

Program adds art to math

by Aleshia Howe
Special to the *Business Press*

A

t All Saints' Episcopal School, math and art can be a creative combination. In an effort to encourage an early appreciation of math and art in combination, All Saints' Episcopal School launched a preschool late last spring with a specialized curriculum.

The Head of School Tad Bird and Early Childhood Director Robin Page worked with Robin Ward, an All Saints' parent who happens to be a Rice University clinical assistant professor of mathematics and associate director for curriculum integration in the Rice University School Mathematics Project.

In its first full year, the preschool program includes two pre-kindergarten classes and one bridge class between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, Page said. As a preschool director for the past 10 years, All Saints' started this program bringing in Page to lead the way as the program director. She's an All Saints' parent, also.

"All Saints' is committed to academic excellence and the ability to bring in talent such as Dr. Ward will help us continue to achieve excellence with our students as well as our faculty," Page said. "Our main goal is to get them ready for kindergarten academically, spiritually and emotionally."

Page said Ward will begin work with the preschool students right out of the gate with "math, literacy and the visual arts." Paint, glue sticks and pastels will become staples in the mathematics classroom as the school draws upon Ward's expertise in the classroom as well as with professional development sessions planned for the year to bring mathematics to a high level of understanding across disciplines.

Her focus is helping students see math in more than just math class, Page said. For example, one lesson might be focused on geometry concepts while exploring how Dutch abstract artist Piet Mondrian painted his masterpieces using intersections, horizontal and vertical lines while creating square and rectangular regions.

Lessons such as this will help students explore and discover mathematical concepts including number sense, patterns, measurement and geometry, she said.

"I love working with the little ones," Ward said. "I want to instill a love of mathematics in the girls, especially, and have all the children develop a love of math. We'll accomplish that by using children's literature and the arts."

Ward will work with students once a week in each of the three different preschool classes, focusing on engaging students in an hour-long activity of looking at mathematics through the perspective of art, Ward said.

Each lesson will center around a different artist's works. Artists from Georgia O'Keefe to Henri Matisse, for example, will be studied, she said.

"We'll discuss the techniques that the artists used, talk about their biographies and then create an artifact in the spirit of that artist," she said. "If we're studying (Jackson) Pollock, we'll do splatter paintings or if it's Georgia O'Keefe, we'll paint larger than life flowers."



Dr. Robin Ward works with Loudon East in a class at All Saints' Episcopal School.

All Saints' is committed to academic excellence and the ability to bring in talent such as Dr. Ward will help us continue to achieve excellence with our students as well as our faculty.

— Robin Page, All Saints' early childhood director

The key, she said, is to look for mathematics in the artwork. Engaging the children through geometry or counting the flowers, looking for patterns and more, she said.

"So many people get turned off to mathematics at an early age. We lose learners around the start of long division because it's not taught in an exciting or engaging way,"

Ward said. "We need to use an innovative way to grab younger learners' interest from the beginning. We need to grab their interest by using children's literature and arts."

With two daughters attending the school in the second and fourth grades, Ward moved to Fort Worth with her husband, Chris DelConte, who is the new director of athletics at Texas Christian University.

Ward has been working with education majors and doing professional development with teachers for the past 13 years. For the last eight years, she has spent time with teachers and researched how to make teaching and learning of mathematics more engaging. Another focus is helping students become savvy consumers, even at a young age, she said. ■