



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mike Enzi  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
U.S. Senate

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) is pleased to have this opportunity to share its priorities and concerns as you turn to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 100,000 members of NCTM endorse the goals of the ESEA and support efforts to improve the law to ensure that American high school graduates are ready for college or a career. The Council also supports the broader goal of ensuring that the United States will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

NCTM is most concerned about adequate support for mathematics educators. Research consistently shows that the most important school-based element of student achievement is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. To make certain that students receive mathematics instruction from highly skilled teachers, NCTM believes that investments in Title II of ESEA should be dedicated to professional development and not be used for other purposes. In addition, in light of the shortage of math teachers nationwide and the particular challenges faced by hard-to-staff schools in recruiting and retaining math teachers, the Council supports the priority given to math teachers in Title II and other programs, as well as federal efforts to broaden participation in the profession by attracting more women and underrepresented minorities into K–12 math classrooms. Similarly, federal support for ensuring that all educators are prepared to teach English language learners and students with disabilities is crucial.

As you know, the America COMPETES Act, enacted in 2007, authorized two programs that never received federal funds. These two programs are of particular interest to NCTM. The first program, Math Now, aims to help elementary and middle school students prepare for and succeed in mathematics by improving K–9



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mathematics instruction. If funded, the program would provide targeted help to low-income students who are struggling with mathematics and whose achievement is significantly below grade level. Under the second program, Math Skills for Secondary Students, states could compete for grants enabling local education agencies (LEAs) to establish mathematics programs to improve the performance of high school students. This program was also intended to invest in professional development for mathematics teachers and coaches, as well as research-based mathematics programs and assessments. Clearly, both of these programs could advance the Obama administration's efforts to increase high school graduation rates by their support of mathematics achievement in earlier grades. This support could also help high school students avoid the kinds of daunting experiences with mathematics that sometimes push borderline students to drop out of school before graduation. Recognizing that your committee and the administration support investments in STEM education, NCTM is hopeful that these established programs will be included or replicated in any new mathematics initiative and that federal investments will enable their promise to be realized. The legislative language that authorized these programs accompanies this letter, and we hope that these programs might be elements of a comprehensive mathematics bill, similar to the literacy initiative proposed in Senator Murray's Literacy for All, Results for the Nation Act (S. 2740) and supported by other members of the committee. In addition, NCTM has been an avid supporter of the Math and Science Partnerships program and continues to endorse that effort while noting the need to implement the program's required collaboration with the National Science Foundation.

NCTM is concerned about the priorities that left the Math Now and Math Skills for Secondary Students programs without federal funds, and this concern extends to the Council's views of Title I. Because Title I is the government's largest investment in educational equity, NCTM is concerned that its emphasis—whether intended or not—is on reading. The designation "Title I" is almost always associated with a reading program or reading specialist in schools and classrooms. NCTM supports explicit changes to the law to direct states to support investments in math coaches and specialists and to require state improvement plans to reflect greater attention to improving the math achievement of students in Title I schools.

NCTM believes that states should have the option to use multiple tests and other indicators to demonstrate accountability. Allowing states to integrate multiple measures when assessing student academic growth and progress is an important addition to the statute. Furthermore, providing support for the creation or expansion of longitudinal data systems and applying lessons learned from experiences with the Race to the Top and other stimulus programs will increase states' capacity to put this information to good use. The diverse needs of students in today's classrooms, the value of intervention strategies, and the importance of formative assessments must also be taken into account as these assessment provisions are revised.



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NCTM regards education technology as another important consideration in modifying ESEA. It is crucial that teachers learn how to integrate technology into the classroom as an effective means of engaging students and enhancing learning. Ensuring the successful use of technology in instruction will require greater investment in professional development for teachers as well as requisite hardware and software.

In addition to calling attention to these considerations, NCTM joins its colleagues in other disciplines in supporting a new ESEA that recognizes the importance of school climate, leadership support, early childhood learning, parental involvement, and research on teaching and learning. Furthermore, knowing that innovative approaches to improving education are much needed in our K-12 systems, the Council is encouraged by the promise of the Investing in Innovation (i3) program and supports its continuation through a revised statute.

Again, thank you for the time and effort that you, your colleagues, and staff are investing in reauthorization. As this process moves forward, if we can provide you with any additional information, please contact NCTM Associate Executive Director for Communications Ken Krehbiel at (703) 620-9840, ext.2102 or our government relations consultant Ellin Nolan at (202) 289-3900.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kichoon Yang', written in a cursive style.

Kichoon Yang  
Executive Director