

Kim's Korner

Competition — No, It's Not Just for Sports Enthusiasts.



Spirit of Math makes the case for healthy math competition.

"...and pencils down."

The contest is over. Fidgeting legs and hands make an effort to wait patiently until all the contest papers have been collected. Anxious parents are waiting outside the doors.

"Okay, now you can talk."

The room erupts with excited chatter. "How did you do this one?" "I got 2 for question number 4, what did you get?" In the large hall, over 150 students from grades 3 to 12 have just completed writing one of the nation's largest series of mathematics contests – one that tens of thousands of students write. These Spirit of Math students have opted to miss a morning of school just so that they could have the opportunity to compete in something they get excited about – math.

Yes, math. Even in North America, many students think of it as another sport – one in which they too can enjoy competitively. They love it because they know they're good at it, and want to show what they can do.

There are great benefits to exposing students to contests, as long as the focus is on learning. So often teachers, parents and students get caught up in the testing frenzy, studying and teaching to the contest. There is so much more value to these contests, then just "teaching to the test," and this value is often lost when the focus is exclusively on how to do the next question.

So many programs out there just show students the answers to the questions or teach them how to calculate quickly in their heads. How many actually look at all the problems, determine the skill sets that are needed, and teach those skill sets, the logical thinking and critical analysis so that multitudes of mathematical ideas and questions can be tackled? This method is hard to come by, but it has been perfected - over 25 years - in the Spirit of Math program. And the results of this method of teaching skill sets are outstanding. With close to 900 placements on the national mathematics honour rolls this year - an outstanding feat - Spirit of Math makes a great case for not just teaching to the test. Spirit of Math students are excelling in mathematics because they have the skill sets needed to think mathematically.

With this focus, the educational value in doing the contests shifts from looking at how many questions are answered, to an opportunity to evaluate how well the math skill sets have been developed, and the concepts understood. In addition, students learn how to take a risk, and are pushed to do more than they thought they could.

Putting students into contests gives them an opportunity that many students don't have. If you want your teenager to be able to compete against others for university math scholarships, they must achieve at least an honours standing on a contest.

Spirit of Math students have an impressive list of contest achievements to add to their resumes. For over 25 years now, students studying with the Spirit of Math program, have succeeded in many national mathematics contests. In fact, for a period of 13 years, when students had the opportunity to study this program in their day school, there were more students on the national honour roll from that one school, than all other Canadian schools combined. Did their teacher teach to the test? Absolutely not, but they did have an incredible program that not only developed extraordinary math skills, but many other interpersonal skills. These students developed minds able to think in ways that propelled them to the top in all areas of life.

From doctors to physicists to engineers, these Spirit of Math alumni are now leaders in their communities, changing the world.

Although the foundational concepts of the Spirit of Math program are being taught in several prestigious private schools, such as University of Toronto Schools and Crescent School, Spirit of Math is also offered to students in an after-school setting. There are 23 campuses throughout the Greater Toronto Area, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Ottawa and Edison,

New Jersey. Students studying with Spirit of Math, taking just 1 class a week, are propelled far past most parents' expectations. In one parent's words: "I decided not to send my son to a private school – instead I am supplementing his education by sending him to Spirit of Math. Just by sending him once a week, his thinking has boosted him far above other students in his day school. I can't believe what he can do."

This is not an extraordinary child. This is a motivated child learning in a progressive program taught by great teachers.

Kimberley Langen is the CEO and Co-Founder of Spirit of Math® Schools and the author of the Releasing the Genius® series of workbooks for students and schools. For more information about Spirit of Math, and to find a campus near to you, go to <https://spiritofmath.com>.

