

Prestwood festival features hands-on math

Jody Purdom | Sonoma Valley Sun

Students, teachers and parents had fun with numbers last Friday as Prestwood Elementary School brought the popular math festival to its school. Sponsored by the California Mathematics Council, the festival celebrates math with hands-on activities for kindergarten through eighth grades.

"This event puts math right in the students' hands and makes learning easy and joyful," said Beth Wolk, principal of Prestwood.



Teacher, Kristi Draluck works with two of her kindergartners during Prestwood's math festival.

The program uses manipulatives to teach standards-based concepts like algebra, geometry and numbers. For example, at one station, students work in pairs to build algebraic function patterns out of cubes. At another station, students solve simultaneous equations with two unknowns using beans. "One of the best things about this program is that students don't even realize they're learning math," said Suzanne Heiser, Prestwood fourth grade teacher. "They're having fun and they're learning – things that are both enormously important to us as educators."

Paul Giganti is the math guru behind the festival. A retired University of California, Berkeley professor, Giganti developed the program while teaching. Once he retired, a federal grant helped him take the show on the road. Now, and for the past five years, Giganti puts on between 60 and 80 festivals throughout California.

"The festival helps kids practice what they've learned in the classroom," said Giganti. "It's also a good experience for the parent volunteers because they get a refresher course on skills that might be rusty. The whole thing gets kids excited and helps them see beyond the basic math facts."

Hosting one of Giganti's math festivals costs a school anywhere from \$800 to \$2,000, depending on the hours and scope of the program. But for Wolk, the benefits are immeasurable.

"I really have to thank our parent community and the PTO for funding this phenomenal program," she said. "It facilitates learning in a way that books and white boards don't. This shines through in the way that the students respond. It's truly been great."