

Annual Math Steeplechase Continues to Add Up

Record number of children to compete this year

More than 1,000 children from 11 schools in San Joaquin, Sacramento and Stanislaus County will converge at the Alex G. Spanos Center on April 20 to do math. But they won't be sitting at tables just answering problems. They will be using tools, twine, buttons and other items to demonstrate how to do math.

The students are competing in the eighth annual Math Steeplechase, a competition where teams of fourth and fifth graders have to solve complex math problems in a matter of minutes. The event will start at 8:30 a.m. Parents are invited to watch the event, but are asked to not distract the children or blurt out answers.

This year's steeplechase will be the largest ever with two hundred more participants and three more schools than last year. The event draws participants from San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Sacramento counties. This year's new schools include APEX Academy (Stockton), Brookside School (Stockton), and Joe Serna Charter School (Lodi).

"Many schools want to compete in this contest because it's a fun way to show the practical applications of math," said event organizer Greg Potter, a professor in the Benerd School of Education. "Besides showing their math prowess, for many of these students, this also will be their first visit to a college campus, and we think that also will have a deep impact on the children."

During the Math Steeplechase, students are split into teams of five to six. Each team is then escorted to a table with props on it and a mathematical problem involving those props. They have 10 minutes to solve it as a group. Each group is then scored by a referee at the table. This year's Steeplechase is being hosted by Pacific's Athletics Department and the Benerd School of Education.

To give the students a break during the day, they also will participate in a scavenger hunt on the Stockton campus. Additionally, the athletics department will have activities for the students during the day. The Physics Department will also be providing an opportunity for students to explore the solar system while visiting Pacific.

This event is meant to enhance critical thinking and math skills among elementary school students. The Math Steeplechase was established eight years ago by Tara Runnels, a Pacific student who remembered a similar event when she was in high school and said it helped spark an interest in math for her. Runnels graduated four years ago and now teaches math as an elementary school teacher.

For more information about this year's Math Steeplechase or to register a school for next year, call or e-mail Gregory Potter at 209.946.2672 or gpotter@pacific.edu.

Comment [pg1]: Make sure the headline concisely tells the reporter/reader what the story is about. A secondary, smaller headline can be used for additional newsy information.

Comment [pg2]: Your opening paragraph should be active and should quickly summarize the news value of the story. Do NOT use paragraphs that sound like a marketing pitch, such as "Today, the University of the Pacific announced a breathtaking program." Such sentences will get your release deleted in the first six seconds of being opened.

Comment [ep3]: The time of the program can be stated in the second paragraph or later in the release; however, if you place it lower make sure to keep the reporters attention to assure they read the necessities of the program. At the very least, the date of the program and the cost of attendance should be listed in the first three paragraphs.

Comment [pg4]: Don't forget to put in what makes the event "newsy," either something that shows impact to the community, is unusual or is new.

Comment [pg5]: A quote, if necessary, should come from someone who is either responsible for organizing the program, will be affected by the program, or from a high-up administrator who directly manages the program. Quotes are not always necessary, but should be in the first five paragraphs of the release. They should be two to three sentences long, maximum.

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Comment [pg7]: Somewhere lower in the release, get into the nuts and bolts about why this event is important and why people should participate

Comment [ep8]: Always offer a paragraph for more information. Include the time, date, and location, as well as any supporting information, such as a website or email address. If you list a specified contact, make sure they can answer ALL questions asked by a reporter.