

# Show Me the Math

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Tacoma School District #10  
Tacoma, Washington

More than 150 businesses in Tacoma opened their doors to middle school students to prove that math is important. Show Me the Math encouraged students to visit many different businesses in their community to see how mathematics is used outside the classroom.

More than 300 students from three middle schools took up the challenge, with impressive results.

A principal got the program going by posing this question, "Wouldn't it be great to do a project around math with our local businesses?" That query led to the formation of a community action team, with business owners, parents, students, school and district staff members coming together.

The group set to work asking local businesses to participate by creating and demonstrating a math problem from their everyday business for students who visited. Businesses were also asked to display a Show Me The Math poster to identify theirs as a math-friendly place.

The district involved three middle schools in the pilot project. Each school kicked off the project in its own way. All students received a Show Me The Math game book that lists 15 different businesses they needed to visit, completing a math problem at each. Businesses included gas stations, restaurants, dentists, auto repair shops and more. Each week students would turn a completed page from their workbook in to their teacher.

For the next few months, students diligently completed the problems in the game book. Students went with their parents, in groups, or by themselves to participating businesses.

Math teachers saw a marked increase in enthusiasm from many students. One student came back from one visit and asked to do a presentation on how gas price increases would affect how much he would have to raise his

prices to mow lawns this summer. A teacher shared a story about another student who had never turned in any homework, but completed every page in his Show Me The Math book.

Parents were equally impressed. "It was amazing watching my quiet, soft-spoken son getting outside his comfort zone and having to approach people he didn't know. We spent an average of 30 minutes at each business, because they were so excited to have us there," one said.

A particularly heart-warming story featured a student who went into an auto shop to complete his math problems and connected with the owner. The student asked if he could visit periodically and the owner agreed. A long time later, the student's mother visited the business to tell the owner that her son had not been doing well in school and was not attending regularly until he started visiting the shop. Now, he's on track.

These and other stories will be the stuff of a documentary that the district would like to produce on this project. The district is planning to repeat the initiative next year, and is looking for ways to attract even more students.

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