

Program helps with math

By **ERIK SCHWARTZ**
Courier-Post Staff

GLASSBORO

They proudly call themselves "math geeks."

These 40 middle-school teachers from 20 districts across South Jersey spend their August days working intensively to improve their knowledge of mathematics.

"My brain is getting overloaded with information, but it's useful information," said Jim Carmichael, 30, a special-education teacher at Glen Landing Middle School in Gloucester Township.

Carmichael and his colleagues had just completed a morning session that focused on teaching fractions, using what one professor called challenging, but doable problems.

They are the second group to go through a new Rowan University program with the ultimate aim of helping students thrive during grades five through eight — "the most critical years of a child's math development," said Eric Milou, a

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MORE INFORMATION

■ **What:** The South Jersey Math Partnership program based at Rowan University, involving middle school teachers

■ **Details:** Teachers undergo 200 professional development hours over 18 months.

■ **Topics:** Math content knowledge, instructional planning and design, communication and technological skills, assessment strategies and adolescent development

■ **Credit:** Teachers who complete the program can apply the graduate credit they earn toward a certificate in graduate studies in mathematics education at Rowan.

■ **Online:** www.rowan.edu/open/mcsiip/sjmp.htm

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Rowan mathematics professor and director of the South Jersey Math Partnership

Milou developed the the partnership in response to a state Department of Education offer of grant funding for programs to help students achieve state standards in four areas: fractions, algebra, geometry, and probability and statistics.

He theorized that rigorous courses in those areas for middle-school teachers would lead to test-score gains by their students.

"Too many school districts have one-day workshops, something that may be valuable but is never sustained," he said.

Test scores for students of the teachers in Milou's first group, which finished in May, improved significantly, he said. That suc-

cess led the state to award the current \$866,000 grant, money that originates with the U.S. Department of Education.

The program "is awesome," said Melissa Jackson, a member of the first group who returned to serve as a teaching assistant for the second.

"You get a lot of things you're able to take back to the students at school," said Jackson, 38, an eighth-grade math teacher at Monongahela Middle School in Deptford. "Everything is based on discussion and hands-on ... self-discovery. (Students) take ownership of what they learn because they actually discover it for themselves, as opposed to just being told, 'This is how you do the problem.'"

Jackson said the program's emphasis on content helped her pass a math-certification exam in

June.

Milou focuses on teachers of middle-years students because most of them aren't certified to teach math as a high school teacher would be.

Several participants said they came to fill that gap in their knowledge.

Pete Spezzano, 26, said he applied to the program after he saw the improvements introduced by a colleague who completed it in May.

"I was realizing, myself, that a lot of what I was teaching the kids were things that I had to go over myself and learn all over again, from beginning to end," said the fifth-grade math and science teacher at Samuel M. Ridgway School in Edgewater Park.

Reach Erik Schwartz at (856) 486-2904 or eschwartz@courierpostonline.com