Math class divides educators

Everyday Math puts focus on how it works

By Kaye Swenson

MONONA – Kay Davick is catching her breath. “I’m always tired after math,” the Nichols Elementary School teacher says lightly after an hour of teaching third-graders to add and subtract two-digit numbers.

“Let the teacher scan the room to see if most children have answers on their desktop or the long black and white number wipe-away basketball-themed game board. It’s fast paced.

“Think you have the answer? Hold the slate up high. But the first 40 minutes are a whirlwind, starting with an 8-minute ‘Basketball Addition’ game where students do as many addition problems as they can in five minutes. The drill: roll two or three standard dice, add the results in your head and write the sum in marker on a wipe-away basketball-themed game board.

The class continues. For 30 minutes, Davick projects math problems on an overhead projector and asks students to work the problems out on individual wipe-away slates. They work in circles on the floor. It’s not just fidgety children that bring a weary smile. The University of Chicago’s “Everyday Math” curriculum has its passing nod to the memorization of facts.

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