

Students experiment with 'mathematical origami'



MATT JONES/THE STANDARD-JOURNAL

From left, Milton Middle School student McKenzie Hauck and White Deer Elementary student Kathryn Frederick try their hands at mathematical origami during the 'Math in Unusual Places' STEAM Day held at CSIU.

BY MATT JONES
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MILTON — Math is embedded in the everyday fabric of our lives, even if we don't necessarily notice it, which is why the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) hosted an educational event to teach kids how to discover the hidden beauty of mathematics.

"We met with the gifted teachers three times a year and they said, 'You know, we

really need to have something that's not necessarily a competition, but just a real enriching day.' So this is an enriching day for the younger kids to get an opportunity to meet with like-minded students from across the region," said Dr. Colleen Epler-Ruths, a CSIU educational consultant.

During the "Math in Unusual Places" STEAM Day, more than 50 gifted elementary students from across seven school districts,

Origami

FROM PAGE A1

including Milton, Benton, Millville, Middle-West, Selinsgrove, Danville and Shikellamy, gathered at the CSIU building to work on STEM-related activities and try their hands at “mathematical origami.”

Dr. Kelly Bickel, an associate professor of mathematics at Bucknell University, served as the keynote speaker, and spent the morning demonstrating how to make a Sonobe module, one of the units for building modular origami. Using a large, square piece of cardboard, Bickel showed students how to make specific folds that could then be used to build cubes and more complex geometric shapes. Students followed along with their own pieces of paper and emulated Bickel’s movements.

“I think it’s just fun for students to see math beyond arithmetic,” said Bickel. “So much of actual mathematics is asking questions and try-

ing to create new things. It’s much more creative than the arithmetic they’re maybe seeing in school.”

Middle and high school student leaders, such as Milton Area High School’s Chief Science Officer Savannah Nixon, were also on site to help supervise the activities.

“One thing is, I hope they see [Savannah] in action and also want to be a chief science officer. I also want them to realize that STEM-related activities are fun,” said Milton Area School District enrichment teacher Natalie Myers-Easton. “I want them to be interested in STEM and allow them to make new friends with other gifted students.”

Along with helping students cultivate an interest in mathematics, the event was designed to allow students to build friendships across districts.

“I think it’s great for them to meet kids from other schools and make new connections,” said Bickel. “I participated in similar events when



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From left, Bucknell University Associate Professor of Mathematics Kelly Bickel and Milton Area School District enrichment teacher Natalie Myers-Easton tackle mathematical origami.

I was a kid and those are some of the memories that have stuck with me over the past 20 years, so I can say that these things had an impact on me when I was a kid. I hope they have an impact on these students as well.”

Following the mathematical origami activity, kids then had the chance to learn about ratios and rotate through different stations to complete interactive math-related activities.