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## Medical students help it all add up with tutoring William Fleming High School students

Medical school and nursing students are offering to tutor pupils at the school in Roanoke County.

By [Courtney Cutright](#)

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Tim Gall taught at a private school for one year after earning an undergraduate degree in mathematics.

"Being a mathematician doesn't qualify you to be a teacher," Gall said jovially.

He worked for a while in construction, which he dubbed "the practical application of geometry," and later served as a medic in the U.S. Army. Now he is a medical student at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine in Roanoke -- and he's teaching math again.

Gall, 31, called on his knowledge of angles to tutor William Fleming High School student Jonathan Gill, 16, in geometry one afternoon earlier this month.

"I don't like math," Jonathan said. "It doesn't come easy to me like the other subjects."

Gall is one of eight medical, physician assistant and nursing students from Jefferson College of Health Sciences and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine who have been tutoring struggling math and science students at Fleming through a service learning project.

The eight-week program was slated to end in February, but the volunteer tutors committed to come back for the rest of the school year on some Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays to prepare the teenagers for the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments. The scores from the annual benchmark tests will be used to determine Fleming's state accreditation status, as well the Adequate Yearly Progress measure of the federal No Child Left Behind mandate. Fleming is accredited with warning but has not made AYP for the past three years.

Gall arrived with healthy snacks in tow: edamame, mandarin oranges and dates. It bewildered him to find out that many of the teenagers he tutored had never tasted a date. He wants to instill confidence in the students, because he said when he was in grade school, a tutor showed him he could succeed.

Algebra teacher Dawn Hakkenberg is witnessing the effect on Fleming students.

"It's an attitude," she said. "Before, they had given up if they had trouble. Now they're engaged in class. They've gone from wanting to give up to going up to the board to show the class how to do problems."

Dominique Walker, 16, pulled up his Algebra II grade from an F to a C with the assistance from the tutors.

"Most tutors try to tell you the answer," Dominique, a Fleming junior, said. But these tutors want assurance the students know how to do the work, he said.

The college students work with the high school pupils on homework and go over missed test questions. Hakkenberg then allows students in her class to retest for a better grade.

"Usually I have a really bad grade in here," said Shuqeria Jennings, 17. "Right now I have a high C."

Shuqeria said she needs the one-on-one attention from the tutors because it takes a second explanation for her to understand and retain the material.

Tutor Amanda DeDonato, 23, a Jefferson College nursing student from Charlottesville, worked with Shuqeria after school Tuesday on an assignment to find the sum of an arithmetic series.

Shuqeria, a bit frustrated, said she didn't get it.

"It is just one of those things you have to know," DeDonato explained. "It is a formula."

The tutoring sessions, including "Power Saturdays," were launched by Gene Jones, who became Fleming's principal July 1.

"It is something I've done before, where I was before," said Jones, who came to Roanoke from Norfolk Public Schools, where he was executive director of high schools.

Jones said he recognized that the students at Fleming needed time outside the school day for remediation, tutoring and catch-up work. It started with the core subjects (English, math, science and social studies) and physical education. But students who needed help with Spanish came to Jones and he found a foreign language tutor, too.

Power Saturdays run from 8 a.m. to noon each Saturday in March and two Saturdays in April. To prepare for the Standards of Learning tests, Fleming also will host the SOL Blitz three Saturday mornings in May.

Jones said Thursday he is confident Fleming students will perform well on the annual assessments.

"I think we have given the kids all the tools they need to succeed on the SOLs," he said.

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