

Four Goals for this School Year

Making Math and Your Teaching More Personal

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Do you set goals? Goal setting, and devising a plan to meet our goals, gives us direction and the ability to change or add to our lives in ways that are personally satisfying. With this in mind, I offer up four goals that I have as a middle school math teacher this year. Your goals may be completely different than mine. My purpose here is to stimulate your thinking, to encourage you to develop your own goals, and to marvel at the results that you will achieve with a focused, consistent action plan.

1) Expand My Collection of Outstanding Mathematics Activities

The mathematics curriculum that I teach each year remains largely the same. It is a given that each class is composed of many new students with unique personalities and abilities. The aspect of my teaching that I have great freedom in is in the selection of activities to effectively teach the prescribed math standards to my students. Some of these activities I find and some I create, but I always feel alive and revitalized when I watch students enjoying a powerful, new math activity. The hands-on nature of these activities often creates a deeper understanding than regular book lessons ever could.

2) Make Math More Relevant to Students

I tell my students that we learn math because it is a powerful tool to use in the real world. Mathematics teaches us to think critically, to solve problems, and it helps us to make decisions. It is unlikely that students will be asked to solve a page of fraction problems in their chosen careers. Instead, in the context of their lives they will use mathematics to navigate situational waters. With this in mind, I look for opportunities to make the prescribed curriculum relevant. After I teach fractions, students complete the Amateur Architect Project. During our study of probability we hold the Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament. Give students a reason to value mathematics and their performance will improve.

3) Inspire Students to Become Mathematically Confident

So much of success in mathematics seems to be mental. Many students reach a place where their mathematical confidence erodes because they can no longer breeze through a course with little effort. I want my students to realize that with time, effort, and a proper attitude, all of them can be successful. When students say, "I don't get this." or "I don't understand." I want to teach them to add the word "yet" onto their statements. I truly believe that with repetition and the correct attitude, all of them have the ability to succeed in math.

4) Complete Meaningful, Relevant Professional Development Opportunities

"Professional Development" has often been a term that has sent shivers of dread down my spine. Oh, no! Not again! Another seminar being force fed about a topic that has little (if any) interest and application for me. However, I love to learn techniques and gain knowledge specifically related to teaching math in my classroom and using technology to help me to do so more effectively. Thus, I will be attending two different math conferences this year (and presenting at them) and I will also learn more about SMART Boards™, podcasting, and technology in the classroom. What will you learn?

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