



Photo by Kendra Lolio

Students at Tiogue Elementary School participate in "Drop Everything and Play a Math Card Game" on Friday afternoon, a new initiative developed by a math interventionist at the school to help make numbers more fun.

Dealing with decks

Tiogue Elementary math interventionist Mary Vandervelde combines card playing and math for fun new monthly activity

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COVENTRY — Mary Vandervelde at Tiogue Elementary School has come up with a new, creative way to teach students math while playing cards. The math interventionist recently implemented the "Drop Everything and Play a Math Card Game" event, a school-wide initiative all students can participate in once a month to sharpen their number sense skills.

Vandervelde said when she started many of the kids had no familiarity whatsoever with playing cards, but using them to play games with numbers proved to be a wild success. In their first scheduled game at the end of the school day Friday, students in every class were actively engaged in War and set up in pairs. Each student picks two cards, and whomever has the highest amount in their hand is the winner of the round. The game can be adapted for addition, subtraction and multiplication, so while kids are playing a card game they are also computing and using their math skills. The game is over when one player has all of the cards.

"I spoke to the principal and said I will go around and teach all the kids the card game and once a month we will



Photo by Kendra Lolio

Two students play a special version of "War," which incorporates addition, subtraction and multiplication.

drop everything and play cards as a sort of educational reward," said Vandervelde. "They can play this at home and teach their families, neighbors and friends."

Each classroom was given 12 packs of cards. Vandervelde said cards are a great, cost-effective way to make math

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fun for children.

"A pack of cards is .50 cents," she said. "You can buy two packs for a dollar."

She said many of the students don't even feel like they're doing work when they play the card game.

"With this format they're all playing and enjoying it," she said. "I tell them 'you've been practicing your math facts for 40 minutes.' Even the teachers have said they can't believe the students are actually all on task."

"It brings the fun back to school," said John Coen, a fourth grade math teacher at Tiogue. "They're very attentive with what they're doing, and they're actually interested and engaged in it. If I say to them 'we need to practice our math facts' it's not as engaging because there is a social aspect to this."

He added, "There's lots of smiles on faces right now."

Next month they will learn a new card game called Math Links, where the players put down three cards and have to find a way to make a math equation with the numbers by adding, subtracting or multiplying. All of the games can be adapted based on grade level. The kindergarteners, for

example, can focus on addition and basic counting, while more advanced grade levels can explore playing with multiplication.

Some teachers use the cards for days when students have indoor recess, and others have set up the decks in special centers in their classrooms so that students can play if they have free time or finish their work early.

"It's a very reasonable product to use," said Vandervelde. "For a deck of cards the kids get so much out of it."

She got the idea last year when she was working with two at-risk students who needed intervention. She thought maybe teaching them a card game would make math more fun and would feel less like learning and more interactive.

One of the best parts about the activity is that it is all-inclusive, meaning students from all grade levels and abilities are able to play and work with their classmates. After Math Links next month they will learn games like More or Less, Tenner, First to Five, Aces and One, Double Check, Make a Difference, Twins, Zero Pairs and Make it Bigger.

"All of the teachers have embraced Mary's idea," said Tiogue Principal Domenic Giusti. "We are so pleased."