

‘Choose maths’ the motto for learning by the numbers



Penrhos College students Bronte Annear, left, 17, and Megan Petty, 16, are among the Perth school's maths-crazed number crunchers. Picture: Colin Murty

STEFANIE BALOGH THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM April 13, 2017

Students at one Perth school are leading the charge to kill off stereotypes, proving that girls who love mathematics are far from social pariahs.

It may have taken a few years but studying maths is now so popular at Penrhos College the students pushed for better recognition of those who excel.

“We are really quite unique in that we’re probably the only school in Australia that has maths captains,” said maths teacher Peter Chandler. “The girls suggested it, saying if you have football captains and netball captains and drama captains, why haven’t you got maths captains?”

The seachange at the college to embrace a love of maths — a shift that needs to be mirrored in schools nationwide if Australia is to equip students with the skills to navigate the future — is largely due to Mr Chandler’s own passion.

The introduction of a maths extension program, maths mentoring program, an annual STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) celebration and partnerships with the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research have revolutionised the way his students learn.

“I remember one of girls in the very early years said at assembly that she liked going to maths after school and then she said to me: ‘Ohh, I just committed social suicide’,” Mr Chandler said.

“Two or three years later, we joked about it and she said it was the best thing she ever did.”

Now, enjoying maths and being good at it is just seen as normal.

Megan Petty and fellow Year 12 students Bronte Annear and Shreya Samanta serve as the maths mentor captains. Megan, who hopes to pursue a career in medicine, said: “What I’ve found really valuable about maths is that it teaches you different ways to look at things.”

Mr Chandler, who last year received one of two \$20,000 Choose Maths Teacher Awards for mentoring girls in maths, decided with his students to direct \$5000 to a one-year scholarship for a teaching student.

Hannah Mast, a 22-year-old maths graduate who is studying a graduate diploma in education at Curtin University, will spend the year taking part in professional development and mentoring at Penrhos.

“It is a match made in heaven because my ultimate goal is to be able to work with girls and encourage them ... in STEM and in maths,” Ms Mast said.

Teacher and student nominations for the Choose Maths Awards, funded by the BHP Billiton Foundation and now in their second year, are now open.

FROM THE HOMEPAGE