

## Camp helps solve problems in math

By Tracy Frank, The Forum

Published Saturday, July 29, 2006

<http://www.in-forum.com/news/articles/134696>

Earlier this week, the sun was shining and the sky was clear. It was just about perfect for playing outside.

Yet 16 children, ages 9 to 11, sat inside a classroom at Minnesota State University Moorhead working on algebra problems; not because they had to be there, but because they wanted to be there.

The students were participating in a weeklong, hands-on algebra enrichment program.

The program, known as the Summer Algebra Institute, is a math camp that uses games, hands-on activities, music and written materials to teach young children complex math concepts usually reserved for junior high.

“It’s fun seeing the kids’ eyes light up,” said Bob Hazen, program instructor and founder. “It’s fun doing things with kids that they normally don’t do at that age, but which I know they can do.”

While Hazen wrote out an algebraic expression, the students used colored plastic tiles to illustrate the problem.



Bob Hazen of St. Paul works with math students Camille Federowich, left, and Mary Noble on Wednesday during a Summer Algebra Institute class at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Darren Gibbins / The Forum

“It’s really been a lot of fun to watch,” said Cheri Puetz, a fifth-grade teacher in the Moorhead School District who worked as a teacher’s aid for the program. “I watch how they catch on with these pieces and I know that this is going to reach more kids. They’re going to get it.”

Puetz plans to use the technique in her classroom.

Hazen said the program helps prepare children for algebra by familiarizing them with the terms and concepts, “so they’re not afraid of algebra anymore.”

Some students wanted to take part in the camp because they like math. But not everyone wanted to spend part of their summer vacation doing schoolwork, at least not at first.

When his mother initially broached the subject, 10-year-old Nicholas Paulson didn't want to attend the math camp.

"But then the first day I saw how much fun it was," he said. "I really like it."

"It really enhances what kids will learn when they get back to traditional K-12 schooling," said Kathleen Paulson, Nicholas' mom and customized training program coordinator for MSUM Continuing Studies.

MSUM's Continuing Studies partnered with Algebra for Kids, Moorhead Public Schools and the MSUM Math Department to bring the Summer Algebra Institute to Moorhead.

Nearly 30 kids in third through sixth grade participated. Continuing Studies plans to offer it again next year and will likely double the number of kids who can participate.

"It helps anybody with different learning styles progress and gives them more tools to understand it," said Jan Flack, director of Continuing Studies.

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