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Camp creates 'mathletes'

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Shelly Lancaster decided she needed a little boost in math before starting the fifth grade at St. Francis School in Goshen so she signed up for the school's weeklong "Mathletes" summer camp.

Not only did Shelly get a taste of math subjects like probability and algebra, she can show you how to do multiplication problems with Roman numerals.

"Not everyone's going to know that," Shelly, 10, said, laughing.

The camp, in its second year, was designed by Reed Gabhart, St. Francis' head of academic program. The camp was June 21-25.

"So often camps like this that focus on an academic subject are remedial, but this is really meant to expose students to concepts that are a little beyond them," Gabhart said.

There's no homework and no grades, he said.

"I think that all of that stuff, plus the pressure to get the exact right answer sort of turns people off from math," he said. "This is meant to be a week of having a little fun with math."

For the five or six students who participated, it really was a fun week.

"It's probably weird to say that math summer camp is fun but it is," Shelly said. "I think it helped me, too, because there are less people and we play games and stuff."

A favorite game of the students was Gabhart's "Let's Make a Deal," where he showed students three doors with combinations of rocks and candy behind them. Using probability, students had to figure out whether they should switch to a different door than the one they were shown to get a better prize.

Each day, the students were split into pairs and had to earn points during the exercises and games, adding a little competitive fun to the mix.

Soon to be sixth-grader Aaron Lattis said he liked playing a card game where the group had to use what they knew about fractions and probability to guess which card Gabhart had drawn from a deck.

"I just figured I was going to be bored this summer and I like math so I picked this camp to do," Aaron, 11, said. "It's fun to try and figure stuff out."

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