

Fun with Math

*Strategic Learning Initiatives
Chicago, Illinois*

Can an old egg carton really be used to reinforce multiplication facts? It sure can! That was one of the strategies shared at Fun with Math, a program that provided parents information and tools to help their children with math – and to enjoy doing it.

Every April, the Chicago-based organization Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI) asks the parents it works with to identify topics of interest or need. Math was at the top of the list. As a result, the organization's parent engagement director, manager, trainers, school coordinators and facilitators helped to plan, design and facilitate a free math workshop for parents. SLI presented the idea for the workshop to schools' Leadership Teams/Action Teams during a summer retreat.

These school leaders presented the workshop for about 150 parents at their schools. They began with a discussion of the important role of math in children's lives. Then, the adults talked about how different math is now compared to when most of them attended school.

The workshop quickly turned from talk to action, as parents participated in math activities they could use to reinforce skills at home. This is where the egg carton and multiplication came in. For one activity, pairs of parents used an egg carton and cotton balls to practice the multiplication tables. Each pair numbered the egg cups from 1-12. Then they decided which number they wanted to work on – for instance the "threes." Each parent took a turn to throw a cotton ball into the crate and to multiply the number where it landed by 3. If the cotton ball landed in egg-cup 6, for instance, then the parent solved the problem 6×3 .

Another activity used geometric-shaped multiplication flash cards. Participants also played games, such as Math Scrabble. Hands-on activities are a hallmark of SLI, which is

dedicated to accelerating student and adult learning through best practices from education and business.

SLI took several measures to ensure that many families benefited from the workshop and activities. First, they publicized the event through posters, school calendars and phone calls. Second, they made sure that the presentation and all materials were translated into Spanish. Finally, although the activities conducted at the workshop were designed for a third-grade math level, the facilitators demonstrated how to adapt them for older and younger children.

Parents learned new strategies for helping their children with basic math facts at home, took home materials and gained knowledge and confidence as "leaders" in their children's education.

"I now feel comfortable helping my daughter with math," said one parent. "You made math interesting and fun for us," added another.

SLI's approaches encourage parents to understand that home is a place of learning. The non-profit group helps schools train parents to make their homes conducive to learning. As a result of feedback to the math workshop, organizers plan to lengthen Fun with Math by 30 minutes and may offer it at different times to accommodate even more families.

*Cris Whitehead
Parent Engagement Director
(312) 738-0022
cckkh@hotmail.com*