

Phyllis Hoyt - Middle School Math

Phyllis Hoyt has taught math to an entire generation of Topeka Collegiate students. She has been on the faculty for all but one year of the school's 30-year history. Originally, she planned to stay only a couple of years after her older daughter was born. That daughter, Jenny '97, is now entering her 30s. Mrs. Hoyt never left, and hundreds of TCS students are better off as a result.



Why has she stayed? "I have most of my students for three years and I really get to know them," Mrs. Hoyt explains. "That's one of the things about this school that I love. I get to see their growth. The pride I feel is very satisfying. It's almost like being a parent." In fact, students have been known to slip and call her "mom." In their successful nomination of Mrs. Hoyt for MATHCOUNTS Coach of the Week last year, two middle school students described her as "one of the most kind and caring people" they know. Could it be those warm cinnamon rolls?

In addition to regular duties, Mrs. Hoyt has coached the MATHCOUNTS team for all but one of her years at TCS. Her "mathletes" meet three times a week outside of class, twice before school. On Tuesdays, they arrive at 7:15 a.m., and are greeted with freshly-baked cinnamon rolls and hot chocolate, part of their teacher's motivational strategy. "The challenge is to get them to want to meet and to want to do the extra work it takes to be competitive," she says. It works.

A wall of awards testifies to Mrs. Hoyt's success. It includes the 2011 Kansas Society of Professional Engineers Outstanding Middle School Teacher of the Year Award. Twice she has coached the Kansas team at National MATHCOUNTS. The TCS Class of 2010 voted her Teacher of the Year.

Watching Phyllis Hoyt conduct the MATHCOUNTS Countdown Round at the annual assembly to help prepare the team for competition, her enthusiasm is unmistakable. "It excites me to take kids who are good at math to the next level, to see them really stretch themselves. Keeping students appropriately challenged is near and dear to my heart. Competition shows them that they may be the best math student in school, but there's always somebody better. It's good for them to see. It's a reality check."

Mrs. Hoyt relates to all students, whether or not they excel at math. "I make sure to validate those students who think they aren't good in math," she says. "If I can help them enjoy math and feel good about their abilities, they will do well." Sometimes it's not all about math. "I don't feel the only worthy knowledge is math," she smiles. "Sometimes we talk about other things. I let them get me off topic if I think it's important."

Asked how she manages to keep the material fresh after 30 years in the classroom, Mrs. Hoyt answers simply, "I love math and I love kids. No two students are ever alike. Every class has a different dynamic. And when a student gets excited or makes a connection, it's thrilling." Spoken like a born teacher, which is just what Phyllis Hoyt is. "I have always loved school, always loved learning," she says, "and always wanted to be a teacher since the day I started school."