



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

December 3, 2008

Presidential Transition Team  
Washington, DC

Dear Education Team:

As the Democratic Party asserts in its platform, “In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, where the most valuable skill is knowledge, countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow.” The importance of a strong and accountable system of public education can hardly be overstated. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the more than 100,000 mathematics educators it represents could not agree more with calls for increased quality in education, accountability of schools and educators, and success in closing achievement gaps while improving the performance of U.S. students in the ranks of their international peers. As you and President-elect Obama prepare for the new administration, this letter offers an outline of educational priorities and some of NCTM’s concerns.

NCTM is the world’s largest professional organization dedicated to improving mathematics education for all students. The Council is committed to a constructive public dialogue to ensure a mathematics education of the highest quality for all students. Seminal NCTM publications provide guidelines for excellence in mathematics education. By identifying the mathematical topics that form the foundation for lasting learning at each grade level, *Curriculum Focal Points for Prekindergarten through Grade 8 Mathematics: A Quest for Coherence* has been influential in shaping curricula that implement the recommendations of NCTM’s landmark *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*.

A strong prekindergarten–grade 12 mathematics education for all students is increasingly important to our nation’s economic stability, future security, and workforce productivity. In an economically competitive nation, everyone must be mathematically literate and recognize the importance of mathematics learning. NCTM believes that teachers and what they do in the classroom are at the heart of this vision. As a result, NCTM works at the federal level to advance policies that support classroom teachers and the educators that prepare them, as well as to advocate adequate federal investment in programs that are important to student learning.

Education advocates nationwide are keenly interested in the formation of President-elect Obama’s education leadership team and how it will address the reauthorization and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as the authorization of



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new education programs as part of competitiveness legislation and new provisions of the Higher Education Act that affect the preparation of teachers. The attention that early childhood education received during the campaign was heartening to mathematics educators. Learning begins at birth, and a public commitment to prepare children for success as early as possible is essential and overdue. We strongly encourage the inclusion of mathematics educators on the envisioned Presidential Early Learning Council.

Unfortunately, the early years of learning are not the only time of growth and development that warrants examination and educational reform. Growing evidence underscores the importance of aligning middle school education with the needs of the workforce and the skills required in high school, as well as the urgency of addressing the growing dropout crisis. Although these issues extend beyond mathematics education, they are crucial to our members and their classrooms.

NCTM is particularly pleased that the president-elect has been vocal about the important role of parents in learning. The recently completed report from the National Mathematics Advisory Panel emphasizes the role of parents in encouraging children to be diligent and persistent, as the learning of mathematics often requires. The new administration is set to take a step in the right direction with its proposed report card, which would show parents the level at which their child is expected to perform, as well as provide information on alternative learning sources, tutors, and how to save for college. Engaging parents supports the efforts of classroom teachers as well as the overall goals of public education.

Perhaps most important, NCTM believes that the federal government should invest in teachers at every stage of their development, including the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. This means investing in the preparation and ongoing support of middle and high school teachers of mathematics, math specialists and math coaches in elementary schools, as well as investigating the best strategies for competing with private industry for the skills that these professionals bring to the classroom. President-elect Obama's proposed Teacher Service Scholarships and his proposals related to teacher education and compensation reflect the importance of recruiting academically qualified prospects to pursue educational careers, providing them with access to qualified mentors and other supports, and ensuring that their workplace is a professional and rewarding one.

NCTM also supports greater coherence of curriculum, assessment, and accountability in prekindergarten–grade 12 mathematics education. Since the publication of *Curriculum Focal Points*, NCTM has been at the forefront of efforts to align curriculum and assessment with learning goals to provide meaningful assessment data to guide decisions about schools. To this end, the Council supports constructive



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national discussion about the value of voluntary common instructional expectations for mathematics education to address the often inconsistent, excessively long lists of learning expectations currently included in many state standards.

NCTM strongly embraces the goal of equity embodied in federal education policies and works to reach the untapped potential of all America's students by ensuring equitable mathematics learning of the highest quality for all students. To achieve this goal, NCTM strongly supports programs and practices that provide access to and resources for the acquisition of high-level mathematics skills by a wide range of overlapping populations, including children of poverty, English language learners, urban and rural students, students of all races and ethnicities, students with learning difficulties, students who are female, and students who are mathematically gifted.

As recently detailed in the National Mathematics Advisory Panel's final report, *Foundations for Success*, preparing elementary and middle school students for success in algebra is crucial to fostering academic and personal achievement. Last year, the America COMPETES Act authorized a new initiative to prepare elementary and middle school students "for rigorous high school mathematics courses." NCTM strongly endorses funding this initiative and is encouraged by the declaration of support in the Democratic Party platform for full funding of this and all programs authorized in that legislation.

Further, NCTM believes that President-elect Obama's proposed "Invest in What Works" initiative is a sound response to another call from the National Mathematics Advisory Panel. This initiative, designed to double the U.S. investment in education research and development in four years, would expand much-needed research in mathematics education. NCTM recognizes the need to consider existing research from a broader range of methodologies and the importance of selecting a director of the Institute of Education Sciences, who will have the position and influence to focus the direction and use of future education research.

NCTM supports numerous other federal investments in mathematics education, research initiatives, and teacher preparation efforts, including programs at the National Science Foundation—most notably, the Math and Science Partnerships program, which informs efforts to improve math and science education nationwide, and the Transformative Research initiative. We also encourage the new administration to heed the call initially made in 2000 to double the NSF budget within five years.

Thank you for your attention to these views. The Council looks forward to working with President-elect Obama and the education team on all of these challenges,



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upcoming appropriations battles, and the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. As the transition proceeds, 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 NCTM's Government Relations Consultant Ellin Nolan at (202) 289-3900.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry S. Kepner, Jr."

Henry S. Kepner, Jr.  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Rubillo".

Jim Rubillo  
Executive Director