

Connections: The Key to Efficient and Enjoyable Math Education

By LEF Student Ambassador, and LHS Freshman, Marina Naumova

In April of 2017, Molly Rawding, a math specialist at Fiske Elementary School for the past five years, was awarded a fellowship grant from Lexington Education Foundation (LEF). The fellowship enabled her to attend the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM) conference, one of the top mathematics education leadership organizations in the country.

As a math specialist, Ms. Rawding has the important responsibility of guiding teachers through professional development and helping them to focus on improving the way they teach. Specifically, she assists teachers with planning lessons and getting the necessary materials, resources, and data that support the curriculum to ensure efficient learning and teaching in the classroom. Recently, Ms. Rawding says the focus of the mathematics department has been on figuring out “how we are building kids as mathematicians, as ‘doers of mathematics,’ as opposed to just kids who can compute or compute fast.” After attending the NCSM conference, she was able to “bring [new ideas] back and share [them] with [her] elementary math team as well as other coaches.” The conference provided an opportunity for her to engage in conversation with, and learn about the experiences of, educators across the country and bring best practices to complement, enrich, and improve the efficiency of teaching mathematics at Fiske.

When asked about what the most significant takeaway from the conference was, Ms. Rawding said, “The first word that comes to mind is just connections.” Some of these connections are made

with other teachers and math professionals who Ms. Rawding was able to network with at the conference. Ms. Rawding thinks being able to reach out to her newfound resources and ask “I’m doing this with my 5th-grade team, what do you think about this, or what have you tried that has worked out well?” is part of what makes this conference extremely valuable. “I love what I do, and I feel like there’s so much to learn from other people,” Ms. Rawding says. The conference was a great space to learn and collaborate with other coaches, teachers, and administrators.

Students at Fiske are benefitting from the tactics Ms. Rawding learned at the conference to build better connections between math concepts and real-world applications. Oftentimes kids grow up disliking math, which could be because of the way that it is taught. Ms. Rawding remarked that “... [the conference was] a bunch of leaders coming together to say, what are ways we can engage kids and teachers in joyful mathematics and math that makes sense, where they’re making the connections? It’s really about what the thinking is and not so much just focusing on answers.” Providing these different ways for kids to learn math could help them enjoy it more and realize the connection between what they learn from math and problem-solving skills.

The NCSM conference has had a meaningful and lasting impact on Ms. Rawding and the entire mathematics department at Fiske. The experience provided insight into innovative ways to teach elementary school math. When reflecting on the progress made at Fiske following the conference, Ms. Rawding thinks that they “still have



Molly Rawding, a math specialist at Fiske Elementary School

work to do, but I think that we are headed in the right direction and we’ve got some great momentum, we have an incredible math team.” She was very grateful for the opportunity LEF provided for her and is excited about the future of math education at Fiske.

This story is just one of the many examples of how grants made possible by the community’s support of innovation and inspiration through contributions to LEF shape education in Lexington Public Schools. Every year, LEF awards around \$250,000 in

educator-initiated grants that span many different subjects, school services, and grade levels. The grants result in enhanced teaching and learning in the Lexington Public Schools, and help bring new ideas and excitement for lifelong learning and social-emotional development to the educators and students in our town.