

Making math fun

RIVERDALE GRADE SCHOOL – “How do I engage learners and also ‘make math fun’?” This is an essential question math teachers have pondered for years. This year, the addition of Bridges in Mathematics second edition curriculum has only enhanced the amount of math “play” used to develop math skills in the grade school.

Learning activities tap into the intelligence and strengths of all students by presenting mathematical material infused with language, pictures and movement. “It’s accessible for all learning styles – visual, auditory and kinesthetic or hands-on,” explains Larissa Reece, 5th grade math teacher.

A recent lesson had her students using hands-on building techniques to solve a problem: How could they help a baseball salesman lower his costs for sending a set number of baseballs to his customers? To find the solution, students created multiple structures to contain the necessary volume of balls within the smallest surface area. They also drew illustrations of their prototypes in order to document their findings.

“Students develop hypotheses, describe observations, explain their methods and ask questions,” Mrs. Reece says. “They decompose problems and use different methods for solving them than the common algorithms.”

While our kindergarten through 2nd grade classes had been using Bridges, this year is the first year for Riverdale to utilize Bridges second edition seamlessly for grades K-5th. Mrs. Reece says it’s now rigorous at every grade level and so well structured that every lesson is a direct line into what they’ll learn next.

“It builds connections between concepts – that’s what I love so much,” she says. “The way they’ve put together the plan and process for reaching the big picture.”

The meaning-based program prompts students to identify the meaning behind the concepts, so they understand when and how to incorporate the practices they learn.

Parents can help by questioning how children are arriving at their answers and encouraging the exploration of multiple approaches to solving problems.

