



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

October 10, 2012

Thomas Dorney  
Legislative Assistant  
Representative John Lewis  
5th Congressional District of Georgia  
343 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Dorney:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the “Arithmetic Standards Challenge to End National Disparities Act.” The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) applauds the goal of involving more minority and low-income students in mathematics through the creation or support of existing competitions. The act could attract and engage students in mathematics learning through an alternative means and it could engage currently underserved populations. Too many elementary and middle school students simply do not have opportunities to reach their potential. Competitions offer another avenue to success and may appeal to students who may not reach their potential through more traditional means in the classroom.

### **Caveat**

While NCTM wholeheartedly supports the engagement of more students in the ardent pursuit of studying mathematics, it cautions that the skills developed and required for excellence in competitions are sometimes different from those that provide the foundation of real learning with understanding and preparation for further, advanced academic study. The skills that are highly developed for success in competitions must be grounded in a foundation of real understanding, and teaching for learning with understanding should not be neglected. Also, competitions may attract high achievers in disproportionate numbers, lessening the likelihood that greater numbers of students will be attracted to mathematics. With those cautions the creation of a new program of mathematics competitions to engage minority and low-income elementary and middle school students has great potential.

### **Existing competitions**

[MATHCOUNTS](#) is a well-established nationwide competition with wide recognition and high visibility. There is also a series of Math Olympiads for elementary and



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middle school students. It may be possible to take advantage of the existing organizational infrastructure supporting MATHCOUNTS or other competitions to reach the goals of engaging more minority and low-income students in the enthusiastic pursuit of mathematics.

**Department of Education**

Housing the program within the Department of Education will give it visibility and the weight of authority that should help sustain the program. Practice tests and lessons hosted by the Department website should be adequately vetted by experienced mathematics teachers.

NCTM appreciates the invitation to comment on the discussion draft and welcomes the opportunity to assist in further development or comment on legislative language. Please feel free to contact me or NCTM Associate Executive Director for Communications Ken Krehbiel (703 620-9840 ext. 2102; [kkrehbiel@nctm.org](mailto:kkrehbiel@nctm.org)) us with additional questions or if we can assist you in any way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda M. Gojak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "L" and "G".

Linda M. Gojak  
President