Music Family Game Night at Chester ES!

Huntington – “Math, for many of us, is the equivalent of driving around Boston. There’s a lot that’s confusing about it,” said award-winning teacher Mike Flynn.

Over 80 people attended the Math Family Game Night for all Gateway K-2 elementary students and parents on held at Chester Elementary School on Thursday, March 16 from 6 – 7:30 p.m. The event was free of charge, thanks to funding from the Gateway Education Foundation.

Flynn addressed the topic “Making Sense of Mathematics: Why Math Instruction Looks Different Today”. Flynn is the Director of the Mathematics Leadership Program at Mount Holyoke College and the author of Beyond Answers: Exploring Mathematical Practices with Young Children. He was a second grade teacher for 14 years and the 2008 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, received a 2009 National Education Association/Horace Mann Award for Teaching Excellence, and the 2010 recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Technology. He has presented locally in Western Massachusetts as well as throughout the United States and internationally.

Kindergarten teacher Doreen Bashista organized the program and applied for funding from the Gateway Education Foundation, based on parent questions about the school’s math program. The goal of the project was to help families gain a better understanding of how math is taught and to give hands-on experience to families so they could better support their children at home.

Parents listened as Flynn explained that many adults were taught to memorize and recall arithmetic functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) without having a true understanding of the how and why of mathematics. As a teacher, he learned to check for student understanding by asking them to tell a story about a problem, such as 9 X 3. A student who had answered the problem correctly, but whose ‘story’ was ‘you have 9 pillows and you times it by 3’ showed a gap in understanding. Whereas a child who said he wanted to give 3 books each to 9 friends, showed an understanding of the purpose of that equation. Flynn said that children could show their understanding of mathematics through building models, making pictures, words, and context as well as equations.

While parents learned more about how to help their children reason and think about math, their children took part in activities led by students from Gateway Regional High School. After the presentation, children brought their families into their classrooms to show them the math games they have been learning in school. The evening ended with an ice cream social.

Flynn concluded, “We want our students to have the same knowledge and understanding of mathematics as “townies” do of Boston. So they can be wicked ‘smaht’.”

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Photos: (top) Award-winning presenter Mike Flynn speaks with parents about changes in how mathematics is taught; (below) Autumn Burns Cosby and her mom joined students and parents who returned to classrooms to play math games together, before their ice cream social. (Event sponsored by the Gateway Education Foundation.)