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Teachers working to boost science and math education

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As a new school year gets underway, Camden County teachers have an ally as they teach math and science to their students.

The Partnership for Reform in Science and Mathematics (PRISM) initiative provides funding and assists with professional learning for teachers through learning communities.

Several lead teachers from Camden got a head start on the school year a few weeks

ago when they attended the PRISM Lead Teacher Academy in Savannah.

Billie Campbell, the lead teacher at St. Marys Elementary School, said the academy focused on leadership abilities this year and gave teachers strategies for professional learning and working in small groups. She said all teachers could have benefited from the seminar.

Campbell said the academy touched on all areas related to improving student achievement.

"Generally you have to

look at the whole picture to improve math and science," Campbell said. "If you improve reading, you're going to improve science."

PRISM, which is funded through the National Science Foundation, is a statewide initiative to improve student achievement in science and mathematics at all levels of education.

Anne Gay, lead teacher at Camden Middle School, said its focus is on professional development.

"It's for teacher training,"

she said.

PRISM works through learning communities. There are math and science learning communities in each of the schools that help to identify the needs of teachers.

The lead teacher workshop provided an opportunity for new lead teachers in Camden and other districts in the region to meet with veteran lead teachers, Gay said.

Through PRISM, Camden schools are partnered with Armstrong Atlantic State University and Coastal

Georgia Community College, allowing college instructors to network with grade school teachers.

"There is a trading of expertise between all the levels," Gay said.

PRISM is also helping teachers as they begin using the new Georgia Performance Standards curriculum in their classrooms this fall.

Under the Georgia Department of Education's phase in plan, sixth and seventh grade science classes are now using the new curriculum.

Gay said being a part of PRISM has helped a lot as teachers adapt to the changes in the curriculum.

Campbell said the PRISM initiative has helped Camden educators focus. All teachers are trying to improve and there is a lot for them to work on, so PRISM makes it easier to improve on math and science.

Camden schools have been involved in PRISM for about three years.

"It's just coming to the surface, teachers are becoming aware of it," Campbell said.