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ARE YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

The title of this article is a phrase often repeated on the streets of New York City. And it is a question that mathematics teachers could ask decision makers everyday. If you are a teacher, *you* are the most important factor influencing student achievement in mathematics. Of course, the tools that support your craft—such as curricular materials and assessments—are influential, but *what teachers do* matters even more. And it is absolutely essential for you to be involved in decisions that affect your ability to fulfill your responsibilities as a teacher of mathematics.

Far too often decision makers are not "talkin'" directly to teachers or involving them in planning that will have an impact on their work. And frankly, this oversight—this *disrespect*—contributes to the departure of many mathematics teachers from the profession. Whether it's a state, school district, or school-based decision, teachers must be involved when change is being considered. Reform or change (I prefer the word *change*) is often needed—even overdue—and teachers must be involved in determining how to best improve instruction. Why? Because teachers are responsible—every day—for its delivery.

When you get involved in school-based, district, state, or nationwide initiatives that will result in any type of change, think about these factors, which are important to successful change:

> Leadership determines what gets done. Those of you who have worked with effective superintendents, principals, or supervisors know how important their leadership is when it comes to implementing change and empowering teachers to use their expertise to guide that change.

> Assessment should monitor the implementation of the initiative. What's being used to determine the success of changes? Are the assessments appropriate? Reliable? Or do they just add another round of tests to the schedule? Are the current challenges to meet state expectations more important than the accountability measures that will be used to assess the new project?

> There must be coherence between the proposed project and existing instruction. Does the proposed project subsume current practices? Should something new be implemented while a new curriculum is still being assessed? How many pilot programs can be run during the same year?

> Teachers must be given enough time for think about the new idea before it is implemented. Colleagues have told me about new things that were sprung on them only a few days before the launch date. Clearly, decision makers were not talking to them.

We know that students who outperform their peers, regardless of socioeconomic background, have one thing in common —highly effective teachers. *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics* tells us, "Effective teaching requires continuing efforts to learn and improve. These efforts include learning about mathematics and pedagogy, benefiting from interactions with students and colleagues, and engaging in ongoing professional development and self-reflection." And I would add this to that statement: to be effective, teachers need to be involved in the decision-making that shapes their work. Are they talkin' to you? I sure hope so. Ω

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