Civil engineer teaches math for a day at Indiantown Middle School thanks to grant

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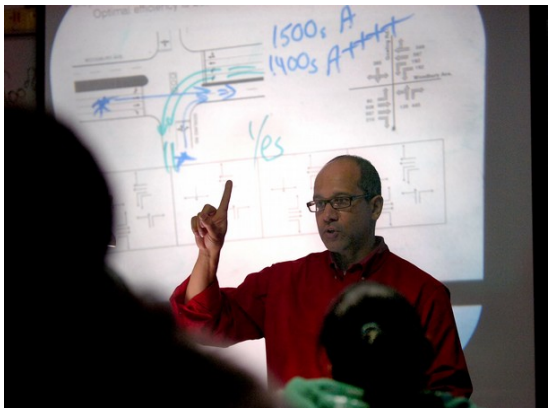

Mark Love, a traffic engineer from New Hampshire, uses an overhead projector while teaching eighth-grade students at Indiantown Middle School the practical use of algebra on Tuesday. Love is at the school to promote math, science and engineering through a grant from the Martin County Education Foundation. “What they were using today was using algebra to design traffic signals, making real-world connections, showing how it’s useful and showing some of the outside everyday value of algebra.” Love said.

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Christina Sebastian, 14, one of 75 Indiantown Middle School eighth-grade students, focuses on lessons from traffic engineer Mark Love, of New Hampshire, as Love teaches students applications of algebra used in real-world settings.

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INDIANTOWN — Sending an engineer into an eighth-grade classroom to teach algebra sounds at first like an off-the-wall idea.

But it works.

Mark Love, of Rochester, N.H., came into the Indiantown Middle School Tuesday and led the students through an exercise in designing a traffic control signal using algebraic equations.

Love, a civil engineer, first came to Indiantown last year following a grant application from Pam Peterson-Daly, the eighth-grade algebra teacher.

She applied to the Education Foundation of Martin County, which received the grant from the Economic Council of Martin County.

Love's seminar was such a success he was invited back and this year will also do presentations at Anderson and Stuart middle schools. This year's grant was for $3,000.

"This program brings an engineer into the classroom to make algebra lively and real, while promoting math and science," said Lisa Rhodes, executive director of the Education Foundation of Martin County. "It's not a lecture but an engaging, Socratic-style, hands-on experience with activities that are challenging, relevant and fun."

Saying, "I see a lot of young engineers in this classroom," Love split the students up into two-person teams and gave them 15 minutes to solve a complex problem on phasing and timing a traffic signal.

Love explained that once students complete the algebraic equation, they can write a computer program.

As a civil engineer, Love has used his formulas to construct some 50,000 traffic signals on the East Coast.

"No computer, no excuse," he told the students. "Don't let the computer think for you."

There was a low hubbub in the classroom as the proto-engineers went to work on the problem. In less than 15 minutes, they began to come to the whiteboard to write down the solutions.

Love stressed to the students the necessity of getting as much algebra and calculus in middle and high school as they can so that they can be better prepared for college.

Rhodes said, "We want to expand this program to teachers and see if we can find civil engineers here in the county that would be interested in teaching a similar seminar."