



California Teachers Get Approval From Board of Education for State Funds to Use 'Standards Edition' of Math Textbooks

Students in the Golden State will soon be using state-approved versions of the math textbooks that helped their counterparts in Singapore crunch numbers better than any children in the world, according to Jeffery Thomas, president of the textbooks' North American distributor, SingaporeMath.com Inc.

Elementary school teachers in California will, beginning next year, be allowed to use state funds to order adaptations of math textbooks that were developed by Singapore's Ministry of Education and helped students there earn first-place rankings in three widely cited studies of student math performance conducted in 1995, 1999 and 2003, Thomas said. The global study -- Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) -- is conducted every four years.

The state-approved adaptations of the Singaporean texts meet the state's K-5 math standards and represent a "marked departure" from most math textbooks used in the U.S., Thomas said. The California State Board of Education included the adaptations, or "Standards Edition" titles, published by Singapore-based Marshall Cavendish International in its 2007 Mathematics Primary Adoption on Nov. 8 after receiving a list of recommended textbooks from the state's Curriculum Commission.

The state's list of adopted math titles is available online at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/ma/im/mathprogramnov2007.asp>. The state released its last mathematics primary adoption in 2001.

The "Standards Edition" textbooks generally replace Singaporean dollars and cents with U.S. currency, Singaporean proper names and various British spellings, Thomas said. Teachers in Singapore deliver classroom instruction in English.

The adopted Singapore math titles are relatively thin books full of colorful illustrations of children, shapes and animals designed to support multi-step word problems that require students to work with numbers in various forms such as decimals, percentages and fractions.

"The presentation is astonishingly clear and child-friendly, yet is mathematically sophisticated," said Thomas Parker, a professor of mathematics at Michigan State University. "Students learn through carefully-designed problem sets. By grade six, the Singapore texts are one to two years ahead of U.S. texts, and the students are extremely well-prepared to start algebra."

Jim Milgram, a professor emeritus of mathematics at Stanford University, added that, "Singapore Math is one of the best programs out there -- especially in the lower grades."

By comparison, in the U.S., elementary school math textbooks "frequently present mathematics in 'template' form," Parker said.

"The teacher does several examples, then the students do problems that are identical except for

the choice of numbers," said Parker, the co-author of "Elementary Mathematics for Teachers," which has been used by undergraduate education majors at various universities, including Cal State University, Northridge and the University of Michigan. "The 'reform' textbooks written in the 1990s go to the opposite extreme, omitting skill development and instead give problems that involve much writing and little mathematics."

The Singapore books, he said, "strike a perfect balance."

Undergraduate teaching majors work with editions of "Primary Mathematics" in conjunction with Parker and Scott Baldrige's "Elementary Mathematics for Teachers." The teaching book often calls on undergrads to read a section of "Primary Mathematics," do problems and study the material from a teacher's perspective.

"Teachers think about what skills are developed, how the problems are organized, what the prerequisite knowledge is and what order topics are developed," Parker said. "This becomes a challenging and effective college course because the emphasis is on understanding elementary mathematics at the level of 'teacher knowledge.'"

Earlier editions of the Singapore math titles helped teachers at Ramona Elementary School in the Los Angeles Unified School District graduate 29% more fifth graders that met the state's "proficient and advanced" math standard in 2005-2006 than in 2004-2005, according to Robin Ramos, a district math coach at Ramona -- a Title I school in East Hollywood.

"Our scores have jumped considerably," Ramos said. "We need to learn how to teach math differently from how we were taught -- or we'll get the same results."

Ramos added that the improvement at Ramona is the byproduct of committed teaching, using the new textbooks and the training in Singapore math teachers received from Yoram Sagher, a professor of mathematics at Florida Atlantic University.

The Singapore math title adopted by California this month for grades 1-5 is "Primary Mathematics Standards Edition" -- which is adapted from the title developed by Singapore's Ministry of Education, "Primary Mathematics." The Singapore math title adopted by California this month for kindergarten is "Earlybird Kindergarten Mathematics Standards Edition," an adaptation of the title "Earlybird Preschool Mathematics" used by kindergarten-aged children in Singapore. Student workbooks and teacher guides are also available from SingaporeMath.com as companions to the "Standards Edition" titles.

Students who use Singapore math titles at Ramona Elementary "love the simplicity of the pictures" and "generally are very affectionate about them," Ramos said.

"They love the little children giving advice," Ramos said. "There's joy, and they respond to that -- the book presents math simply and the students get that."

Richard Askey, Ph.D. -- a professor emeritus of mathematics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison -- added that the 2003 TIMSS results reveal that in elementary school "it is of primary importance to build a firm foundation of numbers and operations and leaning how to solve multi-step word problems, and the Singapore method does each of these."

Askey is acknowledged by Marshall Cavendish International as a contributor on its state-approved title for grades 1-5.

The distributor of the state-approved texts, SingaporeMath.com, will work with trainers from Staff Development for Educators and other Singapore math specialists to help California teachers

use the textbooks, Thomas said.

"We recognize that professional development is an essential part of the textbooks being successful in the classroom," said Thomas, a former community college professor. "There's no substitute for good teaching."

Thomas and his wife, Dawn, a Singaporean, founded SingaporeMath.com in 1998 after the couple returned to the U.S. after spending five years in Singapore. After returning to the U.S., the couple supplemented their daughter's math coursework with editions of "Primary Mathematics" from Singapore.

Shane Armstrong, senior group publisher & head of Marshall Cavendish, said, "The endorsement by the California Department of Education of 'Primary Mathematics' and 'Earlybird Kindergarten Mathematics' (Standards Edition) for use by schools in California as a core program is an exciting step forward, and we will continue to work closely with SingaporeMath.com Inc. to provide the best math, teaching and learning support to educators and students in the U.S. -- particularly in California."

About SingaporeMath.com Inc.

Based in Oregon City, Ore., SingaporeMath.com was started in 1998 by Jeff and Dawn Thomas with a mission to bring quality educational books to the U.S. The couple lived for five years in Singapore (Dawn is a Singaporean), where their daughter attended kindergarten and the first half of first grade, before moving back to the U.S. in 1997. The couple was disappointed with the quality of mathematics materials used at schools in the U.S. and decided to continue using the Singapore math textbooks with their daughter to supplement her schoolwork. It then dawned on the couple that it would be a good idea to make the books available to schools and homeschoolers in the U.S. The company is dedicated to high standards of excellence in service and quality in products. <http://www.singaporemath.com/>

About Marshall Cavendish International

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