Conference Speakers Set for Summer

TMU is pleased to present their 2006 Summer Institute for elementary/middle school mathematics, science and special education teachers. This event will take place Tuesday, June 27 - Thursday, June 29 at the Desmond Hotel and Conference Center. The days are packed with informative workshops and dynamic speakers, designed specifically to address the following curricula: Math Trailblazers, Connected Mathematics, and Everyday Math. This conference will help teachers develop expertise in implementing the curricula in their classroom and strategies for effective mathematics teaching at the elementary through middle school level.

Highlighting the event each day will be a keynote address, followed by two workshops. The three keynote speakers will be Heidi Andrade, Jan Parsons and Bob Peterson. Heidi Andrade will address assessment; Jan Parsons will discuss ways to facilitate mathematical discourse and communication in the classroom; and Bob Peterson will talk about social justice and the ways different students of various backgrounds experience mathematical instruction. The workshops, which run across all three days of the conference, will focus on the specific curricula mentioned earlier and content/pedagogy areas such as “Statistics,” “Early Algebra” and “Proportions and Reasoning.” Other workshop topics include: “Meeting the Diverse and Special Needs of Children,” “Communicating Mathematics More Effectively” and finally, “Learning More About How to Properly Implement the Use of Calculators.”

This day-long conference will start with registration/continental breakfast at 7:30 and last until 3:30. A Courtyard Buffet Lunch is included for all participants, as well as a complementary tote bag with educational materials. To register, visit www.albany.edu/tmu or contact the TMU Office at (518) 442-4583 for more information. For driving directions to the Desmond, visit www.desmondhotelsalbany.com.

There will also be a Math Trailblazers Pre-Conference on Monday, June 26th and an Everyday Mathematics Post-Conference on Friday, June 30th. For more information about the Pre and Post Conference, contact your district supervisor.

Editor: Philomena Brassard
Communications Specialist
Spring Semester of On-line Courses Comes to a Close

Our new and improved offering of spring on-line courses met with much success. Teacher registration was at an all-time high, as was the course completion rate. Over 50 teachers participated in our spring on-line courses, *Teaching for Understanding, Multiple Representations,* and *From Arithmetic to Algebra,* with an average completion rate of approximately 75%! Feedback from teachers and facilitators was also positive:

“I really enjoyed the course...please keep them coming, they are fabulous!”

“...we are very fortunate and blessed that you offer this opportunity to us.”

“...I am thoroughly enjoying the classes thus far.”

“I'm doing Teaching Math for Understanding and am really getting a lot out of it already. One of my reasons for being so greedy for knowledge is so I can not only learn for myself, but can share it with others.”

“The course went really well. I enjoyed [facilitating] it and had several very thoughtful teachers participating.”

“The participants in this current round of From Arithmetic to Algebra are doing some really nice work! There are several very strong participants.”

Planning of summer and fall on-line courses is currently underway. We are researching on-line course offerings by Texas Instruments and Annenberg Media as future resources we might make available to our teachers.

By: Deanna Stickles-Bach

TMU to be Represented at National Conferences

Members of Team TMU will be traveling to San Francisco, California and St. Louis, Missouri for the “American Education Research Association” and “National Council of Teachers of Mathematics” Annual Meetings. The “National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics” Conference, also in St. Louis, precedes the NCTM Meeting. The chance to participate in these conferences will be an unique and exciting opportunity. Attendees will hopefully gain valuable information that can be utilized to improve the quality of professional development offered through the project.

The AERA Annual Meeting is Friday, April 7– Tuesday, April 11. Topics that will be discussed include: “Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools,” “Policy/Practice for Powerful Teaching and Learning” and “Educational Opportunity being the highest Civil Rights Priority.” Additionally, there are break-out workshops to attend, as well.

The NCSM 38th Annual Conference is Monday, April 24– Wednesday, April 26. On Monday, Kathleen Mineau and Elizabeth Cushing, both of CSDA, will run a session called, “Creating and Sustaining an Ongoing Professional Development Plan to Support High Quality Teaching” (within the framework of a reform mathematics program). On Tuesday, Donald Yackel, of CSDA, and Jan Parsons (a keynote speaker at our Summer Institute), will also speak. Their session is called, “Strategies Districts Use to Develop Successful Math Implementation: Key Roles Administrators Play to Engage All Stakeholders.”

The NCTM Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 26– Saturday, April 29, features over 1,000 presentations, workshops, and mini-courses that cover mathematics in all grade levels.
A Healthy Dose of Standards

On February 11, 2006, the TMU graduate assistants attended the New York State United Teachers Math Institute on the New York State Standards. This five-hour conference, held at the Crowne Plaza in Albany, was also offered as a TMU professional development opportunity for teachers. I found the conference to be a very positive experience.

The morning began with a welcome and introduction highlighting what NYSUT is all about. Then, it jumped right into a Plenary Session where we had the chance to discuss questions and changes to the New York State mathematics education. It was a nice way for teachers to voice their concerns and get their “tough” questions answered by experts. It also, maybe inadvertently, became a nice icebreaker for teachers to share with each other a little bit about their familiarity with the state exams and the grade level they teach. One comment I found particularly interesting was, that there is not yet total consistency between the state testing rubrics and grade levels. That is the same kind of problem we run into with curricula used in the schools. As teachers and providers of professional development, I feel it is so important to be aware of even the slightest differences. That way, we plan accordingly when teaching, to really give the children the best possible chance of succeeding.

After the Plenary Session, we broke out into small mini sessions that dealt with specific content knowledge for grades 5-8. Some sessions introduced education options available to schools, such as “Marcopolo” (part of the New York State Virtual Learning System) and programs like “Batter Up” (available through The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum). One common theme of the morning sessions was, examining strategies needed to develop algebraic thinking.

While we were finishing lunch, we listened to a quick speech that helped motivate the transition from the lush desserts, back to math. The talk was given by Dr. Helene Silverman, a Professor of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Lehman College. Even though this talk was brief, I found it to be very powerful. What I really liked the most about it was how it dovetailed so perfectly with last year’s relational thinking day at the TMU conference. Teachers who attended our summer conference and then this one, had a positive reinforcement of the ideas we tried to convey. It was a chance to learn about relational thinking in a different setting with new applications– for instance, using a hundreds-board and transformational geometry. She even gave advice about lesson planning. Often times, educators teach the same lessons year after year, without taking time to reflect upon how the lesson was perceived. I believe it is very important to analyze lessons in conjunction with student work to see what impact the lessons had and to look for ways to improve them in the future.

Finally, the conference ended with an afternoon break-out session. The workshop choices were just as varied as the morning. However, instead of focusing on content, they focused on pedagogy. “Preparing for the March mathematics assessments,” “Implementing calculators in the classroom,” “Communicating math more effectively,” “Learning techniques for helping students with disabilities achieve success” and “Facilitating algebraic activities,” were among the workshop topics. The afternoon session I attended solidified my understanding of the NYS Standards and how to launch lessons in a way that incorporates fun, while building problem-solving techniques in the process.

Congratulations to Margaret Webb, of CSDA, for winning the NYSUT Apple IPOD Nano Drawing!
Not All Good Things Must End: Planning Sessions Update

City School District of Albany Elementary Planning Sessions:
Since December, the Elementary Planning Sessions have addressed issues related to the NYS testing in March. Teachers in grades 3, 4 and 5 have taken a closer look at the NYSED’s Pre-March/Post-March Performance Indicators to more closely align instruction with testing. They have even examined Math Trailblazer lessons from previous grade levels, as well as program components that would serve as practice materials of a reform nature. As of late, the major topic of discussion and professional readings have addressed the issue of differentiating between “What is drill and what is practice,” along with when and how much of these drill/practice activities are appropriate. This topic was chosen because of a common concern teachers of all grade levels had. They felt an increasing number of students were not developing automaticity with mathematical facts. They are being careful to make sure that the initiatives they take to attempt to remedy this problem are delivered at the correct time and in a way that values understanding.

In addition, lead Teachers Kathleen Mineau and Elizabeth Cushing, have continued to visit classrooms to model/assist with lessons and labs. They have also conducted the Phase I training for NYS test scoring by grade level. They are looking forward to reconvening with teachers from grades 5-6 for full-day pull-out training in April and May.

City School District of Albany Middle School Planning Sessions:
Middle School teachers have been working to relate the Connected Mathematics objectives to the NYSED’s Performance Indicators for Mathematics. In preparation for Post-March curriculum and the next school year’s curriculum, teachers are working with Doreen Quinlan, supervisor of Mathematics K-12 in CSDA, to determine appropriate curricula objectives for each grade level (6-8) and organize CMP units in terms of these objectives. They also hope to develop additional activities and experiences that give students an opportunity to demonstrate deep mathematical understanding in reference to the required performance indicators.

Five teachers completed the fifteen-hours required for the Planning Sessions. Four of these teachers are committing to an additional fifteen hours for the remainder of the spring, to continue the work that began in October. Additional teachers will be recruited to assist in this endeavor. The goal is to have teachers from each of the middle schools represented in the Planning Sessions. These new sessions began March 7.

Schenectady City School District Planning Sessions:
On February 15, three teachers completed the 10-hour Planning Session professional development module. Over the course of the ten-hours, these teachers discussed different activities to support student understanding and worked towards developing activities that could be extended to support algebraic thinking.

On March 27, a group will begin a new 10-hour Planning Session focused on examining the Post-March Performance Indicators for the grade level/s they are teaching.

Non-Public Planning Sessions:
Teachers from four different non-public schools met to share lesson plans with each other. In addition, teachers shared strategies that incorporated manipulatives into their curricula, with the goal of supporting student understanding of mathematics concepts. These professional development meetings provided teachers with time to connect with each other to share best practices and resources.

Student Portfolios: Documenting Differentiated Instruction:
The Student Portfolio Session is a brand new professional development opportunity that will be piloted in the Schenectady City School District this spring. Teachers will self-select up to six students who have performed at either a level 1 or 2 on previous state assessments. Using a framework to guide teacher observation, teachers will bring samples of student work, descriptions of activities and instructional strategies to share with their peers. The purpose of these portfolio sessions is to document effective teaching strategies and share those practices in a supportive environment. Each session will consist of teachers presenting the student-work samples and their instructional techniques, and then discussing additional strategies with others in the group. These sessions will begin on April 3.

By: Tosha Burnie-Grimmer