



Teachers attend Summer Math Institute

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Twenty-nine teachers from seven school districts in the region upgraded their teaching skills by taking part in the week-long 2017 Summer Math Institute, part of the Los Alamos National Laboratory Math and Science Academy for Teachers program (MSA).

Held at [Northern New Mexico College](#) June 26–30, the Institute covered math content and best-practice approaches to math teaching for grades 1–8, working with MSA staff and Rick Kitchen from the University of Wyoming.

“We particularly look at fractions and rational numbers,” Kitchen says. “The focus is on the teachers doing mathematics, engaging in problems, sharing their thinking and learning from one another as well as from me.”

The Institute is part of the MSA professional development program for K–12 teachers. Participants attend the summer course and also receive instructional support and additional math and science content workshops throughout the school year. The program aims to increase teachers’ content knowledge and their use of research-based practices for lessons in the classroom, as well as to improve their leadership skills.

Ali Semanision teaches in the gifted program at Mountain Elementary in Los Alamos and was participating in her second MSA Summer Math Institute. She’s clear on the benefits for her students: “When it comes to multiplication, for example, you’re not just teaching the algorithm, you’re teaching the thinking behind the algorithm, which really gives the students confidence,” she says.

“After last year’s Institute I went back and shared my notes with my colleagues, and they liked the approach so much that there are more teachers from Los Alamos Public Schools here this year,” Semanision says.

“I used visual cues with my second graders to work on multiplying two-digit numbers by three-digit numbers. They really got it, and had a better grasp of it than some of my fifth graders who had been taught in a different way.”

Stephanie Ortega teaches second grade at Cuba Elementary, and the Institute was her first taste of the MSA program. “It was a little overwhelming at first, but very quickly I could see how I could implement the techniques to help even my little ones get a better understanding of how math works, not just how to do it,” she says.

“Students are learning more mathematics because the teachers are learning more mathematics, and they’re taking that back to their classrooms,” Kitchen says.

The participating teachers came from: Los Alamos Public Schools, Pojoaque Public Schools, Santa Fe Public Schools, Taos Day School, Cuba Independent School District, Pecos Independent School District, and Jemez Valley Public Schools.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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