

# Making math meaningful

## Peshtigo math teacher lets her students celebrate learning

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PESHTIGO—Peshtigo math teacher Paula Jornlin teaches the importance of learning mathematics skills and helps students celebrate learning. She utilizes two computer programs which assess the students at their individual learning levels. One of the programs has a tutorial which makes it easier for children to learn math skills at home with their parents. The students can also earn a game day with a multitude of prizes when they show improvement with math skills.

“Why do I need to know this?” Not only do students think this to themselves, they often directly ask Jornlin. “I try to relate all math skills to real world situations.” For example, fractions are sometimes a difficult concept for students. She tries to relate using fractions to real world scenarios. “I show students how they will use fractions in their careers and personal lives in contexts such as cooking, building, decorating, engineering, medical, plumbing, electrical and landscaping.” Jornlin reminds students how math skills are essential to their lives.

“I can just use a calculator” is another common student statement. “With technology advancing so quickly,” Jornlin shares, “that can be a difficult statement to work with.” Jornlin explains to students that mathematics is not just finding the answer to a question. Mathematics is about learning different thinking skills and problem solving strategies. “I



Peshtigo math teacher Paula Jornlin teaches her class of fifth-grade students.

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explain the need to know the process of math problem solving, and not just the answer. There are many processes to get the same answer.” The key is teaching students to learn the best methods, and to encourage students to keep learning and seeing progress. Learning problem solving strategies helps with more than just math concepts.

Peshtigo elementary teachers also use computer based monitoring systems to help measure individual student mastery of math skills. A program called Renaissance Place houses two programs which monitor student skills. Another program, STAR, measures reading and math skills school wide. Three times a year, students complete a STAR math assessment which automatically determines the math skills students need to work on in the Freckle program. “After the STAR assessment, it automatically sets

students at their individual levels in a different learning program called Freckle,” Jornlin explains. Students can improve their math skills at school and at home using this program. She really appreciates how Freckle helps parents work with their children. “If a child gets stuck, Freckle has a help section complete with video instruction to provide the tools for parents to easily help their children. It’s a great connection between school and home!”

Students celebrate learning their math skills on game day. They are able to earn rewards for improving their math skills. Jornlin uses a ticket incentive program to reward students which they can use for prizes. “Games I’ve used include Pinko, spin the wheel, skeet ball, mini golf, marble game, Connect

Four, and mini basketball, to name a few.” Students can also spend tickets on raffle prizes. Mrs. Jornlin buys some of the prizes and some are donated by parents. “You’d be amazed at what they work for,” she said. Prizes have included books, puzzles, playdough, chapstick, small toys, and small boxes of candy.

Besides using math ticket rewards for games, students can also create STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Art Mathematics) projects in the innovation room at the Peshtigo Elementary Learning Center. In the innovation room, students can create products with a 3D printer, as well as a new laser cutter, engraver. This year, NKS Tire and Auto donated a Glowforge printer, which cost over \$5,000. Students use a CAD (Computer Assisted

Design) program using Tinkercad. The Glowforge cuts the student created design into 1/4 inch or 1/8 wood, which has been donated by both Wisconsin Building Supply and Mike Berger of BS Crafted Customs.

“Having a game and raffle day motivates students to try their best, ask questions, and learn more than they ever thought they could.” Jornlin sees a lot of excitement from students about the game day activities as well as using the technology in the innovation room. “When students work on lessons at home, it increases communication between students and parents. Whether parents are helping or just discussing math lessons, it’s important for parents to see what skills their kids are working on in fifth grade.” Jornlin emphasizes, “It’s

important to celebrate success and make learning a fun experience.”

“Teaching is more than teaching the material, it’s about building relationships and teaching life skills. When I see that deer in the headlights look, I think to myself, ‘how can I help them in a different way?’” Even though teaching is challenging sometimes, Jornlin finds it very rewarding when she sees the lightbulb go on. She started working as a para-professional in Peshtigo eighteen years ago and has taught several levels from 4K to sixth grade. “A big part of my job is listening and being a support system as they grow and learn academically, socially, and emotionally.” Anyone who’d like to donate raffle prizes can contact Paula Jornlin at [jornlinp@peshtigo.k12.wi.us](mailto:jornlinp@peshtigo.k12.wi.us).

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