The Advocate
Baton Rouge public schools land $3.5 million grant to improve math instruction nationwide

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The East Baton Rouge Parish school system’s approach to math instruction will soon become the subject of intensive investigation, particularly how well it is helping minority children and those living in poverty, thanks to a $3.5 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Once this research project is complete, the prominent Seattle-based foundation plans to share its findings widely.

“This will provide math teachers in EBR and nationwide the tools they need to learn as we progress mathematically in our country,” said Superintendent Sito Narcisse.

Narcisse said accelerating math achievement is important given the “unfinished learning” that students suffered during the pandemic.

Narcisse spoke Thursday at a press conference to highlight the grant.

New York City public schools was the only other school district to land this competitive “math equity” grant. It was competing in a field of 17 applicants.

The Gates Foundation developed the competitive grant program with input from the Council of Great City Schools, of which East Baton Rouge is a member.

Ray Hart, executive director of the Council, spoke at the press conference.

“When we worked with them to develop what would help all of our students get better, learn and grow, I couldn’t think of a better place where we can begin to learn and make investments in our young people here in East Baton Rouge,” said Hart.

LSU’s Social Research & Evaluation Center is in charge of the research and is in the process of devising the research design behind this project. They will be watching progress in math of East Baton Rouge Parish schoolchildren as they use online software the school system subscribes to called DreamBox Learning.
The grant, which will last 33 months, will follow how students perform on their DreamBox math lessons over the next 33 months as well as accompanying classroom math instruction to identify what out of all that leads to better student engagement and results. LSU will work with a network of experts throughout the research.

“It’s not just a research team on the side. We are part of a research infrastructure,” said LSU Social Research & Evaluation Center Director Judith Rhodes

DreamBox’s chief learning officer, Tim Hudson, also spoke. He said DreamBox is designed not only to help children improve their math schools, but also improve the motivation and interest in math, thereby overcoming the stigma against math that so many children develop at an early age.

“Our goal is to inspire children think for themselves,” Hudson said.

DreamBox was first used in East Baton Rouge in fall 2021. Hudson said East Baton Rouge is on the right track.

“East Baton Rouge is a district with an innovative leader, with innovative ideas, with a bold vision for the community,” Hudson said.