

Brainy kids slog it out



The Palmerston North Convention Centre was abuzz yesterday for the regional Mathex competition. Pictured centre feeling the pressure is Levin North School's Shae Walker, 9, and teammate Nathaniel Payton, 9.

Picture: Murray Wilson

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Brainy kids were in their element. More than 850 students in 67 teams from around Manawatu were testament to the fact that maths can be exciting. The Palmerston North Convention Centre was a hive of activity as groups powered through maths questions during the Year 9 and 10 session yesterday afternoon. The afternoon session ended with 17 minutes to answer 20 questions in rapid succession.

A group of Manawatu College Year 9 students said the biggest challenge was keeping to time. Michelle Mudawarima, 14, said other students who didn't "get" maths were just lazy. "It's about attitude. If you think you're no good at it, then you won't be. "It's a challenge - I like to think for myself. In history you're told what to think and what to remember, but in maths I can work it out for myself." Freyberg High School maths head Robert Elder said only the very best

teams get close to completing. However, the competition was exciting. The three week build-up, including a students' training camp held at lunchtimes, proved challenging. The best maths brains always "floated to the surface", he said. Teams had to work as one. Some teams split into two, each working on the same problem to see if they came up with the same answer, Mr Elder said. "It's about strategy." Maths had practical applications too, Awatapu maths teacher Bernie

Wells said. His students get to estimate chocolate chips in cookies, he said. "Involving food and making it real means it's not boring." He found maths attracted students of natural ability, but who were also prepared to "get stuck in and slog it out". "Kids can come to competitions and realise they're not the only ones who get excited about maths." ■ Palmerston North Girls' High School won the Year 9 section and Wanganui High School scooped the Year 10 section.