

# Brook Knoll Elementary earns state recognition



Brook Knoll second-grade teacher Becky McDermott, who also graduated from the school, keeps an active classroom that encourages inquiry and discovery. SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Brook Knoll School

6.11.14

School awarded for its parent involvement, math practices

By Calvin Men

calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com  
@calvinmenatwork on Twitter

**SANTA CRUZ »** Inside of Becky McDermott's second-grade class at Brook Knoll Elementary School, students are divided into smaller groups during parts of the day. McDermott works with children to count plastic coins while two parent volun-

teers work with other groups at nearby tables on reading lessons and math games.

McDermott has at least one parent helping her each day, sometimes organizing paperwork but more often working with children in group activities. The parents have become essential to the way McDermott runs her classroom.

"It would be a lot more differ-

ent (if the parents weren't here)," she said. "What, unfortunately, would happen is I wouldn't be doing all of the things I do because I would be having to do whole groups or their independent learning centers would have to be very easy."

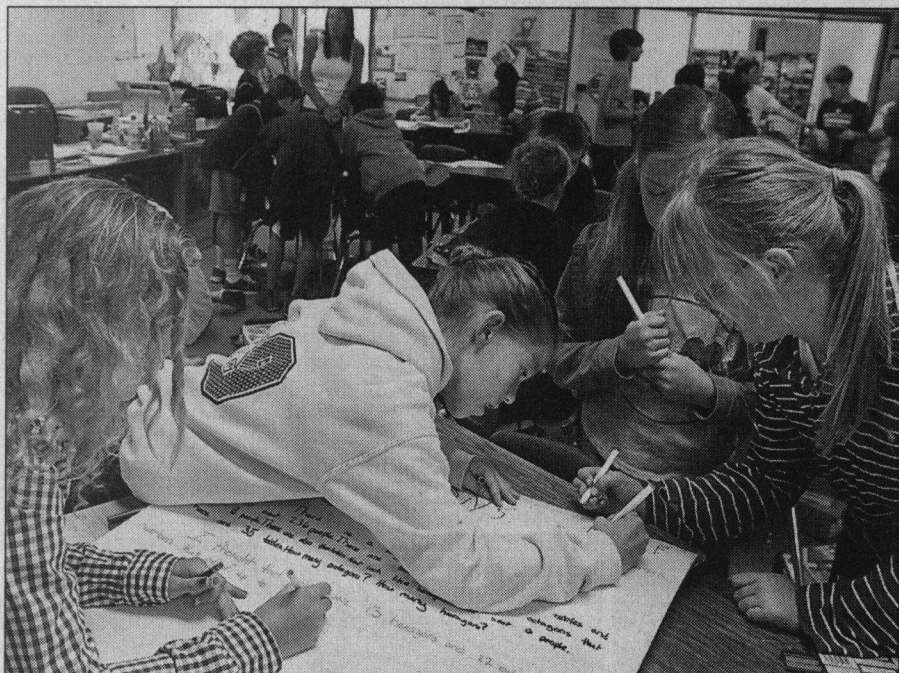
Parent involvement was one of two signature practices that helped the school become a California Distinguished School

for 2014. Awarded by the state, schools qualify for the award by meeting academic performance criteria. After qualifying, the school submits an application that profiles the school and outlines two signature practices at the school.

Brook Knoll was one of four county schools named as a California Distinguished School for

AWARD » PAGE 3





SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Morgan Stevenson, Phoebe Whitmore, Marta Frankiv and Kate Spencer collaborate on their final math project for the school year in Rhonda McEntee's fifth-grade class at Brook Knoll Elementary School on Wednesday.

## Award

FROM PAGE 1

2014 the state Department of Education. It's the first time in at least 16 years the school won the award, according to Sharlene Ransom, school principal.

Brook Knoll highlighted its parent teacher organization and its math comprehensive math program as signature practices.

"It's more than just the prestige," Ransom said. "I think it validates who we are as a community. I think it's something that says, 'You know, you're fine. You've been wonderful for many years and we're validating that now.'"

There are 75 parents who volunteer at the school, working with students as well as helping to maintain parts of the schools.

Beyond volunteering, parents are also key in fundraising, supporting art and science programs at the school.

The school's second signature practice, its mathematics program, has components designed to help students solve and understand problems. It includes using Silicon Valley Math Initiatives, a program used to help teachers develop new math strategies, and using an assessment process to ensure student understanding. A majority of the teachers at the school have completed summer sessions at the Math Initiatives' summer institute.

"For the last several years, we've been working on improving our math skills and making sure all kids are receiving the math education they should be," said Rhonda McEntee, a fifth-grade teacher and

math coach for the school district.

On a recent school day, students in her class were working on their math puzzle of the week. After reading the word problem about a man paying rent with gold chains, students worked in groups to write out the answer on a large sheet of paper. The curriculum has evolved from using one method to get one answer to using various methods to get the same answer.

"When my kids were in school, it was mostly about getting the right answer," she said. "We're not down that road anymore. We're now honoring many ways to get an answer and looking at many ways to get and answer. We're also looking at kids not just doing the math but understanding why they're doing it and what it means."