

Math Masters on the Go

Rachel Winkles

The Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative (CRMC) hosted its first annual Math Masters Tournament in April. Five schools participated. At its conclusion, CRMC Director **Denise Peppers** presented a trophy to the winning team from Blackmon Road Middle School, coached by CSU alumnus **John Dobbins**.

Peppers, aware that Muscogee County had discontinued its middle-school math competitions, decided to establish one on campus. She wanted to give the event a “twist,” however.

Most math tournaments are about procedural fluency—that is, skillful completion of mathematical processes. With the CSU event, however, groups of middle-schoolers worked on multi-step problems which, for full credit, they had to discuss with “solid mathematical reasoning,” Peppers explained. She credits Dr. Chris Rodger of Auburn University for modeling this approach in tournaments there.

Peppers decided that, in 2013, middle schools in the Partner School Network would be invited to take part. “We felt that we could enrich existing collaboration with them and garner their support for reaching out to more schools next year.”

At first, team coaches—teachers from the participating schools—knew little about what to expect. They did learn that students would work on four “group-worthy” problems and would collaborate to solve them.

Participants, according to CSU faculty, enjoyed themselves. Interim associate dean **Dee Greer** said that she heard one youngster exclaim, “Wow! This is really going to be fun. We’re not just doing math; we actually have to think!”

Math education professor **Debbie Gober**, co-director of UTeach Columbus, said that Math Masters was “a nice blend of collaboration and competition” and differed from typical competitions.

Peppers is planning a second year of Math Masters, which will involve more schools. She is also looking into a competition for homeschooled children.