

Building a Purposeful MA θ Program

In 2008, the Evans High School (EHS) math team, located in Evans, Georgia, was enjoying another year of strong performances and recognition, like prior years when our students found satisfaction from working together and sharing pure competition. The question came up: Where can we extend this positive energy?

- A. Try something.** How about putting on a math tournament? After extensive research, coordination, and confirmation from numerous participants, a city-wide tournament was scheduled at EHS. It seemed like the appropriate time to organize our math team students as the charter members of the EHS Chapter of Mu Alpha Theta (MA θ). This resulted in recruiting far more students than were previously on the EHS math team. We had a very motivated group of students that organized, presented and ran the first-ever math tournament in Columbia County, Georgia. It was a big success and considered a first step toward continuing yearly tournaments, as well as identifying a focal mission for our MA θ Chapter.
- B. Change happens.** In spite of our best intentions, the second annual math tournament at EHS had such a drastic drop in attendance that the program was suspended. But something more important took its place. Although our MA θ members had been responsible for tutoring a minimum of six hours, it became increasingly important for us to provide members who would be available on a daily basis. This involved assigned tutoring in the media center after school and setting appointments with students who needed time outside the regular schedule. We became the go-to math tutoring source for counselors, principals, and parents.
- C. Making a difference.** In an effort by EHS to give struggling students extra face time with a teacher in their area of preference, a 30-minute power-period was wedged into the middle of the day. In 2011, this program was randomly assisted by members of MA θ , but in 2012, our membership was divided into five rotating sections which supported several classrooms with math tutors. As a direct result of the MA θ tutoring accomplished during these power-periods, many EHS students completed credit-recovery for courses that helped them to graduate on time. In my power-period alone, twelve of the thirteen students (92%) that signed up for credit-recovery completed the required tests and exam. The MA θ tutors made a difference.
- D. Lessons learned.** These items may not apply to all circumstances at all schools, but they applied to EHS.
 - 1) **A good sponsor is hard to find.** Whether there are two students on a math team or twenty, these students should be given the opportunity to compete. Too often the lack of sponsors for various reasons result in teams staying home. [This is the reason our in-house tournament went off line.]
 - 2) **Students can do it.** Don't limit the opportunities that your students may be willing to attempt and accomplish. For many years our focus was only on going to math tournaments. Once we moved outside that mentality, the enthusiasm for greater responsibilities and higher achievements grew.

- 3) **Have a good time.** Competitions are many times as much a social event as they are a measure of student ability. Competing as a team brings school spirit and unity. The positive attitudes will have a direct influence on greater effort and support.
 - 4) **Math Team is a sub-unit of MA θ .** In our case, MA θ grew out of our math team. Now the child is the 'parent'! For us, this is a big advantage. When non-math team members learn about math tournaments at our monthly MA θ meetings they become interested and are soon participating at tournaments. All of our officers happen to be math team members, but math team members don't have to be members of MA θ .
 - 5) **This is important work.** Not that there aren't other important clubs in any school, but when a chapter of MA θ focuses on contributing to the success of the whole school, then everyone benefits.
 - 6) **Delegate.** This was my biggest challenge. The program doesn't run itself and there is a lot of work to keep things going, so the members (primarily the officers) must achieve the goals and requirements of MA θ . The more MA θ members that can assume responsibility for areas of the operations, the sooner they will take ownership of the program.
 - 7) **Service, achievement, competition, and excellence.** Our mission emphasizes the need to maintain an example to others and promote excellence. There are also a fund-raising drives to help the county food pantry and support Christmas charities.
- E. How to set up your own chapter of MA θ .** A quick rundown on how to get a program started.
- 1) **Distribute flyers* ASAP.** Not later than the second week of school, distribute the MA θ sign-up forms to all the students in precalculus, AP Calculus, AP Statistics, and any of the advanced math classes. Early contact with members is important to get interest spreading.
 - 2) **Meet monthly*.** There should be monthly MA θ chapter meetings and frequent meetings with the key members to check on publicity, memberships, fund raising and math team. Initially, these meetings will emphasize the vision of the sponsor and then gradually evolve into student-led activities.
 - 3) **Officers and constitution*.** Officers need to be voted in as soon as possible, as well as the development of a constitution that is designed for the local requirements.
 - 4) **Induction ceremony.** The induction ceremony, or the Charter ceremony for new chapters, should be accomplished when the list of registered members is completed. (Our annual induction ceremony is on/about Oct 1st.)
 - 5) **Assign tutoring requirements*.** Beginning at the first meeting, members are encouraged to volunteer for tutoring dates in the media center. Members are also identified for power-period assignments with specific time preferences.
 - 6) **Follow up.** Officers are required to follow up and confirm that our members are serving according to the schedule. This is essential, as they ensure accountability.
 - 7) **Documentation, confirmation, and graduation.** The end of the year will approach quickly. Keep accurate records of membership requirements, including attendance, tutor hours, donations, participation, etc., as applicable. When seniors complete their requirements, they are awarded honor cords for graduation. We also identify MA θ members who are awarded honor cords on the graduation program.

* See the Evans High School MA θ website for our sign-up form, constitution, meeting minutes, and tutoring schedules, located at http://www.edline.net/pages/Evans_High_School/Activities/Math_Honor_Society

We don't have all the answers, but we are willing to try new ideas and usually good things happen. I hope this provides insights to the benefits for establishing a chapter of Mu Alpha Theta. Personally, it is a privilege to work with some of the most talented young adults at Evans High School. They will go on to become significant contributors to our community and our country.

Bert T. Shoemaker
MA θ Sponsor & Math Team Sponsor