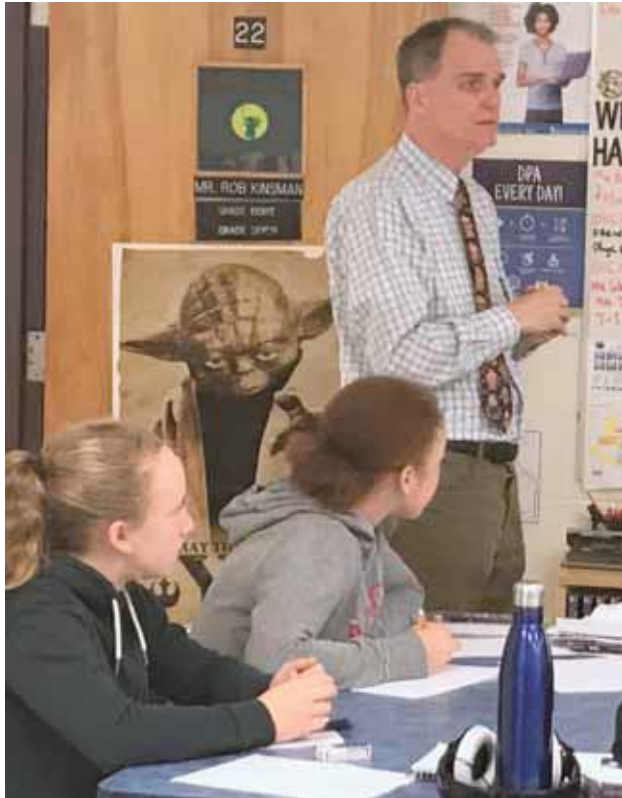


Becoming Passionate about Math



Rob Gleeson walks the grade 7/8 students at Sturgeon Creek School through a math problem. Photos courtesy of Sherree Denby, Secondary Numeracy Coordinator at RRDSB.

by Melissa Friesen

Rob Gleeson spent 30 years teaching high school

and instead of leaving it all behind, after retirement he joined the Centre for

Education in Mathematics and Computing at the University of Waterloo. There are three main components of the Centre: math contests for grade 7-12, computer challenges from grade 5-10, and school visits.

That last component is the reason why Rob happened to be in the Rainy River District last week. He went from Emo to Fort Frances to Rainy River to Atikokan hoping to inspire young minds to love math. Although Rob grew up in Thunder Bay, he had never made it to Fort Frances until now.

In each classroom, he started his workshop with a problem that would engage the students. If he was in a class of grade 7/8s, he might start with a geometrical problem about squares, which naturally turns itself into algebra. Games were a key aspect of his workshops, especially if the students started to lose focus and felt the instruction was beyond their mental capabilities

for that day. Whenever the class started to fade, Rob was always quick to bring them back to life with a little competition.

"Actually, almost all the students were engaged! It was a really good group," he said of the RRDSB students. Depending on how old the students were, Rob was able to get on their level to reinforce the importance of mathematics. If it was for the elementary students, he might talk about the patterns in math that we see everywhere in the world. If he was talking to high school students, he might suggest that math education can land them some pretty great jobs (some, maybe most, that don't even exist yet).

As the world becomes more technologically obsessed and dependent, the more demand there will be for engineers and mathematicians and computer technicians. As the future unveils itself Rob suggests that the students in this area are in good hands.

"The staff was really excited and committed to the education of the students. They have a true passion for math," he said.

But the real X factor that he finds the most fascinating about teaching math is the potential of perspective. Regardless of how many times Rob presents

the same math problem, he always seems to encounter students who see the problem from an entirely new and different viewpoint. "There is no exception. This always happens," he admits. Whether in Toronto or in Rainy River, this is a highlight for Rob as an educator.



Students then had a chance to work on the problems together in groups, and find their own passion in the many different aspects and expressions of math.