

**Interviewee:** Jodi King

**Interviewer:** Haley King

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**Abstract:**

Jodi King is an eighth-grade math teacher and district mentor coach in the Kimberly area school district. Jodi was born and raised in the Kimberley area and discusses how the pandemic has affected her, her family, her students, and her coworkers. She shares her experiences throughout the pandemic, from the transition to online learning to adjusting to teaching in person during the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jodi also touches on some of the politics that were brought into educational discussions, such as mask mandates and vaccination status, as well as social justice issues that affect the way she teaches in her classroom today.

**Haley King 00:00**

Okay. All right. So today is Monday, December 6 at November - okay, you know? Look at that.

**Jodi King 00:17**

You just had to say the date and the time. Okay. Okay. Why are you so nervous?

**HK 00:27**

I'm not nervous. I'm just bad at speaking in sentences.

**JK 00:31**

I should be nervous because I'm one that has to answer all these questions.

**HK 00:36**

Okay, restart. Okay, so today is Monday, December 6, 2021, at 7:52pm. Currently, there have been 47,916,623 cases of COVID 19 and 773,779 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States. In Wisconsin, there have been 958,496 cases, 9873 deaths and nearly 60% of Wisconsinites are fully vaccinated. Today, I'll be interviewing my mom, who is an eighth-grade math teacher at JRG Middle School in Kimberly, Wisconsin. So if you could just start off the interview by giving a little background about yourself. So your name, age, race, and gender.

**JK 01:33**

Okay, so my name is Jodi King. I'm 49 years old, I am a white female.

**HK 01:44**

All right. And what are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis, so your job extracurricular activities?

**JK 01:52**

Sure. Um, so I've been a middle school math teacher for the last 26 years or so. My day is sort of split in half, I teach part time, and then in the second part of the day, I am the district mentor coach. So I work on coaching all of the mentors in the district, which there are typically about 40 years old total.

**HK 02:25**

All right. Okay. Um, and then can you just describe where you live and what it's kind of like living there, how you like it? How long you've lived there?

**JK 02:34**

Sure. I live in Appleton, Wisconsin. Um actually a little town just kind of east of the Appleton it's called Darboy. It's part of the Kimberley Area School District. I've lived here my whole life, when I was growing up is very rural community, mainly farmland, it's now grown to be much more of a, I guess, suburban type living, more white-collar jobs than blue collar jobs. And almost all the farmland is gone. And it's a nice community to live in. People typically get along with one another. It's a nice place to raise a family. There's low crime.

**HK 03:26**

All right. Okay. So, um, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts on it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

**JK 03:36**

When I first started learning about COVID, I knew pretty quickly that it was going to significantly impact our schools. I think that was one of my biggest concerns at the time. Obviously, the unknown of how it was going to affect our students, I was really worried at first, that it was really going to have a big impact physically with our students, I thought a lot of them would be getting COVID. So I was really concerned about that. And what I mean by that, when I'm saying that - I thought a lot of people were going to like - I thought we were going to have potentially quite a few deaths from COVID with our student population at first. When they first started talking about shutting down schools, and I knew with talking to some other teachers, particularly our science teachers, I knew there was no way that we were going to be going on a two or three week at home thing, I knew it was going to be the remainder of the year, and I was concerned too, that it was going to lead into next year.

**HK 04:58**

And so In regard to teaching, so obviously you did have to go online. So how was that transition from teaching in person everyday to now you're probably used to it, but going online having to adjust to all of these new parameters put in place?

**JK 05:16**

Yes. So I think one of the most challenging things for schools was the immediacy of switching from teaching in person to teaching virtually, I think, I don't even recall exactly, but I feel like we had about two days to prepare. And there was so much uncertainty, that and it was for K through 12, that was going virtual within two days. And so there was no real time to really figure out what are the expectations of going virtual. So I think that was really challenging. And then it was just a matter of figuring out. You know, when we first went virtual, we had no real expectation for kids, we knew that some of them I teach in middle school, we knew that some of them would be at home babysitting. So we knew we couldn't expect students to join, like, class at a certain time, because they might be watching their elementary age siblings, or maybe someone even younger, maybe a toddler. And so we didn't really have any expectations in terms of saying, okay, at 10 o'clock, you will all need to join my Google meet at this time, it was sort of like I'll run a Google meet. And if you're able to make it great, but if you're not, I totally understand. So then it was like, Okay, how do you deal with that? So that was extremely challenging online. So what was tell me more about that? What was the question? Was there a second part to it?

**HK 07:09**

It was kind of just how -

**JK 07:15**

-that how it changed.

**HK 07:16**

Yeah. How has it changed since then?

**JK 07:19**

Yeah. And so I think I think what we quickly realized, was that, we needed to figure out what the expectations were going to be and how we were going to hold kids accountable. Because again, so besides the fact that we had no set schedule for our students, we also weren't really sure how to assess the kids, virtually. We didn't have time to create things, we didn't have time to discuss things as teachers with one another. You know, we had just learned about zoom meetings and Google meets. And really, especially for those teachers that weren't very tech savvy, it was really challenging.

**HK 08:11**

Um, yeah, I would you brought up in the beginning how when we first went online, I remember with our family, even, we were thinking I would have to babysit the neighbor, kids, because we didn't know how childcare, and everything would work. Um, so kind of a follow up question to

that. So do you think being a mother helped the way you taught online? And understanding? Or did it kind of hinder because you had to help your kids through all the online stuff as well as teaching your students?

**JK 08:39**

Yeah, I guess it went both ways. So one, it was extremely challenging, having all the kids home and trying to get them to be online. One being an elementary aged, and not really, necessarily able to navigate what the requirements were. So she really needed a lot of help, to another high school student who, because he wasn't being held accountable, didn't care and so then trying to get him to join. So there was all of those things as a parent I was trying to deal with, and then trying to be online at a certain time for my students and making sure my background was quiet, and my own kids weren't coming to me for help at that time. It was very, very challenging trying to do like two very separate things at the same time that required really 100% of my effort. My students from school required 100% of my effort, and my own children did so that was really tough, but I will say because I have multiple children, so one elementary, I had two in high school and one in college. I was really able to listen to their challenges that they had with the virtual learning, and I was able to learn from them to try to help my own students online. So it really did give me a good perspective. And I also saw what was working for them at home. So I was able to look at all four of them and I was able to see, okay, there are certain things that are helping them to succeed. And so then I was able to bring that into my own teaching, I guess. So I was, I was actually quite thankful that I did have children at home, even though it was tough, I really do feel like I learned a lot from them and applied it to my own teaching.

**HK 10:46**

Okay, and so now that we've kind of transitioned to being back in person, in a sense, um, how has COVID-19 affected the way you teach in your classroom today?

**JK 10:57**

Well, so just a little background on my school district. So we went virtual for about two or three months in 2020, in the in the spring of 2020. And then for this school, year, 2021, which was last year, we were in person five days a week. So we did not do hybrid learning. Our students in our district either had to choose to go fully virtual or fully in person. And so at at our school, we had to follow those certain COVID protocols. So we had to keep spacing, all the kids had to stay with the same group of students all day long. And within that group of students, they had to stay by the, by the same small group of students. So we use the same seating chart from when they arrived at school until when they left. So what when, when that group of class, for example, let's say, group A, let's say there's 30, kids in group A, group A would go from language arts, and then that entire group of 30, students would go to math, and then they would go to social studies, and then they would go to a computer class and art class, etc. So they stayed with the same group of kids all day long. And then within that group of 30, we had groups of four kids. And so they had a stay by that same group of four kids, all day long, they couldn't get up and mingle with anybody else in the classroom, they had to eat lunch by those same kids. So it really affected the way I taught because the way I teach. My math class consists of an 83-minute block. And I often

do a variety of activities to get the kids up and out of their seats, they're middle school kids. They like to be social, and they like to be moving around. And so I couldn't do those things anymore. I couldn't it was really hard to get them up and moving. It was hard to get them to talk to other people in the class we want, we tried a variety of things where, where they would wear headphones in class, and they would all try to join a Google meet and so then I could have them in breakout rooms joining kids across the class, but that was hard to organize and manage. And because I often had kids at home as well, that were quarantining. So it just really affected the ability to get kids to be social and move around. So this year now, we now have optional masking. We are much more lenient on our COVID mitigation things. I would say for the most part. We're back to normal, normal. Um, but I don't think our kids are back to normal. I think there were a lot of social and emotional things that kids are still coping with from last year. They went a year to a year and a half with very limited social opportunities. And so students are very timid right now to join things. And so we've really had to push kids to join clubs where we used to get tons and tons of kids joining. Now, they're slowly starting to join again. But they still have this underlying fear of getting COVID. A lot of my students are not vaccinated. And so they have to toy with this socially. Now 90% of kids probably right now, like when I looked around my classroom today, I had one student wearing a mask. Nobody else was. When we first went optional, we had 20 25% of the kids that were masking, so it was still like socially somewhat okay to wear a mask. And now I don't know if kids are just tired of wearing a mask? Or if it's just that social aspect of it, well, nobody else is wearing a mask. Why do I have to wear a mask? And its people are going to think I'm weird if I'm the only one wearing a mask. So again, with middle school students that social acceptance is such a big thing. I don't know. But I do know that they're still afraid of getting COVID because more kids now are starting to get COVID in the classrooms.

#### **HK16:10**

Okay, um, so I kind of have two follow up questions to that as well now. So you kind of went into it a little bit, but could you just almost elaborate a little bit more on how you've seen COVID-19 impact the mental health of your students?

#### **JK 16:29**

There seems to be more need for our student services. A lot of kids seem to be struggling through anxiety. Um, it seems to be across the board where we have students in our class classes that are just having a hard time staying in class for no reason, it's not like they're not coming to class because they're being bullied, or because they don't like the teacher, or they don't like the content of the class. Those aren't the reasons. They're coming just because they're having a hard time being in a classroom with people and having expectations. I think going from three or four months, when we went online the first time to really having no expectations. Kids sort of lost some of that drive. They started I think, experiencing stress at home and their parents just saying, forget it, you don't even have to worry about that homework assignment. Just forget about it. So then if their parents have that attitude, I don't know, I just think that's what we're seeing now we're seeing a lot more anxiety at school and needing Student Services.

**HK 18:00**

Um, and so kind of with the teachers, too, I think that's a side that not a lot of people look at, but have you, how have you seen it affect your, like, co workers? Because I know, going right back after the pandemic, in the beginning of fall 2020, fall 2020? Yeah. Um, did you see a lot of fear within teachers? Because I know, you probably were more exposed to teachers who are in higher risk groups of getting COVID and being affected by COVID? How did that affect their teaching? Did you see anyone like lose their job over it or consider leaving or anything like that?

**JK 18:41**

Yeah. Um, thankfully, nobody lost their job over it. One teacher that I work with did take a leave of absence for the year. She had a student with special needs, who was high risk. So she was worried about bringing it home to her. And her child was in a different district that was virtual. And so she really needed to be home to help her through the virtual learning. So she took a leave of absence. I have other teachers that have either they themselves are high risk, or they lived with somebody who has high risk or visit somebody often who's high risk. So I think teachers were very concerned, especially because a lot of the people that I work with are in that upper age level where COVID was more deadly and more harmful than our students. So there was definitely a fear. There were some teachers who did not want to be in person are very upset that we were in person, for quite some time, I think it probably took them about half a year, to really sort of settle down and be okay with being there, I think it really took the first semester for them to see that we did not have a significant number of teachers getting COVID, although we did have some teachers that that COVID that got quite sick. And it was pretty stressful when we had a whole team of kids and teachers, for whatever reason that COVID was spreading among that team, I think two out of the three team teachers that COVID We had a lot of kids, we had to completely shut down the classrooms, and the entire class had to go virtual. So that was very stressful on teachers.

**HK 20:59**

Um, okay, and going back to a point you said a little bit earlier about kids in their parents. So usually, um, some kids school is somewhat of a safe space for them away from home. So when the pandemic first started, did that open up any fears for you, for your students, like, well being in mental state at home, or even with like food accessibility and stuff like that?

**JK 21:27**

I think that, um, we were pretty lucky in that, by the time we went virtual, in, I think, March, we had developed pretty good relationships with our students, that we felt that we had a decent handle on who needed help. We work really hard at making connections with our students and making sure that every student in our building feels connected to an adult. And if, if for those, so we know who does and who doesn't, we have that list like I shortly, it's December, and shortly we'll have that list where I actually know, I already know what students that I have don't feel that they have a connection, we're already working on making those connections. So that previous year, we had done all that work. So that was really helpful. So we made sure to check in on our

students. And our Student Services team is really strong that they were checking in with kids. Not saying that it was perfect. And I think with the students that I personally deal with, I deal with students that are in an advanced math class, who more often than not come from families that are quite supportive. In previous years, I've worked with students that come from more challenging home situations. I know that there was a lot more struggle there of getting kids engaged and making sure they were safe. But it was it was just it was tough. It was scary. Because we know that some of our kids are in homes that aren't the best. In terms of food, I think our school and I think this is countrywide, made a pretty quick, significant progress in making meals for families and having kind of that organized we have, we had a couple schools in the district where families could come at lunch and pick up meals. I believe there was potentially even a delivery option. I'm not positive on that. But they worked really, really hard to make sure that our families were fed, that funding is continuing this year. We also have a backpack program this year. So families that are in need right now, can, the students can pick up a backpack that has food in it that they can bring home over the weekend so that there's food at home too. So I do think that the pandemic was actually a real positive in that, because I think in our community in the past that has been ignored, because it's a pretty affluent community, people tended to brush it under. And I think it brought an awareness that there are families in our community that really do need that help with food and they are working really hard to make sure that they have access to it.

**HK 24:40**

All right. And so what concerns have parents come to you with throughout the course of the pandemic and how have you handled those concerns?

**JK 24:57**

I feel, to be honest, I haven't had tons of parents that have come to me with concerns. I think, partly because I was pretty proactive in communicating to my parents with letting them know my availability. I made a lot of video tapes for my students when, when we were online. And so when kids were stuck on things, I would make videos and they could watch the videos, if they had a question on their homework, I would make a quick video and email it to them and kind of show them how to do problems. And then I would just constantly communicate with the parents with what was going on. So I think that helped to ease their questions and concerns. I think now this year, it's just more of what people are generally, they're concerned with masks. And I think that's just that has been brought more to the school board than it has to individual teachers. When we first went optional, I was really concerned that I might be getting personal phone calls from parents. I thought that we might have students that would be making comments to one another. But I think the messaging that we did to our students, I think really paid off, and there really hasn't been any, I don't know of any issue where any student has gotten bullied for wearing a mask. I haven't heard of any parents really calling and complaining to the schools. It's only been at the school board meetings.

**HK 26:53**

Have you attended any of the school board meetings and seen anything?

**JK 26:57**

No, I did not physically attend any. I did watch part of one of the school board meetings where I knew parents would be raising their concerns. So I watched maybe 10-15 minutes of it to just kind of see what people were saying, because I was curious. I wasn't sure. I will say there are certain things that are out of my hands that I just don't stress over. And I knew masking was one of those things. I had no control over whether or not our school was going to be masked or not. So I guess I was concentrating on all the other things. We you know, our district has very high expectations for students, for staff, and so the masking thing, honestly, for me is a small portion of my worries.

**HK 27:55**

Getting into that a little bit more. So masking is, and vaccination status are becoming political, well have become political issues. Um, have you seen an increase of politics at school throughout the pandemics? Or throughout the pandemic?

**JK 28:13**

At the middle school, I, I am actually surprised. I haven't seen anything. But again, I think it's because of our messaging. We talked to the kids, we said that vaccines and masking is very personal, and people wear masks and get vaccines for a wide variety of reasons. And that everybody's opinion matters. And we need to make sure that we're being respectful of that. And we told our kids and if there's, if you're having any concerns or any issues with that, you need to immediately see our dean of students and we will handle it and I just haven't had any. And like I said for a while I had about a fourth of my kids that were wearing masks. I didn't hear anybody say anything to them. Nobody told me that they were getting bullied by it. Some kids shared with me why they were you know, and but that was it. Thankfully, amongst our students, I haven't seen anything.

**HK 29:22**

All right.

**JK 29:24**

I've seen it amongst our parents on the Facebook page.

**HK 29:27**

Yeah [laughs], do you want to elaborate on that a little bit, maybe?

**JK 29:30**

I don't know, I, they um, they're getting extremely upset about masking and I think teachers wish they would get upset about other things. You know, I think there's a lot of other things that parents could spend their energy on worrying about. Um, I wish that they would just listen to the science behind masking and just kind of follow that and get more passionate about other things, so,



**HK 30:02**

Yeah. Um, so that kind of goes into my next little set of questions. Um, so this is more about the community you live in, have you seen the overall atmosphere of the pandemic affect politics within the community?

**JK 30:21**

So when I'm out in the community, I feel like people have been, besides the school board meetings, because the school board meeting got pretty heated. But besides that, I would say face to face with people, it's been pretty decent. It's, I think, on social media, where I see and hear people being more political, and spewing like one liners that I try not to pay much attention to, because I just don't think that's necessarily the right place to voice opinions. I'd rather have a conversation with people, weigh pros and cons. I think when you're on social media, you almost have to pick one side and stick to that one side. And I prefer to listen to a wide range of people's ideas and viewpoints and sort of come to a mutual understanding, I guess, is the way that I prefer it. So but out in the community. I, I haven't seen a ton. But I don't know, I am not out in the community a lot. I go grocery shopping. Yeah, I've seen. I haven't seen much there.

**HK 32:06**

Yeah, um, so for you personally, did you, so a lot of social and justices were highlighted in the summer of 2020, or 2020, following the murder of George Floyd. And I think critical race theory really got a lot of traction during that. So have you seen, like, critical race theory work its way in to either the politics of school or even, maybe not critical race theory specifically, but the injustices that were highlighted over 2020. Have those affected the way you've taught in your classroom?

**JK 32:55**

Um, first, I'll speak to critical race theory. Um, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding around critical race theory. And I think a lot of people hear that and they fear it. Because they don't fully understand it. Again, being a middle school math teacher, it's, I don't always see it. I do know, there have been a few things that we've had to be a little careful about doing or saying. I think they want to make sure that what we do and say, is the right thing. And sometimes, we think we're being harmless, sometimes we even think that we're helping. Sometimes we think we're helping people when in reality, we're not helping people. So anyways, I don't I don't even know what I want to say to this. Our district is being very careful with what we're doing. Being very slow when it comes to equity work, because we want to make sure that the work we do is the right thing. Our view right now, is that every single student matters. And what we need to do if we want there to be equity, we need to get to know every student's story. So that's what they want us to do is get to know every student's story. Who is this child in my classroom? What is their background that might affect the way they learn? How do they socially interact with other people and how might that then change the different strategies that I use in my classroom so we're really looking at who are all these individual students in my classroom? And then what are the standards that I'm supposed to be teaching? And now knowing what I know about my students,

What strategies can I use to get them to reach those standards. So we are really focusing in on making sure that all of our students have access to grade level content. And that might be different than what people think that we might be doing. Like, oh, I have to somehow come up with math problems that have the names of the students in my math problems, I need to make sure that I have some Hispanic names, some Hmong names. That's not really going to help my students. Honestly, doesn't matter the names of my students in my math problems. What matters is, am I making sure that all the students in my class have access to reaching the grade level standards? Because that's right now, what's wrong with our school system, not all kids have access to grade level standards. In a certain schools, they dummy down the curriculum, they think that kids can't reach that. So what we're really trying to do across the board, making sure all of our students, students with disabilities, students with that might be language learners, that come students that come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, we're trying to make sure that they all have access to grade level standards. That's, I think, what is shifting in our district. Not that we're trying to figure out certain content things like I feel like some of the work around critical race theory has its place in certain content areas. Um, you know, I think for me, it's making sure my students have access to grade level standards.

**HK 37:15**

Um, and do you, because you mentioned you are also the mentor coach, um, has it affected the way you coach the mentors at all?

**JK 37:29**

Yes, so our goals, and our mission statement has equity built right in. That our mission is to disrupt, disrupt that inequity is that different groups have faced and it's, again, it's all about teaching our mentors, when they're working with new teachers, we want our new teachers to be looking at those grade level content areas standards, getting to know their kids and figuring out how do you make sure that all your students are getting access to those grade level standards. So it's always been part of the work that I've done with our mentoring program. But that that emphasis I think, has been even greater. Now, in the trainings, when we train mentors, we specifically talk about equity, what that means, we talk about bias, we give them examples of what our own biases might be. So we study biases during the training, as well. And when our mentors are working with our new teachers, we talk about different biases that we might have, etc. So yeah, it's a big part of what I do with my mentor work.

**HK 38:55**

Okay. Um, so we are kind of running a little bit out of time. Um, so the final question I want to ask you is, knowing what you knew know now about the pandemic, if you could tell people in the future watching this, um, what would you want them to keep in mind when looking back on this pandemic?

**JK 39:27**

The first thing that jumped into my mind, listen to the science.

**HK 39:31**

Yeah [laughs].

**JK 39:34**

Not the sound bites. I think too many people listen to the sound bites, instead of listening to the doctors and scientists who really have a wealth of understanding. So first and foremost, I'd like them to do that and then and then broaden their view of like, this is this is not the world's first pandemic like. The whole idea with vaccines i It boggles my mind of some of the things that people have said about vaccines, while they all have had the chickenpox and measles and mumps and polio vaccines, and don't think much about that. So I don't I don't know what everybody's hang up is about the vaccine. Because I think if you really look at the sciences, it's not as scary as what people think. So listen to the science, not the sound bites. The other thing is, is I do think that we are stronger than we sometimes think we are. And I think we've been through a lot. And I, I think, too, that the pandemic has shown us that I think it's really opened up the door to some inequities in our country, which I think has been almost like, even though it's bad, it's like it's been a blessing. People are really starting to, I think, realize why certain groups fear the doctor or maybe don't have access to medical care, like this is crazy. And I think it was something that people just weren't aware of in the past. So I think looking back on that, I think we're going to look at the pandemic, as they're going to be parts of it that have been blessings to people, because it really brought awareness groups that were underserved.

**HK 41:36**

Yeah, I can attest to that fully kind of closing up the interview here. I know in education, in what you were just talking about in groups where there might be distrust, or they're not getting the right medical attention. I'm taking a course this year at the University that is all about the medicalization of race and gender and kind of looking at, like, why we're seeing these impacts in certain communities because of COVID. So I think that is one of those things where it's like, COVID is an awful thing. And I wish this stuff was exposed to us in another way, almost, you know,

**JK 42:11**

I think too, it's brought an awareness to like the, the importance of that technology and making sure that people have access to technology and the internet, as not only educationally speaking, like, we saw school kids that they don't have internet at home, how are they supposed to join a Google meet when they don't have any sort of internet at home? Whether that's, you know, kids that are like, have socioeconomic issues, or if it's been communities in northern Wisconsin, that just really don't have good internet you know there. And because a lot of people don't have access to the internet 24 hours a day, then getting medical help. I just like for me, getting, you know, my kids tested for COVID, getting the vaccine. It's all been on the internet, and how challenging that must be for people without the Internet. Yeah, go down to the local library, to get on to a computer to try to make an appointment. I don't know we are making that stuff more

accessible to people is something that I don't know we need to continue to work on. But I think the pandemic has helped us open our eyes about the need for that.

**HK** 43:40

Now that's a very interesting point. I didn't even think about that. So thank you so much. I'm going to stop recording now.