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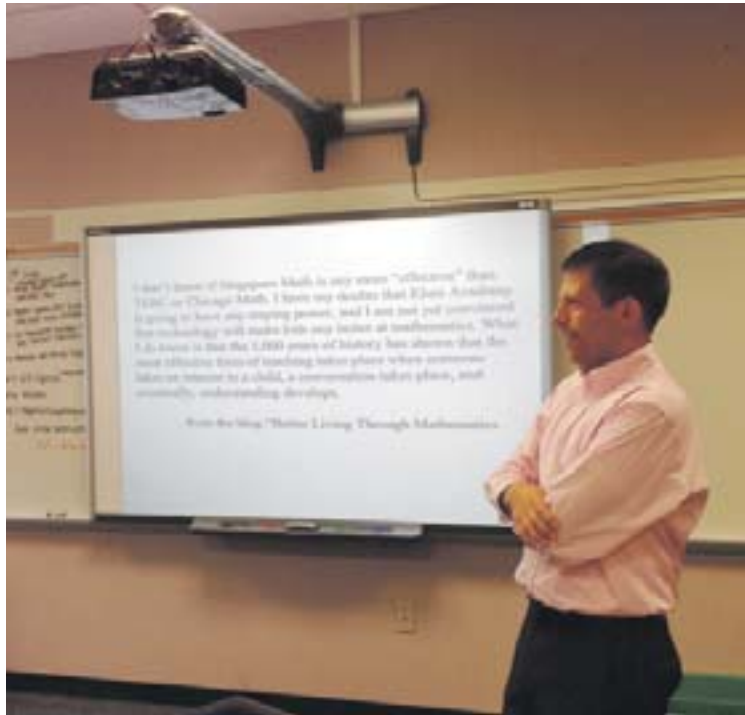
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A Valuable Math Lesson for Parents

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 Stanly 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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Together in Training

Lamorindans cooperate for EOC drills

By Cathy Dausman



Lamorinda emergency preparedness volunteers.

Photo Dennis Rein

While Lamorindans recently went about their daily business, more than 30 professional and volunteer first responders and civic employees wrestled with the after-effects of imaginary tornadoes and mock terrorist attacks.

The group, which included representatives from Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda, Moraga-Orinda Fire District, Saint Mary's College, Cal Fire, Contra Costa County Emergency Operations Center, The Red Cross, a local amateur radio group, the Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team, East Bay Regional Park District, the Disaster Medical Assistance Team, and others, attended a three-day training exercise at Saint Mary's College where they learned how to run an Emergency Operations Center.

Communities open an EOC site when a natural or man-made disaster requires management and support beyond the scope of the incident itself. California opened EOCs during the Tuolumne County Rim Fire and the 2010

San Bruno gas pipeline explosion. This EOC seminar was the first of its kind within Lamorinda.

Lamorinda Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein organized the event, which was taught by personnel from the Emergency Services Training Institute of Texas A&M Engineering Extension Services and hosted by Saint Mary's College's Adán Tejada, chief and director of the department of public safety.

Rein has worked to develop EOCs for each Lamorinda city and the college, and said they have come a long way since he came to the job three years ago. Now Rein hopes to build a more cohesive unit. "This training session opened the door for one Lamorinda city being able to provide staff to another during a disaster," he said.

Participants used Federal Emergency Management Agency handbooks to solve financial, logistical and operational problems triggered by each training event. They learned to prioritize life and safety issues, stabilize the event,

conserve property and return the affected area to a post-event normal. They also learned how to request county, regional, state or federal assistance.

"This class will ask [you] more questions than [supply] answers," warned senior training specialist Bill Long on day one. Still, "Lamorinda is a much better place since this [training]," Rein said.

"There is a lot of power in co-operation," Moraga police chief Robert Priebe agreed, saying the training was "very valuable on many levels."

Priebe, along with Orinda police chief Scott Haggard, acted as joint EOC managers during the final, day-long exercise. "The best part was getting all three cities and Saint Mary's College all together," Priebe said. "I thought it was an outstanding opportunity to work with other city staff," echoed Haggard, whose advice to exercise participants was to "stay calm, slow down and document [the work being done]." ... continued on page B6

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