Challenge & Success

Last week, my son Daniel called from college to report with huge enthusiasm that he and his friends had persuaded the administration to create a math dorm for next year. This is a kid who is already taking two math courses each semester, and solving problems for fun that John Nord sends him. He could tell I was hesitating, so he jumped right in with, "Just think, we can stay up all night doing math problems."

This kind of enthusiasm doesn't happen by accident—especially in math. The love of problem solving and genuine pleasure in learning must be stimulated early on and cultivated throughout a child's education. Love of mathematics is rampant at Saint George's. When I talk with each grade of students throughout the year, it often outpolls that perennial favorite, PE, for the subject they like best.

Building a dynamic, stimulating and fun program has been a long-time goal of the Math department. Eight years ago, as a result of our last Pacific Northwest Association of Independent Schools accreditation, we created K-12 department chairs as a way to bridge the curricular divide between the three divisions. Previously, we had followed the more traditional model of each division overseeing its own curriculum, with academic department chairs only overseeing the Middle and Upper School programs.

In implementing that recommendation, the Math department fully embraced the discipline as a K-12 endeavor—both out of necessity as well as philosophy. Judson Ford has led that effort, building relationships with teachers in all divisions and working toward curricular continuity. Math requires close coordination as one concept builds so closely on another in a vertical fashion. Judson immediately needed to familiarize himself with what was happening in the Lower School so he could provide support to teachers in their work with students of varying abilities.

Since then, the Math department teachers continue their close collaboration between divisions—meeting frequently and sharing insights through their curricular mapping work. Math competitions at each level build skills kids will need later on and develop enthusiasm for the subject, while teachers share enrichment opportunities for students between divisions and integrate technology into their lessons.

As you will see in this magazine's interview with Judson, he is an articulate advocate for our strong program. His work to build the bridge between divisions has strengthened the math program so all of our students can experience both challenge and success, stimulating the love of learning and problem solving that may lead them to a life of "all nighters" doing math with their friends.

– Mo Copeland, Head of School

Middle School math teacher Shane Kangas and his Math Counts team that won the regional competition and will send a team of four to state. Five of the top 10 individual scorers were Dragons!