

38th Annual NCSM Conference, St. Louis Missouri
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The St. Louis Airport was buzzing with friendly conversation among math educators as I stepped off the plane on April 23. Waiting in line for a van, I was already having a conversation about parent education with Ruth Parker! It was invigorating to have the opportunity to attend the 38th NCSM Annual Conference. I had left Denver searching for “answers” to some of the many questions my district was asking. For example:

- What are good interventions for our struggling algebra students?
- What are best practices for our growing number of English Language Learners (ELL)?
- How can we help all grade levels teach more consistently with state standards as a framework?

I quickly realized that it was going to be more than the learning, research and expertise that would make the NCSM conference valuable. It would be the sharing of commitment and passion from math educators that would help me strengthen my “vision” of quality mathematics instruction.

In my role as a district math instructional specialist, I work with math departments that are ready, willing and able to implement new curriculum for all students and interventions for their struggling math students. They work hard, participate in professional development, and try to implement everything correctly, but often they are discouraged and struggle to see success. Having a broad “vision” of what it means to understand mathematics, rather than a little snapshot of things to try, is part of building successful math programs. The research and expertise along with the commitment and passion of the presenters at the NCSM conference helped me strengthen and clarify my vision of K-12 mathematics education which I will share with my colleagues and teachers in my district.

I attended sessions on the achievement gap, strengthening collaboration between math teachers and special educators, instructional strategies for ELL students and implementing standards-based mathematics programs. These sessions modeled, in the words of NCTM, “high-quality, engaging mathematics instruction with ambitious expectations for all and accommodations for those who need it.” I observed an activity in which the participants were asked to speak “a different language” by trying to describe photosynthesis without being able to use words that started with R, L, or N. The participants were apprehensive, spoke slowly, and used the best words they could, but struggled to communicate what they really understood. My vision for ELL students in our district began to broaden because I was able to reflect on how it feels to learn and speak in a second language.

I also attended sessions that addressed quality professional development and research. The information presented in these sessions provided ideas directly related to my job. It is a daily challenge to foster a district math environment in which knowledgeable math teachers, using mathematically rich curriculums, are growing as professionals. Guidelines were presented for principals observing in math classes and three-year implementation plans for reform-based math programs supported by professional development. A tremendous amount of research on reform based math programs was presented which, when shared in my district, makes our process more efficient. The clear visions and experience of the presenters provided the framework for a strong, well-implemented district vision.

Thank you to all the NCSM visionaries who lead us and thank you to the membership and leaders of NCSM and NCTM for creating and supporting the Iris Carl Award, which provided the opportunity for me to attend the NCSM conference this year! The NCSM conference experience helps all of us calibrate our personal thinking with national direction. I close with a vision of when, as Alan Schoenfeld in his keynote session said, “The stars align.”

The vision is – **Meaningful engagement with powerful mathematics for all students!**