Oakland school gets math grant

By BRIAN WHITE
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Oakland Elementary students struggling in math will have extra help this fall, thanks to a $70,000 grant from the Kentucky Department of Education.

That money, from the state’s Mathematics Achievement Fund, will pay for an intervention program for second- and third-graders “who are struggling in the basics of mathematics,” Oakland Principal Michael Taylor said.

About 25 students will participate at a time, and be identified from tests at the end of the last school year and at the beginning of the upcoming year.

The tests will show where the students need help, Taylor said.

“Each student is basically going to be on a kind of individualized program based on their needs,” he said.

Oakland math and science teacher Brooke Knight was selected to teach the program. She attended training at the University of Louisville in June, along with teachers from 44 schools in other counties that received the grant.

There will be several more meetings for teachers throughout the year, and they will participate in weekly sessions on the Internet.

The students will work in small groups and one-on-one with Knight, who previously taught fifth grade. The curriculum, called Number Worlds, uses hands-on activities to help the students make sense of the pages of their workbooks.

“This one has a lot of games, a lot of hands-on games that will reach into their thinking and their math skills,” Knight said.

She said she used similar activities in her regular classes, so the Number Worlds method wasn’t a big adjustment.

The classes with Knight will be in addition to student’s usual math classes, and will likely take place in the afternoon, she said.

“This is extra assistance,” Knight said. “It will not go into their regular instructional time at all.”

The students in the program will be tested several times during the school year, and will be able to stop taking the program once they are up to their grade level, Taylor said.

“This improvement is most important while students are in their primary school years because it affects the rest of their academic careers,” he said.

“We’ve got to catch these children early and often,” Taylor said.

Oakland had 270 students last year, and many of them need the extra help, including those who speak English as a second language, Taylor said.

“We’re the smallest school in the county, but we have a very high at-risk population and a growing ESL population,” he said.

About 70 percent of Oakland’s student qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, Taylor said. Students in that demographic tend to score lower on standardized tests in math and reading.

“There’s a big need for this, and we are very very grateful that we got this grant,” Taylor said.