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**Wednesday, December 11, 2002**

## Schools get tips on solving math problems

### Educators seek rise in students' test scores

BY [GEORGE BASLER](#)

*Press & Sun-Bulletin*

**BINGHAMTON** -- Joan Simpson came to Broome County on Tuesday to give some advice.

Simpson teaches eighth- and ninth-grade math in the Salmon River Central School District, near the Canadian border. Students there have posted good results on the state's eighth-grade math test.

So it figures that Simpson was part of a team from Salmon River that came to the Binghamton Regency Hotel and Conference Center for a day-long conference on improving eighth-grade math scores.

The conference, organized by the Broome-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services, featured presentations from teams in 10 rural, urban and suburban school districts whose students have shown a high level of success on the eighth-grade math test.

Their audience included some 180 teachers and school administrators from across central New York, including 15 school districts in Broome and Tioga counties.

The visiting teams shared strategies and practices that are working to boost student performance, said Jennifer Kakusian, a professional development specialist at Broome-Tioga BOCES.

Hopefully, local educators can adapt some of these strategies to their own schools and "rethink what they're doing in the classroom to enhance student performance," Kakusian said.

BOCES put together the conference because low math scores are a problem in middle schools across New York, said Brenda Myers, BOCES' deputy superintendent for instruction.

Six Southern Tier middle schools, including the two in the Binghamton City School District, made a state list of "schools in need of improvement" because of students' performance on the eighth-grade math test.

Conference planners used a mathematical model to identify the 10 successful school districts, from as far away as Buffalo. They then used a \$5,000 grant from IBM to pay the tab so teams from each district could come here.

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Simpson said she can understand the pressure to boost scores because schools are increasingly being judged based on the results.

One strategy that has worked in Salmon River is requiring students to spend an hour in math class each day, instead of the traditional 40 minutes, she said.

Other schools at the conference talked about curriculum changes, coordinating instruction across all grades and using data to spot weak areas.

"We came to see the best practices in the state and see if there is anything we can pick up on," said Michael O'Branski, principal at Binghamton's East Middle School.

The tests are "high stakes tests" for teachers, said Peter Anderson, a math teacher at Oxford Middle School. He wanted to hear ideas from districts that have done well.

The best way to make improvements is to share ideas together, said Gary Wahl, a math teacher at Chenango Valley Middle School.

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