

COURIER-POST

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

South Jersey's Newspaper

75 cents

Math's fun for Camden kids



JOSEPH GIDJUNIS/Courier-Post

An eighth-grader at Bonsall Elementary School in Camden ponders math problems that are part of an innovative curriculum.

Innovative teaching method grabs, keeps their attention

By JOSEPH GIDJUNIS
Courier-Post Staff

CAMDEN

By 9:30 a.m. eighth-graders in Marie Onyeani's math class in Bonsall Elementary School started dealing the Aces, 2s, 3s, and 4s from a deck of cards, but it's OK. It's part of the assignment.

Next to the cards lay a sheet with 100 squares, and the first to color them all in, wins. The cards, when paired, correspond to a fraction, and the students must translate the number to a decimal to know how many blocks to fill.

The classroom, normally subdued at this early hour, started bustling as the 17 students furiously used calculators and pencils to apply their newfound knowledge.

These playing cards, and similar teaching-tool companions, aren't unique in this 15,000-student district. It's part of a districtwide cur-



JOSEPH GIDJUNIS/Courier-Post

Nontraditional teaching tools make math more interesting for eighth-graders at Camden's Bonsall Elementary and other city schools.

riculum called LL Teach, and all sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders have been using it for two years.

Eileen Rock, the Camden School District's director of elementary education, said

she has seen improvement in classroom participation and general knowledge since implementing this curriculum. The quick successes, includ-

courierpostonline.com
WEB EXTRA

■ For more photos, go to our Web site and add /galleries or click on this story.

See **MATH**, Page 2A



Math/It may not be cool, but kids admit they like it

Continued from Page 1A

ing anecdotal test score bumps, led administrators to expand it to fifth-graders this year. Plans to change over the math curriculum in all elementary grade levels to this more interactive curriculum are under discussion, school officials said.

"A lot of kids get bored when it's just a book," Onyeani said. "This program allows students to discuss and hear the concept in a different way. They get more motivated about math. It keeps them engaged and interested."

Bonsall Elementary School Principal Deborah Olusa characterized this new math material as an improvement because it reaches children who learn better with visual aides.

"It's more analytical and critically-based . . . and it uses visual components through a game-like format," Olusa said.

The curriculum has already worked wonders to raise test

scores in Jersey City's middle schools, said Paul Lawrence, past president of the Association of Math Teachers of New Jersey and creator of LL Teach (Lawrence Learn and Teach). In the five years since LL Teach has taken over the school district's math program, overall scores for fourth-graders on New Jersey's standardized assessment test increased from 44 to 75 percent.

"When you and I went to school, it was a procedure-based mathematics. Move the decimal, apply the rule. When you add fractions together, use a common denominator," Lawrence said. "But when you do procedure-based mathematics, there often isn't any understanding behind it. That's sometimes why kids get bored in math."

This is especially important because only 25-30 percent of children learn through procedure, he said. Most students need another method before the concept sinks in.



JOSEPH GIDJUNIS/Courier-Post

Eighth-grader Khalif Hunter, 13, uses his graphing calculator to get answers to fraction and decimal problems at Bonsall Elementary.

"Mathematics hasn't changed. Just the way we teach it," Lawrence said.

A deck of cards is one tool. Blocks, drawings, special game boards and twists on other popular games such as Jeopardy!, are all typical classroom aids, too. These games often cause concerns for parents who may think their children aren't obtaining the same rules and discipline.

But Lawrence said the tools

are not to be used as a crutch. Camden's students wouldn't go so far to say math is cool, but it's not the drag it was before.

"Last year, math class felt like it lasted forever. I didn't want to go," said Ashley Vaughn, 13. "Now, I get the stuff quicker." Joseph Lopez, 13, concurred. "It made class go faster."

Reach Joseph Gidjunis at (856) 486-2604 or jgidjunis@gannett.com

