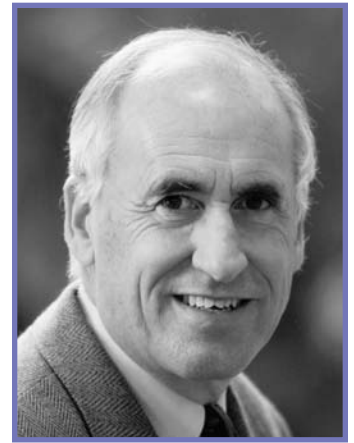


President's Message

Here Comes Summer— and Much, Much More!

Francis “Skip” Fennell



I am writing this, my initial President's Message, on a cold day in Westminster, Maryland, but you will be reading it at one of the more wonderful times of the traditional school year. Summer break is on the horizon. Things like grades, final projects and assessments, putting supplies away, and school-related minutia are probably filling your weeks and days. In fact, just getting your eyes on this column is likely to be a major accomplishment. Thanks for reading.

Yes, soon we'll be humming "Here Comes Summer" (a relatively small percentage of you will remember this as the title of an old rock 'n' roll tune). I have been an educator for 40 years and have taught for most of those years. I can tell you that I love summer. In my mind, summer begins the day students depart. The break from classes can be a very productive time for mathematics teachers, but it can also bring with it some concerns.

Recharge. Above all, the summer break is a time for teachers to recharge their batteries. We spend the school year carefully crafting lessons linked to important curricula, engaging students in thinking about the mathematics they are learning, and linking assessments to instruction. The career we have chosen is demanding. It's a hard job. Some would argue that if teachers were just allowed to teach, the job would be less taxing, but that's a topic for another President's Message. In short, we all need time off to recharge before we take on a new group of students. For those of you who are preschool and primary-level teachers, the break is a time that forces you to adjust your speech patterns, among other things, to fit into the adult community. (Many people have no idea what it's like to talk to five- or six-year-olds all day long!) Many of us will spend a few summer days resting beside an ocean or some other body of water. And summer is our time to reconnect with family and friends, read the books we have been wanting to read, and tend to other personal needs.

Reflection. For many teachers, the summer also offers "golden weeks" for professional reflection. Many of us will take on jobs that are very different from teaching, such as running a bike-rental shop, doing construction work, working in a library, or serving as a tour guide (all actual "summer jobs" of math teacher friends of mine). This time away from school can help us gain a clearer perspective on the experiences we've had in the classroom.

Please use the break to think seriously about what went particularly well this year, and why. What seemed to click? What should be changed? Such reflection outside the classroom can result in fresh insights that bring about improvements for the coming school year. We owe this type of reflection to our students and ourselves.

Renewal. Summer is also a time when teachers can renew their commitment to teaching and learning. It is a time when we

can attend those all-day workshops, continue graduate studies, or engage in other significant professional development opportunities without having to plan lessons for the next morning. The summer break allows teachers to actually do the required reading, work on the computer, converse with colleagues, and fully immerse themselves in learning.

We should never stop learning and developing our potential. So this summer, consider focusing on a mathematics topic that you haven't considered in a while and explore it privately or with a colleague. Or participate in online courses, conferences, or other Web-related initiatives, which have become a convenient way to engage in professional development activities during the summer, from almost anywhere.

Concerns. As many of you know, the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act have helped create a "miniboom" in summer school programs of all types. I have reservations about summer school programs, even though they offer students opportunities to catch up, get ahead, or just feel better about mathematics. My main concern is that there can be a disconnect between what is taught and learned in summer school and what happens during the regular school year. This occurs because regulations, procedures, standards, and funding for summer school programs vary in this country. Having such opportunities for students is extremely important, but connections are needed—to existing work, to the next year's teacher, to appropriate mathematics activities, and on and on. Another related concern is that summer programs shorten the summer break to just a few weeks for many teachers. Some of the best mathematics teachers are tapped to be summer school mathematics teachers. When do these teachers get a chance to recharge, reflect, and renew themselves? The summer weeks can be a time for students and teachers to renew their skills, but care needs to be taken if we are to develop, monitor, and run high-quality summer programs.

So there you have it. Recharge, reflect, and renew—three things that many of you will be doing this summer. Enjoy yourselves. Use the time to rest and rejuvenate. And advocate for well-planned summer school policies and programs; they are needed—everywhere.

I look forward to visiting with you in this space many times over the next two years. Each opportunity will allow me to provide some background on mathematics education issues that are important to us all. I am honored and excited about the opportunities that I will have while serving as your president. It will be my goal to draw on my experiences to help us all meet the challenge of providing an appropriate and challenging mathematics experience for all students.

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