



Building a community of math learners

November 14, 2019

Students at Pojoaque Valley Middle School were given a new way to look at mathematics thanks to morning of math puzzles and games on October 24.

Laboratory volunteers helped run some of the activities at the Julia Robinson Math Festival organized by Pojoaque Middle School, the Math Circles Collaborative of New Mexico, and the Laboratory's Math and Science Academy (MSA).

Julia Robinson Mathematics Festivals take place all over the world in honor of the famous mathematician, and the Pojoaque middle schoolers moved from table to table trying out the activities that all incorporate math challenges and insights.

High-school students from Mandela International Magnet School in Santa Fe also volunteered to run tables, helping out as the younger children collaborated to explore games such as the [Tower of Hanoi](#) puzzle, where the challenge is to move disks of different sizes from one peg to another without placing a larger disk on top of a smaller one.

“The best thing about the day was to see the level of engagement of the students,” says Monica Martinez-Archuleta from the MSA, who was running a table herself. “They were experiencing what it’s like to work collaboratively, I could hear them asking questions of one another, looking for ways to move forward on the tasks they were given. Looking across the auditorium, I could see how we are building a community of learners of mathematics.”

Students from Mandela International Magnet School helped the PVMS middle-schoolers.

The lead organizer of the event was Alicia Gonzales from PVMS, who is a member of the MSA’s Math Teacher Leader Network, an association of math teacher leaders and their principals and the MSA that works to strengthen mathematics teaching and learning in elementary and middle schools in northern New Mexico.

“I think it is important to do events like this for middle school students because at that age they often feel as though they are not capable of learning math and decide that they aren’t a “math person” and never will be,” says Randy Merker of the MSA. “This is an opportunity for them to realize something different about themselves. I also think it was great to see one of the members of our Math Teacher Leader Network take the initiative and put this festival together.”

