



EDUCATION

# More Fayette schools sign up for Singapore math program

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More Fayette County schools want the county Board of Education was

ng new Singapore math program,

Teachers, students and parents initially struggled with the program when it was launched in 2009, but they have become more comfortable with Singapore math's emphasis on problem-solving and deep mastery of mathematical concepts, according to a report to board members.

The program — which uses an English translation of math textbooks employed in Singapore — began in nine elementary schools in 2009. A dozen more joined this school year.

"Seven or eight" more elementary schools want to sign on starting next fall, and officials are discussing a pilot program for sixth grade, Peggy McKee, Fayette Schools elementary math content specialist, told the board. The district has 33 elementary schools.

Maxwell Elementary is interested in a Spanish-language version for its Spanish immersion program, McKee said in an interview.

Growth in the program is important because Singapore math's concepts are aligned with new, stricter common core content standards for mathematics that Kentucky public schools will start following next fall, McKee said. The new standards and the Singapore textbooks stress deep understanding.

"I think teachers are really excited about it for next year," McKee said.

Singapore's students some of the world's top math performers. The Southeast Asian nation has about 4.8 million people.

When the Singapore approach was introduced in Fayette, math scores of students in the program were expected to fall.

"Anytime you introduce a new program, your scores probably are going to drop the first year," McKee said.

Scores at some schools did decline, but most of the schools held their own, and some produced impressive results, according to data presented to the school board. Some examples:

- Liberty Elementary recorded a 12 percent gain in African-American third-graders reaching proficiency or distinguished on statewide tests, cutting their achievement gap in half.
- Harrison Elementary's African-American fourth-graders showed a 20 percent gain, and Yates Elementary eliminated its third-grade African-American achievement gaps.

Several schools that joined the program this year posted sharp gains on the MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) test. For example, third-graders at Northern Elementary recorded almost a full year's growth by the middle of this school year.

"My students actually have become better math thinkers," said Scott Sheets, a fifth-grade math teacher at Clays Mill Elementary, which began using Singapore math this year.

Sheets said he, his students and their parents struggled at first, then settled in as their understanding grew.

He urged the board to stick with the program over the long term.

"I think you'll see even more improvement next year. And when this year's first-graders get to me, after having had the program all the way through, I think we're going to see exponential improvement," he said.

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