

## NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2026](#) / [February](#) / Math Contest = 26 Years and Counting

## MATH CONTEST = 26 YEARS AND COUNTING

## MATH DEPARTMENT HOSTS ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL COMPETITION

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | February 23, 2026

Are you smarter than a high school math student? Try this question, and take your socks off if you need to use your toes to count:

*A drawer in a darkened room contains 100 red socks, 80 green socks, 60 blue socks, and 40 black socks. A person selects socks one at a time from the drawer but is unable to see the color of the socks drawn. What is the smallest number of socks that must be selected to guarantee that the selection contains at least 10 pairs of socks? (A pair of socks is two socks of the same color. No sock may be counted in more than one pair.)*

The answer is below. It is the same answer that students from 19 regional high schools sought as they competed in the annual [Christopher Newport Math Department Math Contest](#).

The contest brought together nearly 200 high school students from high schools on the Peninsula and from as far away as Fredericksburg and Virginia Beach.

"Participants get a chance to visit our campus and experience a math department in action," said [Mathematics](#) professor and contest director Dr. Jessica Kelly.

This is the 26th year the contest has been held at CNU, and the preparations begin long before the problems are unveiled on a February Saturday. Faculty write the contest questions and visit the high schools to share strategies for solving contest-like questions. CNU math students escort the visiting high school students on campus tours and act as proctors and graders during the tense rounds of the competition.

This year's individual champion was David Yu from Grafton High School, and the victorious team came from Tabb

High School, both in York County, Va.

“Participants develop problem-solving skills and gain confidence,” Kelly said. “At least one student from every school earns a prize. The contest aims to be a positive, rewarding experience that fosters enthusiasm for and an interest in mathematics.”

The contest also helps CNU accomplish its [Strategic Compass](#) priority to “Connect with the Community.” “The contest has built sustained relationships between local high school teachers and the CNU Math Department,” Kelly said, adding that it is believed to be the only in-person contest open to all individuals and schools in Virginia.

As for the socks question, the correct answer is 23. (Go ahead and put those socks back on now.)

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