

Philadelphia Archdiocese Finds Success With "First In Math" Pilot Program

Philadelphia, PA—Bob Sun, inventor of the 24[®] Game and developer of the First In Math[®] Online Program, was enrolled in the fifth grade at the St. Francis De Sales School soon after arriving in Philadelphia from Shanghai, China. That was more than 40 years ago, but his dedication to the archdiocesan schools has not wavered. During the 2005/2006 school year, the Philadelphia Archdiocese collaborated with Sun to introduce the First In Math[®] online program in its schools.

The successful pilot included 25 schools that fielded a total of 122 teams in grades three and five. Among the schools is South Philadelphia's St. Thomas Aquinas, who had 125 participating students on four teams. St. Thomas students, typically from economically disadvantaged homes, represent many diverse cultures: African American, Cambodian, Thai, Indonesian, Latins from Central America and Caucasian. "Many of these students are global learners," explains principal Armand Taraborelli. "their right-brain dominance benefits from the use of manipulatives, hands-on activities, and computer graphics, and the First In Math[®] program meets their needs."

To determine what impact, if any, the activity on FIM's web site had on the Terra Nova (a nationally-normed standardized test) scores for his third-grade students, Principal Taraborelli used the group's second grade scores as a point of comparison. What he found was a significant increase in math scores, year-to-year. "Obviously, this program was a tremendous help to our students," says Taraborelli. (See chart)

2005 Terra Nova (2nd grade)		2006 Terra Nova (3rd grade)	
Math:	52.4	Math:	68
Composite:	47.3	Composite:	82
Computation:	37.0	Computation:	86
Total Math:	41.0	Total Math:	65

Asked to identify the key to the program's success in his school, Taraborelli did not hesitate to mention the competition element—especially with fellow archdiocesan school St. Denis—and the fact that FIM is a fantastic supplement for review and reinforcement. "When teachers introduce skills, they seem to vanish without adequate exposure," mused the principal, "but FIM provides a way for students to stay in shape!"

Taraborelli also credits the interest and enthusiasm of individual teachers for the amazing performance of St. Thomas third graders. "Our teachers encouraged students with incentives such as homework passes, popcorn parties and positive notes to parents," says Taraborelli. "These inexpensive and effective tools produced a whirlwind of activity on the First In Math[®] site."

Taraborelli shared his findings with Sr. Edward William Quinn, Chairperson of the Elementary Mathematics Curriculum Committee for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. "We are thankful that this program is providing tangible results for some of our neediest kids," says Sr. Edward. ■