

Spartanburg Day School takes global approach to mathematics

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Working on a problem

Claire Thompson, 9, uses a SMART board to work a Singapore Math problem.

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Gerry Pate/gerry.pate@shj.com

By LEE G. HEALY

lee.healy@shj.com

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Spartanburg Day School has changed the way students tackle math, adopting an internationally praised approach school leaders say is necessary for students to compete in a global market.

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[Singapore math program](#)

The Singapore Math program was implemented in the SDS Lower School this year, and already teachers and students are noticing significant gains. The goal is concept mastery in a few areas, rather than shallow knowledge of many areas. Teachers say students have a deeper understanding of mathematics and are learning it quicker.

How it works

In Camilla Wilson's fourth-grade class, students seem strangely excited to share their answers to homework word problems. The classroom's high-tech SMART Board - a computerized, interactive projector - and tangible cut-outs used for accurate counting make problem solving a fun experience.

Here's the problem: "8,912 adults visited a book fair. There were thrice as many children as adults. How many children were there?"

This time last year, Wilson explained, students would be instructed to pick out the numbers and key words, like "thrice." They would be expected to determine this is a multiplication problem, solve it and move onto something a little more difficult.

This year, the class works together to solve the word problem step by step. Students read the problem for understanding, draw it out, then do the math to solve it. The "model-drawing" allows students to visualize math problems and gives them a starting point to solve them.

"Everything revolves around problem solving," Wilson said. "That is really helpful for kids, especially the ones that aren't strong in reading comprehension."

Nine-year-old Claire Thompson steps up to the board.