She has used the apps in her classroom and shares them with other teachers at the training sessions.

Her students loved using them, she said.

“The pictures are great, and the kids can really relate.”