

Workshops aim to make math fun

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Math remains one of the most difficult subjects for students today.

In high school especially, many struggle to secure the credit.

To help students develop a better understanding of mathematics and problem-solving, the Rainy River District School Board brought in a school resource specialist from the Centre of Education in Mathematics and computing last Tuesday and Wednesday to run workshops around the district.

Rob Gleeson, with the University of Waterloo, facilitated the workshops and taught students about important concepts relating to math.

"Problem-solving was the name of his workshop but he also had some big ideas," noted Sherree Denby, secondary numeracy co-ordinator for the local school board.

Gleeson spoke about the importance of asking for help, careers relating to mathematics, and how it fits into everyday life.

Denby hopes the students

took away a greater understanding of math's applications outside of the class.

"I hope the students took away that math is fun, and that math isn't just what you learn in the classroom and in the curriculum," she remarked.

"It can be puzzles, problem-solving, gaming, and things like that," she noted. "It can be very intriguing."

The visit from Gleeson came about after Denby reached out to the University of Waterloo since hearing of the math workshops it offers.

"I contacted them last year and found out that they would be thrilled to come up here," she recalled.

"It's in their prerogative to support math, especially in rural areas."

Bringing in outside resources to enhance learning in the field of math can be very effective in helping students achieve more success academically, Denby added.

"I think it's important because we are in a sort of isolated area and it's nice to get a different perspective," she reasoned.

"Students feel like they're supported and cared about

when people come from far away to teach them."

And during Gleeson's time in the classroom here, he really connected with the students, Denby lauded.

"He knew how to read the crowd to adapt what he was saying to the type of students in the room," she noted.

"He had a lot of good messages."

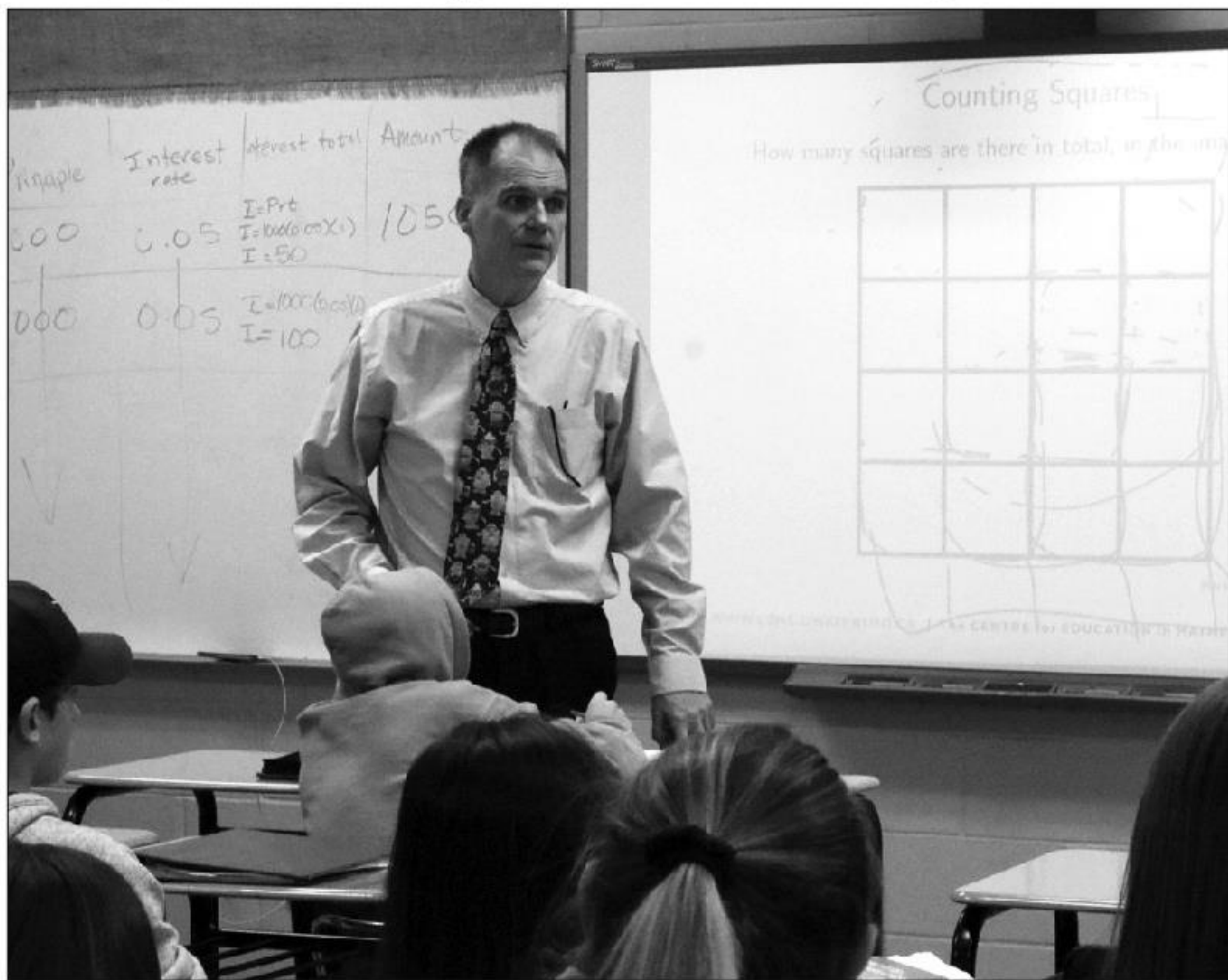
The workshops balanced some of the more difficult math problems with fun games and also weaved positive messages into the programming.

In fact, some teachers now are looking at starting up math clubs since Gleeson's visit.

"It's kind of excited and encouraged many of the teachers he's talked to," Denby said.

"One of the teachers that the math department had at the high school talked about maybe starting a lunch-hour club for kids that might be more interested in doing the type of problem-solving [that Gleeson taught]."

Down the road, the local school board will look at forming more partnerships with outside resources when appropriate to improve students' learning.



Rob Gleeson, school resource specialist from the Centre of Education in Mathematics and Computing, visited Fort High last Tuesday and Wednesday to run math workshops with students. He visited schools across the district to engage students in problem-solving strategies related to math.

—Sam Odrowski photo