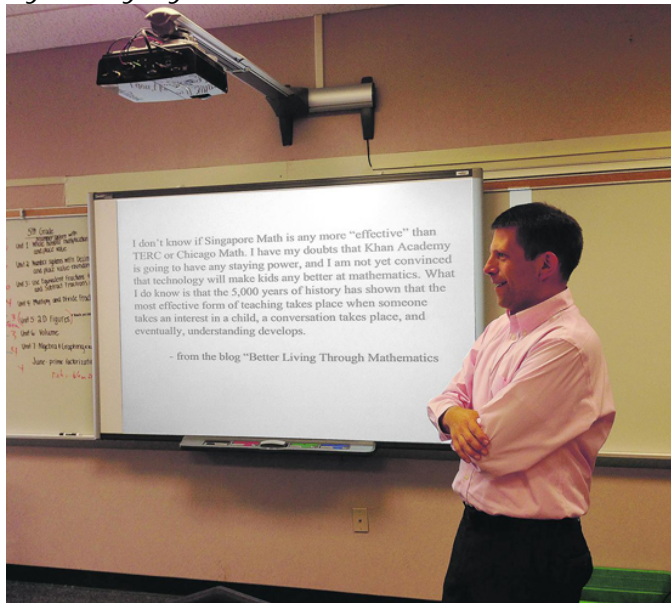


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## A Valuable Math Lesson for Parents

By Cathy Tyson



District math consultant Andy Schipper discusses Common Core math standards with parents at Stanley Middle School. Photo provided

Just a few months into the school year, many parents are perplexed by new math standards that are completely different from the way they learned basic computations back in the day. As part of an ongoing series of parent education evenings, the Lafayette School District sponsored an event for parents of second- and third-grade students to bring them up to speed on new math standards that are part of the Common Core model.

Despite a frigid evening, the Stanley Middle School library was full of parents from across the district who wanted to understand more about math instruction. District math consultant Andy Schipper delivered an entertaining and informative lesson on Common Core math standards and key math concepts that the assembled grown-ups could understand.

He demonstrated exactly what their children will be doing in school and pointed out the many differences in how math is now being taught. Starting off with international comparisons that showed how U.S. students have stagnated throughout the era of No Child Left Behind, he shared a video of a "Number Talk" with third grade students who were able to discuss an astonishingly wide variety of ways to solve a problem, and engaged parents to collaborate on simple, yet surprisingly challenging math games.

One could almost see the light bulbs going off in parent's heads when prompted to collaboratively play games like Arithmagon and Seth's Game. The exercises helped cement just how different the new math is, and how it requires real thought and analysis, compared with the memorization of days gone by.

Schipper says the main problem with the old way of doing things was that curriculum was "a mile wide and an inch deep." The new Common Core framework focuses on fewer standards but with an emphasis on coherence and thoroughness. "It's all about a greater depth of knowledge, thinking and reasoning skills," he said.

The role of teachers, illustrated in the video clip, highlighted their task as being more of a facilitator, moving from "sage on stage" to a "guide on the side," said Schipper.

Homework may present new challenges to parents because kids are doing calculations in a way that parents simply aren't used to; historically many parents were taught only one way to solve a problem, lining up digits in columns, carrying the one, and so on. Students will be coming home with strategies that parents may not be familiar with.

Schipper advised parents that homework will look different with more games and puzzles that bolster the ability to reason abstractly and quantitatively than sheets of endless computations.

What can parents do to help their students? Encourage doing math in their heads, advised Schipper, along with helping them master the basic addition and multiplication facts. Also key is encouraging kids to figure out solutions, prompting them with phrases like "What do you think?" and "How would you figure it out?" versus just giving them the answer to a question.

There will be an additional "Focus on Math" parent event, primarily for grades four and five, but all parents are welcome, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14 at the Stanley Middle School library.

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