

## **Helah Snelling**

Frances C. Richmond Middle School

### **Ms. Kono's Favorite**

“Face it, I’m Ms. Kono’s favorite student of all time. Seriously. She loves me...” My 20 year-old brother, Isaiah, bragged to my 18 year-old brother, Eli. “Ha! No. Trust me,” Eli protested, “Ms. Kono is the best, and I’m her favorite...” Eli and Isaiah continued to squabble over their love of Ms. Kono, and I couldn’t help but think that she must be a pretty cool teacher to make both of my brothers, who are vastly different, feel like they are in her favor. I was eager to interview her and learn more about her, as well as why she chose to be a math teacher at Hanover High School.

Amy Kono was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1958. Her mother attended a secretarial school in Chicago, and her dad served in the Navy, before he studied to become a doctor. Ms. Kono’s parents were smart, but also had a good sense of humor, and were very hard workers. She was the oldest of five kids — three sisters and one brother.

Throughout her childhood, Ms. Kono moved around a lot, and attended many different schools in New York. Wherever she went, she always loved school, especially math. One of her favorite teachers was Mrs. Charles, who was like a second mom to Ms. Kono, as well as just a great teacher. Ms. Kono’s experiences in different schools before college were part of what inspired her to become a high school math teacher.

Ms. Kono went to college for her undergraduate degree at Bucknell University, where she majored in math. The only aspect of college she disliked was how some students seemed more motivated by grades than by learning. Ms. Kono, however, loved to learn, and went to graduate school at George Washington University. After graduation, she worked as a computer programmer, but soon realized that she wanted to help people rather than focus on technology. She tried teaching preschool, but quickly understood that she would prefer teaching older children. That’s when she got her first high school teaching job in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Ms. Kono enjoyed many travels with her husband, who served in the Army, but her life was not without hardship. Before Ms. Kono began her current job at Hanover High School, her parents divorced. “It was a tough time for all of us...” she said in the interview. Because of the big age difference between Ms. Kono and her siblings, the divorce was much harder on them, as she notes, “My siblings really had a completely different experience. For that reason, we have not been very close.” In addition to her parents’ divorce, Ms. Kono also suffered the heartbreak of her brother dying in 2009. These are all very traumatic experiences, but I can’t help but wonder if overcoming obstacles and challenges are what makes Ms. Kono such a relatable and kind teacher for all students.

In 2002, Ms. Kono got a job as a math teacher at Hanover High School in Hanover, NH, and she has taught there ever since. The job can be challenging at times — Ms. Kono always feels like she could do much more, and do it better — but that doesn't mean she doesn't love her job. She enjoys getting to know each and every student, and to do that, she tries to have an all-in-this-together kind of attitude, where she and her students enjoy being in the classroom together, and aren't afraid to ask questions.

Ms. Kono is very compassionate about the amount of pressure Hanover kids feel about grades and college choices. One of the rules Ms. Kono tries to emphasize is, live each day to learn, and not to worry about the future. If someone says they're bad at math, for example, she would say, "Math is not just calculations. Math is thinking. Everyone thinks. And everyone thinks in different ways." The world needs different thinking. Ms. Kono wants math-challenged kids to think, "Math is not so easy for me, so I'll work at it." She emphasizes that math is a skill, and it's something that can be achieved, not something you're born with. Like anything, math takes practice, and practice makes better.

I asked Ms. Kono what a good day looks like, and she commented that all days are good days, because hard days are when the most is learned. She tries to live by this saying she created: "The hard stuff is the good stuff. Love what you HAVE to do." A lot of Ms. Kono's attitudes are really inspirational, and I think it's because she loves her work, and she makes a difference each day. Ms. Kono noted to me that she is not a math teacher first; she's a teacher. Math is what she teaches, but the teaching is what she loves. I loved her comment, "It is the TEACHING I love most, because every minute I am teaching, I am learning."

At the end of my interview, I thought about how inspired I was by Ms. Kono, and how much both of my brothers loved her. Isaiah is now in college, but when he was in high school, Ms. Kono was one of those teachers who not only challenged him, but also made herself available to help him after school and in the evening. Every class, every year, Ms. Kono tells students and parents that they can call her at home, with any concerns they might have. Eli, who is now an HHS senior, has an IEP for a learning disability, but Ms. Kono has always made him feel smart and capable — because he IS smart and capable. She is kind to all her students, and makes them all think they are her favorites. Next year, when I start high school, I hope Ms. Kono is my teacher in a future math class. I know she will not only be a valuable math teacher, but a great life teacher and mentor.

## About Me

My name is Helah Snelling. I am currently an eighth grader at the Frances C. Richmond Middle School in Hanover, NH. I like math and science, and hope to study veterinary medicine in college. The lessons I enjoy most in school are when science and math come together, like when we studied chemical equations in Algebra. Still, I make time for other interests like playing several musical instruments, running with my dogs, playing squash, and surrounding myself with all things Harry Potter.