



## ***The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics***

***BECOME OCTM: Building an Energetic Community of Ohio Mathematics Educators***

**March 25, 2010**

Dear Leaders of the House Education and Labor Committee,

The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics (OCTM) is an organization of 3,500 mathematics educators from pre-school through college. We serve 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.

- We support high standards and accountability for the education and learning of all students. However, we do not believe that high-stakes testing and punishment rather than support for under-performing schools has been successful. Alternatives to standardized testing, such as performance-based, formative or portfolio assessments, provide students and schools with opportunities to show evidence of growth and understanding beyond answering multiple-choice questions.
- We encourage leaders to continue the process of evaluating and revising the developing set of national standards, and encourage the broadening of mathematics standards rather than narrowing them. The current focus on calculations and numerical skills has come at the expense of in-depth thinking about mathematics and a broad curriculum. The United States should place less emphasis on international standardized assessments that address number skills, and focus more on building our students' critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- Intervention techniques, resources, and ongoing, embedded, professional development for teachers and classrooms should be made available to struggling schools. Further, hard-to-staff schools in high poverty areas, as well as classrooms with students with disabilities, should be given greater support.
- Standardized tests should not be the only method of assessment. An overreliance on standardized testing has led, in many classrooms, to a narrow curriculum focused on teaching to the test. Mathematics in particular should emphasize students' conceptual understanding and address process-oriented standards, such as communication, problem solving, reasoning, connections, and representations, which can assist students who are learning and working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reauthorization of the ESEA should focus on promoting these problem-solving abilities, in addition to the underlying development of essential calculation, data analysis, measurement, geometric, and algebraic skills.

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.*

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, including the House Education and Labor Committee. For additional information and dialogue, we invite you to contact OCTM through our president, Kim Yoak, at [kjyoak@gmail.com](mailto:kjyoak@gmail.com) or at 330-689-5200, ext. 6255; or advocacy coordinator, Katie Hendrickson, at [kh232602@ohio.edu](mailto:kh232602@ohio.edu) or at 740-274-0147.

Respectfully,

The Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics Board of Directors