

***Curriculum Focal Points  
for Prekindergarten through Grade 8 Mathematics***

**Questions and Answers**

**1. What are “curriculum focal points”?**

“Curriculum focal points” are the most important mathematical topics for each grade level. They comprise related ideas, concepts, skills, and procedures that form the foundation for understanding and lasting learning. They are the topics that should be considered as the basis for decisions about curriculum development.

**2. What exactly is a “focal point”?**

A focal point is a cohesive cluster of related knowledge, skills, and concepts. It is more than a single objective, standard, expectation, or indicator. It is not a discrete topic for teachers to present to students and check off as having been mastered. Rather, a focal point specifies the mathematical content that a student needs to understand deeply and thoroughly for future mathematics learning.

**3. Why has NCTM developed a set of curriculum focal points?**

With current mathematics curricula, students are expected to become acquainted with a wide range of topics in a short period of time, keeping them from developing deep mathematical understanding and connections. These curricula typically include long lists of concepts and skills at each grade level but never answer the question, “What are the key mathematical ideas or topics on which the others build?” The focal points are an example of how to answer this question. NCTM is offering a focused framework to guide states and school districts as they design and organize the next revisions of their expectations, standards, curriculum, and assessment programs.

**4. What is the purpose of NCTM’s Curriculum Focal Points?**

- NCTM’s Curriculum Focal Points present a way to bring focus to the teaching, learning, and assessing of mathematics. They provide a framework for designing and organizing curricular expectations and assessments. Collectively, they describe an approach that can be used in developing a mathematics curriculum for prekindergarten through grade 8.
- Organizing a curriculum around a set of focal points, with a clear emphasis on the processes of mathematics, as outlined in NCTM’s *Principles and Standards for Schools Mathematics*, can provide students with a connected, coherent, ever expanding body of mathematical knowledge and ways of thinking.
- The Curriculum Focal Points are intended to address curriculum, or *what* is taught, rather than instruction, or *how* it is taught. Although the initial impact of the focal points will be on curriculum, ultimately the focal points will affect teaching, learning, and assessment, as well.

**5. Who should use the Curriculum Focal Points?**

The Curriculum Focal Points are intended for use by a variety of constituencies committed to improving the learning and teaching of mathematics:

- *State and district leaders* as they take the next steps in the development of future curriculum, instruction, and assessment materials
- *Publishers* as they reconsider the scope, sequence, and organization of textbooks and assessment tools
- *Teacher educators* as they organize content and methods courses and help teachers and prospective teachers develop their knowledge of critical mathematics understandings across the grades
- *Classroom teachers and instructional leaders* as they prioritize existing lists of curriculum objectives, expectations, and textbook materials

**6. How does NCTM's new publication, *Curriculum Focal Points*, relate to the publication *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*?**

*Curriculum Focal Points* is an extension of *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*. *Principles and Standards* describes the development of mathematics content across the grades; *Curriculum Focal Points* identifies areas of emphasis within the mathematics curriculum at each grade level, prekindergarten through grade 8. Together, these two publications provide valuable resources to guide mathematics curriculum, instruction, and assessment.