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Importance of continuing ed stressed

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Lansing State Journal

Teachers and academic professionals are stressing the importance of continuing education after a Michigan State University study said that American college seniors planning to teach middle school math are less prepared than their international counterparts.

"Especially in light of the high standards we're expecting of our students in mathematics, this shows the need to invest in high quality professional development for our teachers," said Doug Pratt, spokesman for the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest teachers union.

MSU Distinguished Professor Bill Schmidt said a key way to bridge the gap among teachers who already have graduated is by increased focus on continuing education.

Summer school

To maintain their certification, teachers across Michigan are required to take continuing education classes to keep their knowledge current.

Schmidt directs a program called Promoting Rigorous Outcomes in Mathematics and Science Education, or PROM/SE.

For the past five years, his group has hosted teachers from Michigan and Ohio for a summer course on how to be a better teacher.

"That professional development was geared around trying to improve their level of mathematics," Schmidt said.

"But we also tried to improve their understanding of coherence and focus and how that relates to their actual instructional practices."

Mark Rudd, a 13-year math teaching veteran at Pattengill Middle School who is now the Lansing school district's gifted and talented coordinator, said the lifelong learning is vital.

Technology advances

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"Math is one of those areas where it's always good to learn the newest things," Rudd said, citing advancements in technology like the rise of scientific and graphing calculators.

"The mathematics I learned 40 years ago is still OK, but we need to be able to help the students today be prepared because we're asking them to do much more."

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