



DECEMBER 2017

# Hatice Nigdelioglu

9TH AND 10TH GRADE MATH  
REVERE HIGH SCHOOL  
REVERE, MASSACHUSETTS



## Meet Hatice Nigdelioglu

**SCHOOL:** Revere High School, Revere, MA

**YEARS TEACHING:** 7

**PRIMARY SUBJECT:** Ninth and tenth grade math to English learners; previously taught high school special education

**ROLES SHE PLAYS AS A TEACHER LEADER:** Participates in professional learning group meetings, mentors other teachers, faculty advisor for the Muslim Students Association and participates in the school's Cultural Competency Committee

**GO-TO WEBSITE:** <https://www.tolerance.org/>

**GO-TO BLOG:** <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/blogs/index.html>

**W**hen asked what teacher leadership means to her, Hatice Nigdelioglu has an immediate answer: "I help students find their voice." For Nigdelioglu—or Mrs. N to students who struggle with her Turkish name—this means teaching her students the skills and knowledge they need to be successful and empowering them to advocate for themselves and what matters most to them.

Nigdelioglu teaches math to ninth and tenth graders at Revere High School (RHS). Many of her ninth grade students are new arrivals to the United States and learn in a "sheltered" setting, where English language supports are integrated into math instruction. To meet the needs of this diverse population, she incorporates literacy and vocabulary-building exercises into her math lesson plans. Nigdelioglu also teaches college prep math to tenth graders.

Like the students she teaches, Nigdelioglu immigrated to the United States and knows the challenges of learning a new language. She is also a Muslim, and wears a headscarf to school every day as a visible cue to Muslim students that she shares their customs and culture. She is particularly interested in amplifying the voices of immigrant and minority students who feel disenfranchised and excluded from the rest of the school community. These shared experiences are an important part of what makes Nigdelioglu an effective teacher and influential teacher leader.



Within the school community, Nigdelioglu participates in professional learning group (PLG) meetings with other teachers, advises the Muslim Students Association (MSA), mentors fellow teachers and participates in the school's Cultural Competency Committee. But perhaps her most memorable role as a teacher leader came in the days following the Boston Marathon in 2013, when she urged the school community to support Muslim students who were targets for discrimination and others touched by the tragedy.

"Being an immigrant myself, I feel like there are times when I have to be the voice for my students," she said.

### A district-wide commitment to teacher leadership

**T**eacher leadership is not new to Revere Public Schools. Under the leadership of former long-time Superintendent Paul Dakin, the district enlisted aspiring teacher leaders to help implement the state's new educator evaluation framework in 2010. These teacher leaders became experts on the new evaluation process and trained administrators on how to use it. This collaborative approach to decision-making was such a success that the district established the Revere Educators Leadership Board (RELB), a group of teachers and administrators from all schools in the district who oversee the "change process" and implementation of new policies and initiatives.



Dianne Kelly, the current superintendent, former RHS math teacher, and former president of the Revere Teachers Association, has embraced and expanded teacher leadership in the district since taking over in 2015. “It’s really important that [we include teachers] when we make decisions about what happens at the classroom level, because teachers are the experts,” she said. “When we devalue teacher leadership by telling people what to do, they often don’t implement new policies and procedures with fidelity. The best thing we can do if we want to improve teacher practice and student achievement is to put teachers in charge.”

Consistent with this belief, teachers in Revere Public Schools have access to a panoply of teacher leadership opportunities, such as mentoring their colleagues, serving on RELB or school-based committees, and facilitating PLG meetings and other professional learning activities.

The district is following through on its commitment to teacher leadership. The leadership team at RHS changed the bell schedule to give teachers time to meet twice a week in PLGs with their peers, discuss instructional strategies, and exchange best practices and lesson plans with each other. More recently, the Revere School Committee, acting on a recommendation from RELB, approved the development of four new teacher leadership positions called “Consulting Teachers.” Each consulting teacher will work with up to 15 other teachers interested in improving their practice through a combination of one-on-one coaching, classroom observations and co-teaching. Through this strategy, consulting teachers have the opportunity to share their expertise with their peers and boost student achievement district-wide.

The long-term goal of teacher leadership in Revere is to change the culture of teaching and learning. “The first step is to change the schedule,” Kelly explains. “The real work is around changing instruction, mindsets and culture. If we make ways for teachers to work together and share their expertise with each other, teachers will learn that their role is to maximize their individual potential and the potential of the teachers they work with.”



### **Lifelong learners and student advocates**

**N**igdelioglu has internalized the belief that teacher leaders are lifelong learners. “To me, teacher leadership means I will grow every day,” she explains. “And in order to do that, I need to collaborate with my colleagues and the families of my students.”

The 2017–2018 school year has presented Nigdelioglu with ample learning opportunities. For her first six years at RHS she taught math to special education students. Beginning this year, however, she accepted a new challenge—teaching math to English learners (EL) in a “sheltered” classroom setting, where they receive intensive language supports alongside rigorous math instruction.

During PLG time, Nigdelioglu asks her colleagues for advice on the best instructional strategies for working with EL students, while sharing some of the expertise she has acquired from working with special education students. “If I have best practices, I share those with my colleagues. And if my colleagues have best practices for a particular group of students, I want to learn from them.”

New challenges don’t intimidate Nigdelioglu, and neither



does hard work. She grew up in a small village in Turkey where education was not prioritized. Her mother had an elementary school education, and her father had a high school education. Young women in particular were not encouraged to seek higher education. When she excelled in school her teachers advocated on her behalf, and convinced her father to allow her to continue getting an education. Those teachers opened up new opportunities for her, and set her on the path to becoming a math teacher.

Inspired by the way her teachers advocated for her, Nigdelioglu believes that an important role for teacher leaders is to advocate for and help to empower their students. “Teacher leaders address students’ needs by being their voice when necessary and bringing them one step closer to their future goals,” she said.

One concrete way Nigdelioglu does this is by serving as the faculty advisor for the Muslim Students Association (MSA). Last year, a group of Muslim students who said they felt a lack of support from the broader school community approached her about being their faculty sponsor. She agreed, helped get administrative approval to launch the student organization and has advocated for the group ever since. In one instance, Nigdelioglu helped mediate a conflict between the MSA and administration over the group’s plans to sponsor a fundraiser for Syrian refugees.

Fatim Zahra, a senior at RHS and one of the leaders of MSA, believes that Nigdelioglu exemplifies many of the best qualities of a teacher leader. “She listens to students’ concerns, and isn’t

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overbearing,” Zahra said. “She’s more of a facilitator and allows us to lead. I’ve learned from her that it’s important to stand up for what I believe in.”

### Stepping into the teacher leader role

Sometimes the most impactful teacher leadership moments are the ones that can’t be planned. For Nigdelioglu, that is what happened immediately following the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013.

The bombing took place while students were away for spring break. Before students returned to school, the RHS faculty met to discuss the tragedy and how to best support their students. The tragedy impacted RHS like it impacted many school districts across the state: an RHS teacher had run the Marathon, and many RHS students and their families attended the Marathon. Many were present (though unharmed) when the

## **3 THINGS TEACHERS CAN DO TO PURSUE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:**

- **Put yourself out there.** Even new and inexperienced teachers can contribute to the school community.
- **Listen to your students.** Let their interests guide you, and find opportunities to let them lead as well.
- **Find experiences that you share with students and your colleagues,** and use them to amplify your voice as a teacher leader.





bomb exploded.

But the tragedy hit extra close to home when an RHS student was falsely connected to the bombing. The New York Post published a front-page picture of an RHS student and his friend above the headline “Bag Men: Feds seek these two pictured at Boston Marathon.” The student and his friend were both Muslims, but ultimately were found not to be in any way connected to the bombing. A day later, the FBI released photos of the actual bombers, but not before the RHS student endured harassment and threats from the media, the public and even the community of Revere.

Heading into the meeting, tensions were running high. And it was during the meeting that Nigdelioglu rose to explain how the tragedy had affected her family. She also spoke on behalf of her students and pled for tolerance and compassion. “Everyone was hurt after the bombing, but Muslim students were hurt especially bad,” she explained. “Muslims feel unsafe after terrorist attacks like everyone else, but they are also targeted as terrorists.”

The speech changed the feeling in the room almost immediately.

“It was one of the most courageous things I’ve ever seen,” said John Fergus, a history teacher and Nigdelioglu’s colleague

### **3 THINGS SCHOOL LEADERS SHOULD DO TO ENABLE TEACHER LEADERS TO FLOURISH:**

→ Honor teachers as professionals. Find a way to make teacher leadership part of the teacher union contract and compensate them for their contributions.

→ Empower teachers to make decisions —not to rubber stamp decisions made by the administration.

→ Give your teachers leadership opportunities that allow them to stretch and grow.

at RHS. “She made the meeting about love.”

Nigdelioglu continues to share her personal story and promote messages of tolerance and compassion at professional development sessions, conferences and meetings with the



Revere community. “A lot of the time, she’s the only Muslim in the room, but people really connect with her story,” Fergus explains. “They might initially be drawn in because of her story as a Muslim or a woman, or they might identify with the challenges she faced to come to this country, but I think our students learn from her the importance of a strong work ethic and persistence.”

### Leading in the classroom

**H**er work ethic is evident in her classroom. On a recent fall weekday, Nigdelioglu led her class through a lesson on combining like terms, a precursor to solving algebraic equations, and set up stations throughout the classroom to engage students with the content. As the teenagers file into the room, Nigdelioglu immediately tasks them with a warm-up activity posted on a screen. Once that is complete, she leads a short vocabulary lesson before moving students to one of the four work stations.

Throughout the 80-minute period there is little down-time for students. Students work together in groups, speak to each other, share ideas and help each other solve problems. The

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work is serious, but the mood is collegial, friendly and warm.

This sense of compassion serves as the North Star for Nigdelioglu, both as a teacher and a teacher leader. “What we’re doing is important. I’m here because I care deeply about my students,” she said.

And her students notice. “Every day I see her in the hallway smiling and saying hi to students,” explains William Ly, an RHS sophomore and one of Nigdelioglu’s advisory students. “She’s very friendly, and not doing it because she has to. She really cares about us.”



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