

## Auburn faculty help area schools conduct summer math institute

Nearly 400 teachers from East Alabama schools returned to the classroom this summer as part of the TEAM-Math Summer Institute.

The teachers from more than 25 area schools gathered at Opelika Middle School, where they studied mathematics and teaching techniques under the direction of faculty from Auburn and Tuskegee University and top teachers from Alabama schools.

The participating schools will be among the first to introduce the TEAM-Math curriculum and instructional approaches into their classrooms beginning with the 2004-2005 academic year.

"This is hands-on learning," said Phillip Zenor, a member of TEAM-Math and professor in Auburn's College of Sciences and Mathematics. "These teachers, and later their students, are learning by being involved. They are doing hands-on exercises such as measuring shadows cast from a flashlight and turning it into a math exercise by figuring out the angles. They are learning mathematics through personal experiences."

TEAM-Math is a partnership of 12 school districts, along with AU and Tuskegee, with a goal of improving mathematics education in East Alabama. Last fall, the National Science Foundation awarded TEAM-Math a five-year, \$9 million grant as a part of the foundation's Math and Science Partnership.

Partners from Auburn include College of Education and College of Sciences and Mathematics and AU Outreach.

Tuskegee, meanwhile sent faculty from the TU Department of Mathematics and its Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

"One thing we have talked about is how learning math concepts on a higher level can help children in

all disciplines," said Amy Hopkins, a first-grade teacher at Oliver Elementary School. "We are learning about activities that we can incorporate in our classroom to expand higher order thinking skills and to challenge our students."

During a session for first grade teachers, taught by Barbara Pickard of Tallassee Elementary School, the teachers became students themselves as they were divided into different workstations and given a box of wooden geometric shapes. Each workstation used a different activity to teach lessons, such as how triangles, squares and pentagons can be used to create other shapes and how geometric shapes can be used to teach children about fractions.

At a time when technology is a major part of our society, it is important children develop critical thinking skills at an early age, Pickard said.

"We are facing a different world and our children need to be prepared," Pickard said. "What better way to teach the children than by encouraging them to participate in hands-on activities. They have more fun learning because they are enjoying what they are doing."

It is this type of teaching method that is most helpful for the children, said Becky Scarborough of Wright's Mill Road Elementary School in Auburn.

"The students learn more from their free discovery time," she said. "Trial and error for them is one of the most beneficial ways for them to learn."

Teachers who attended the 10-day Institute will participate in quarterly meetings during the academic year, as well as a one-week summer institute in 2005.

For more information on TEAM-Math, log on to: [www.team-math.net](http://www.team-math.net).