

Math for Parents (MAPPS) at Hohokam

written by David Gay

Tuesday evening, February 26, 2008, an extraordinary event took place. Twenty-five parents of students from Hohokam middle school and its feeders celebrated the completion of a Math for Parents Mini-Course. It was the last of eight sessions of a course titled *Thinking with Fractions, Decimals and Percents*. Throughout the course, parents worked at tables with other parents solving problems using pattern blocks, place value blocks, Cuisenaire rods and other hands-on materials. Many parents came up front to share their solutions with the whole class. All of them were involved and all were having fun. One parent said: "This is sad. What are we going to do when this is over? We want to do more math!" The group was evenly split between men and women --- many mom-and-dad couples participated. Of the 18 parents who attended all eight sessions, 9 are Native American, 8 are Hispanic, and 1 is Anglo.

The course began during the first week of January and met every week thereafter at Hohokam. Each session began at 4:45p.m. with dinner in the school courtyard. Mathematics began in earnest at 5:30 in the library and continued until 7:30. A translator was present at all sessions to translate between facilitators (who spoke in English) and about a third of the parents (who preferred to speak and solve problems in Spanish). A child-care center was nearby, staffed with certified district employees.

The February 26 event marked the culmination of an effort by a team of a dozen or so TUSD educators to involve parents in a real way in the mathematical education of their children. The team of coordinators consists of five teacher-facilitators from Hohokam and its feeders, the TUSD mathematics curriculum specialist, the TUSD Title I coordinator, other staff specialists and aids from the district, and a representative from the U of A MAPPS Center. Shelly Duran, the Title I coordinator, is the leader. The team met regularly beginning in the fall of 2006. In the spring and fall of 2007 several stand-alone Math for Parents Workshops took place at Hohokam and Lawrence (a feeder elementary). The success of these events spurred the team to plan for a Math for Parents Mini-Course --- a significant escalation of Math for Parents activities for Hohokam and its feeders. An escalation, because a Math for Parents Mini-Course involves a significant commitment of time for a participating parent: eight, two-hour sessions held in consecutive weeks. The major question was: Would enough parents sign up? A Math for Parents Mini-Course had never been offered at Hohokam and its feeders. The team took the plunge. Team members felt this move was essential for making its program of Math for Parents activities sustainable. Mini-Courses would be the means for creating *capacity* in the program: parents participating in the Mini-Courses would become cheerleaders for and promoters of the program; many parents could become potential co-facilitators of Math for Parent workshops. The Mini-Course whose last session took place that Tuesday evening was a first for TUSD. Forty-four parents attended the initial session. Eighteen parents attended all eight sessions. Members of the team of educators were clearly tickled by its success.

The last session of the Mini-Course began, as the others had, with mathematics. However, the second hour of the session constituted a celebration of the end of the course. Each parent came forward to obtain a “Certificate of Completion” and walk a “gauntlet” of “dignitaries”, shaking hands with the latter and receiving kudos of “congratulations!” “good job!” “¡felicidades!” The dignitaries included Roger Pfeuffer (TUSD Superintendent), Ross Sheard (TUSD Principal Supervisor for Hohokam, its feeders, and other district schools), John Michel (Principal of Hohokam), Ana Gallegos (Principal of Lawrence, a Hohokam feeder), David Gay (Coordinator, MAPPS Center, U of A), Christina Harmon (TUSD Secondary Mathematics Curriculum Specialist), Molly Hearn (Hohokam Teaching Resource Specialist), and Shelly Duran (TUSD Title I Coordinator).

Before the awards ceremony, while parents were still doing math, Roger Pfeuffer turned to me and said: “This program is really powerful!” Ross Sheard, sitting nearby, leaned in and added: “This is the greatest program I’ve ever seen for parents. Ever! In any subject!” During the celebration part of the evening, one parent stood up and said: “I went to school in Mexico. I remember being asked by my teacher to solve some math problems in front of the class. I missed a couple of them. He beat me with a stick. After that --- through my college years --- I hated mathematics. I never understood anything in mathematics. I got through because I memorized all the solutions in the back of the book. But in this course at Hohokam, I have begun to understand. I have learned ways to solve problems. I can solve problems myself and can understand what I am doing. Above all, here I feel safe.”

Five teachers from Hohokam and its middle schools shared the responsibility for facilitating the sessions for the Mini-Course. Typically, two of these teachers would facilitate a particular session, while the other teachers (those able to attend) acted as aids --- greeting the parents and circulating around the tables, answering questions and offering assistance. Three all-day Saturday sessions were held to train these individuals. One session took place in mid-November and was led by Christiana Harmon; the second session took place in early December and was led by Mary Schumacher, Director of the U of A MAPPS Center; the third training session took place the first week of February and was led by Christina Harmon.

The team of coordinators of the Math for Parents Program, known as the MAPPS Team, will be meeting soon to debrief the Mini-Course. Members of the MAPPS Team are really pumped-up with the Mini-Course’s success. There is no question that there will be more Math for Parents (MAPPS) activities at Hohokam and its feeders, that there will be more Math for Parents Mini-Courses, and that there will be an effort to involve Mini-Course participants in leadership roles. Already, more feeder schools are clamoring to be on board for Math for Parents activities to take place at their schools.

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