

# MVGATE

## How to Start a Math Club or Math Team at Your School

### Overview

Parent volunteers from MVGATE started a weekly Math Team at Old Mill School in 2012, Park School in 2013. If you'd like to start a math club or team at your school there are many ways you can proceed, but the model that has worked well for us is Math Olympiads for Elementary and Middle Schools (MOEMS.org). MOEMS is a competition that been going since 1979 and now embraces 150,000 students on 6,000 teams from all 50 states and 30 countries. They have two age groups: grades 4-6 and 6-8. Here's how to start a MOEMS program at your MV elementary school.<sup>1</sup>

### Start with parents.

Old Mill's principal, who sponsored MV's first math club, advises you to start by self-organizing a small group of motivated parents, then for them to bring a proposal to the principal. Once your principal is onboard, she can open all sorts of doors for you. (Literally. You'll need a room, after all.) That approach was tested at Park and worked well.

### Assemble your team.

Find about three like-minded parents at your school. If you know some, great. If not, snoop around. If you need help finding some, ask MVGATE (below).

- Organizer: Out of the core group, choose one organizer who drives this to reality, then sustains it ongoing. This person also frees the coach to focus on math, not logistics.
- Coach(es): One or (preferably) two adults who work closely with the kids on math. It's nice to have a math whiz, although the practice books are good enough that a non-whiz can do it. Just don't call yourself a "teacher" -- this is a team, not a class, and there are no tests -- only contests.
- Kids: at Old Mill, where 4th & 5th grades have a total of four classrooms (i.e. about 110 kids), some 16 kids attend Math Team regularly. Unless you're a trained teacher, sixteen is probably all you can handle. We suggest open enrollment: any kid who is willing to commit to doing Math Team is welcome. (Besides, MVSD no longer tests kids for GATE, so self-selection is the best we're going to get.)

### Time it for success.

MOEMS runs five monthly contests from November-March. We recommend that you start in the spring, *after their season is over*, with a non-competing Math Club. Don't begin with the contests, but take the spring to get into the hang of things. Roll this out gradually. Practice. Then the next fall you can burst out of the gate with a Math Team that competes. We suggest weekly practices for one hour right after school. Ask around and choose a day with the fewest conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> There's no reason you couldn't start a MOEMS team at MVMS, too, but first talk with Evan Lloyd and Robyn Geissler, who run the 7-8th grade Mathletes team (a program of the Marin County Office of Education).

### Funding it.

This is easy; *you don't need funding* beyond what your school should be able to do for you. The practice books cost \$100, the contest registration (which you may wish to delay until fall) costs \$89 to \$99, and you need nothing else. At Old Mill, the principal ordered these online from MOEMS.org in five minutes using her discretionary spending card.

### Recruit & advertise.

- Your principal's regular email newsletter is a great way to notify parents of your new math club; to remind them once it's started; and to celebrate its achievements.
- Get into the email newsletter from your PTA, too. (Indeed, at Old Mill it was the PTA Site Council that got us started.)
- MVGATE can send notices directly to member families at your school who may be interested in Math Team.
- Kids don't plan ahead. If your school's admin can get on the intercom before last bell and announce "Math Club begins in room ten at three o'clock," it'll do wonders for attendance.

### Eliminate risk.

- Waiver: your principal may want kids to bring a permission slip or liability waiver. If so, the school will probably provide one, but if not, MVGATE has a liability waiver, written with the MVSD, that you can use.
- Security screening: your principal may ask (per state law) that volunteers working unsupervised with kids get a background check, which involves getting fingerprinted ("LiveScan" program). You can do this at the MVRP. The MVSD pays for it.

### Sustain it.

Kids grow. Students graduate. Parents who were on fire when their kid was in school may fizzle out after she graduates. Make your math club sustainable so that it will survive you and your startup team. To do this, keep a good pipeline of 4th graders coming in, and groom their parents to join your group. Find the parents of even younger kids and get them excited. Hold an open house for 3rd grade families in late spring, so they'll join as 4th graders in the fall. Then once your school's team is running, help the parents at the next school to start theirs!

### Get help.

Need help? Advice? A pep talk? MVGATE and your fellow parents will help you if you need it. Maybe you want to attend a practice to see how it runs. Maybe you need help finding like-minded parents. Once your team is up and running, maybe you want to scrimmage against someone! Old Mill parent Jeff Leane will help you find what you need:

- [MVGATEAC@gmail.com](mailto:MVGATEAC@gmail.com)
- [MVGATE.org/resources/math-club](http://MVGATE.org/resources/math-club)

Starting a Math Club is not hard, it's a lot of fun, and it's good for our kids. We'll help you. Why not start today? ■