



The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics

BECOME OCTM: Building an Energetic Community of Ohio Mathematics Educators

October 26, 2011

Dear Leaders,

The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics (OCTM) is an organization of 3,500 mathematics educators from pre-school through college. For 61 years, we have served Ohio mathematics educators at all levels by providing and supporting engaging, ongoing, collaborative professional growth opportunities. We believe that every student should have *full access* to mathematics education that develops the conceptual understandings and mathematical skills necessary for *full participation in a global society*. OCTM strongly advocates for policies and practices that value and emphasize the usefulness of mathematics in *critical thinking, informed decision making, and analytical problem solving* on the part of every teacher and student.

This letter is written in response to the upcoming reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and outlines our recommendations for the new ESEA.

Teacher Quality

- Any reforms centered on teachers, such as performance or merit pay, should carefully consider research and the effects on teacher or student learning.
- Teacher input can provide valuable expertise to reform movements. Studies have shown that when teachers are involved in curriculum planning, student performance increases.
- Teacher evaluations should include peer review rather than a narrow checklist of items.
- Rather than focusing on reactive teacher accountability measures, more emphasis should be placed on high quality teacher preparation programs and supportive induction programs to assist early career or struggling teachers. These programs have been shown to increase teacher retention, a major issue in this country.

Standardized Tests

- The current system has a strong emphasis on standardized testing. However, high-stakes testing and punishment rather than support for under-performing schools has not been successful at improving learning.
- Impossible benchmarks and punitive measures have led to widespread cheating, including within schools that have been lauded for miraculous achievement gains.
- Some states have merely lowered the bar to allow more students to pass the test, rendering the test scores meaningless. We support high standards and accountability for the education and learning of all students.
- Whereas standardized testing can provide some meaningful data, it should not be considered as the sole basis for any decision. A more holistic view of student growth should be used to evaluate student performance. Those who know the students and their work best—teachers—can evaluate their students' progress.
- The timing of the standardized test in many states has led to a month or more of school after testing with no real content being taught.

Narrowed Curriculum

- An unintended outcome of the overreliance on standardized test scores has been the narrowing the curriculum to focus on test preparation.
- Mathematics in particular should emphasize students' conceptual understanding and address process-oriented standards, such as conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and mathematical reasoning/problem solving skills, which can assist students who are learning and working in the 21st century. The reauthorization of the ESEA should focus on promoting these problem-solving abilities, in addition to the underlying understandings and skills of essential calculation, data analysis, measurement, geometry, and algebra.

Disadvantaged and Historically Underserved Students

- Intervention techniques, resources, and ongoing, embedded, professional development for teachers and classrooms should be made available to struggling schools.
- Hard-to-staff schools in high poverty areas and students with special needs should be given greater support.

The federal government plays a valuable role in ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality education; therefore, this renewal of the ESEA should reflect that aspiration toward improved quality. *We support the development of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to provide further support to teachers and schools who educate disadvantaged and historically underserved students.* Further, provisions in the ESEA should be based upon high-quality research of teaching and learning.

The members of the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics thank you very much for your careful consideration of this important issue, and for your leadership in developing a world-class mathematics education system for all students across the United States. OCTM looks forward to future discussions and collaboration with leaders in mathematics education. For additional information and dialogue, we invite you to contact OCTM through our president, Mark Jaffee, at markjaffee@oberlin.net or at 440-574-1462, or advocacy coordinator, Katie Hendrickson, at kh232602@ohio.edu or at 740-274-0147.

Respectfully,

The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics Board of Directors