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START THE YEAR OFF RIGHT

It's summer time; the sun feels warmer and shines longer. It's prime time for vacations, family gatherings, relaxation, and an opportunity for reflection and rejuvenation. I hope you find yourself embracing this wonderful and special time of year. Equally thrilling is the fast-approaching time when teachers and students return to the classroom full of life and excitement.

No matter what adventures your summer has brought, I anticipate that you have thought about your math classroom—past or future—and have written down an idea that might work with your class this year. This ongoing process of thinking and reflecting is crucial in raising your level of effectiveness in the classroom. Here are a few things to consider as you begin the 2008–09 school year:

> **Start with a Project**

As you think about beginning the school year, I suggest that you consider kicking off the mathematics learning with a project or unit that will demonstrate how students from various backgrounds and abilities will learn critical math ideas with understanding in your classroom.

How will you help students make educated guesses, teach them to use their reasoning to develop and evaluate mathematical arguments, and support them as they make and interpret representations to model problems? How will you help your students build a strong mathematical foundation so that they can build further critical skills and concepts? Opening lessons should build on what students bring to school—math and common life experiences.

> **Excite Your Students!**

Look at the standards and benchmarks for the mathematics that you need to teach, and then start with a topic that will

excite and intrigue all of your students. One option is to start the year with lessons about measurement. In nearly every state, assessments show that students struggle to understand and apply measurement concepts meaningfully. Many opening lessons about measurement use measurement tools—rulers, protractors, balances, and other scales, with units of measure, such as $1/8$ inch, 1 cubic centimeter, 0.05 grams. Extensive use of rulers, with both fractional and decimal units, can be powerful preparation for abstracting from the number line and using it to represent rational numbers. As students' knowledge in mathematics grows, measurements become relationships among multiple measures, such as kilometers per hour, parts per million, meters per second squared, and pounds per square inch.

> **Integrate Supplemental Materials**

Make math come alive in your classroom. Carefully look over the lessons in your curriculum materials and supplement them with engaging activities and lessons from many sources, including NCTM's Navigations Series and Illuminations Web site (illuminations.nctm.org). Check out the lessons available in these resources for your grade band. I am confident that you will find lessons and activities that will meet your needs, while also setting the tone for your classroom by engaging students in hands-on, meaningful mathematics.

As the big smiles, bright eyes, and open minds begin to flood your classroom this year, I hope you have thought about how you can keep that motivation and excitement throughout the year. Your opportunity to make a difference is right around the corner! Ω