

Games sharpen skills in math

EASTCHESTER — Quick. What's five times six?

Eastchester students and adults who are a little rusty with their math facts can brush up their skills with online games collected by the district's tech teacher and available with the click of a button.

As of last week, more than 50,000 clicks have been registered at www.skillsarefun.com — not bad for a site that's only been keeping count for a few months.

"It's not easy to find unless you know where to look," said veteran teacher Anthony Rich, who has been with Eastchester schools for 18 years and helped create the site.

Rich spent 11 years teaching second- and third-graders before becoming the district's elementary teacher tech trainer. He returned to the classroom several years ago to teach technology to the district's elementary school kids, spending time at both Greenvale and Anne Hutchinson schools.

The teacher, a father with a love of computers and other technology, had searched out the best math skills sites for his own daughters, now 11 and 9. Then he heard from many other teachers that their children were arriving in class the first day weak in basic math recall. Some children

just never learned the facts in the early grades that they needed to do math in the later grades.

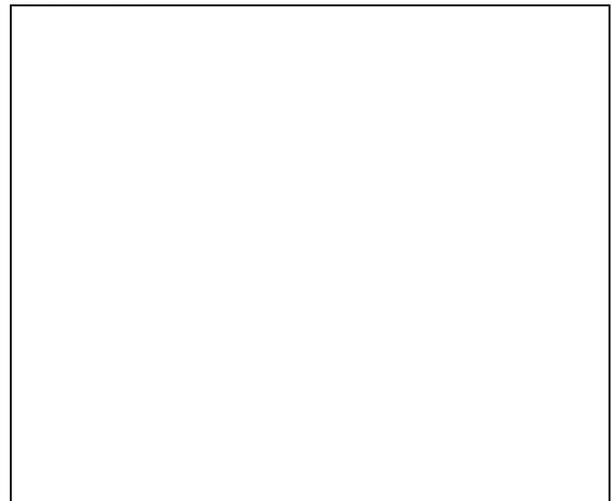
So two years ago, with the help of district curriculum coordinator Ron Hattar, Rich set up a site for the teachers with links to some of the games he used at home. He added pictures to help students find specific games and has since expanded the site to include typing games, brain exercises, a place for parents to create math worksheets, and seasonal games.

The site now is considered the go-to place for elementary school students at Eastchester who have some time on their hands.

"I love playing computer games and stuff, and I do like math," said Greenvale second-grader Brendan Sullivan, 7. "I told a couple of my friends, and they think it's pretty cool."

Greenvale Principal Theresa Sullivan got in

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on the action, taking up a student challenge on one of the games. She won, but she said she was delighted with how well the youngsters did.

“I think it’s a great resource for kids and for their parents,” she said. “They can play at home, challenge one another, play against themselves — it’s a great way to gain or strengthen automatic math facts.”

The site is part of Rich’s curriculum. He teaches students the basics of computer use, from logging on to creating a safe screen identity, and gives them “free” time when they’re allowed to play the games. Other teachers use the games as rewards for students, and all the youngsters and their parents can access the site from home.

“When we put the counter on, we had almost 1,000 hits right way. We had 10,000 in no time, and it hasn’t stopped,” he said.

The only downside, Rich said, is he cannot tell who is logging on and which games they’re using, and which skills they need more work on.

“I think there is actual improvement” in math facts, said Jessica O’Hara, a fifth-grade teacher whose students nearly all said they used the site regularly on their own time. “Having the ability to access it at home and on their own time makes it more appealing to them.”

O’Hara’s students said they liked the site for the competition. Some of the games

allow students to play each other from their home computers; others allow students to compete against themselves.

“It makes you work harder to win the game,” said Olivia Colavita, 11.

Added classmate Ashley Anello, 10: “If I’m struggling on my math facts, I would (click) on that to help me.”

Second-grade teacher Cindy Tolomeo said she uses the games with her students.

“We use a lot of visuals,” which is one of the site’s strengths, Tolomeo said. “It’s what they’re used to and they don’t look at it as work. It’s a great way to sneak it in.”

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