

FROM THE NCSM PRESIDENT... KATEY ARRINGTON

**MAKE IT HAPPEN:  
IMPROVED STUDENT EXPERIENCE CAN BECOME A REALITY**



KATEY ARRINGTON

Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen,  
others make it happen. —Michael Jordan

*Do you ever feel like we talk about the same things over and over?* It seems that way to me sometimes. In discussions about how to improve student experiences, we talk about setting common goals and vision, increasing coherence in and across our instructional programs, and utilizing instructional strategies that are inclusive and engaging to ensure every student feels they are capable and supported. And yet, across schools, districts, and states we see inconsistencies in vision for mathematics education and incredible variation in the quality of programming students experience.

As someone who thinks about system-level change for a living, I give a lot of thought to

what might be holding the problems of incoherence and inconsistencies in place. Of course, there are structural changes we need to make in the system, including ensuring resources flow to and through our systems in equitable ways so all students have what they need. Policies must provide all students access to and success in high-quality experiences with the materials that support each and every one of them achieving success in learning. We must also provide educators with meaningful professional learning and collaboration opportunities, so they can make necessary changes in practice. Structural changes are often the topic of our discussions about creating change to increase student success, and while they are necessary, they are unlikely

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by themselves to be sufficient to shift the conditions that hold these big issues of inequitable outcomes for students in place.

For lasting and sustainable change, we must go deeper. Relational changes are needed across our systems, including both constructing new types of relationships and addressing the power dynamics within the system. All educators on a campus and in a district need to act as a team to identify areas of strength and research-based instructional practices that can support increased student engagement and learning in their context. Teachers need to have agency and know that, while there are expectations for continuous work toward improvement of student outcomes, they get to make choices about how they approach their own growth and will have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to make progress. A leader's focus in this process is on supporting teachers in making informed choices and then in enacting the strategies chosen. Teachers are the most important factor for student learning, and they need to be treated as professionals as they put their best foot forward.

Relational change cannot be limited to including or impacting only the adults in the building though! "Teacher and student agency goes hand in hand" according to Tatiana Ciccarelli (2024) of NWEA. As teachers need agency to make meaningful progress, students should also get choices and inform what is happening in their schools. They should have the opportunity to collaborate in their learning and to focus on growth goals. When students and teachers are trusted and feel respected in their work and included in the decision-making power structures, they can bring their authentic selves to the classroom and flourish.

Lastly, and certainly not least, changes in mindsets and beliefs must be made urgently. In the systems change framework I use regularly, work on mindsets and beliefs is called *transformational* change. Kania, et al., (2018) describes transformational change as addressing "deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk" (p. 1). Structural changes and relational changes are unlikely to be implemented, have the intended impact, or be sustainable if there is no shift in the suppositions of deeply held mindsets that drive our actions and behaviors. Mindsets and beliefs hold structural and relational issues in place if not directly addressed.

The National Policy Board of Education Administrators (NPBEA) publishes the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, and one of their standards says, "Effective leaders ensure and embody high expectations AND confront and alter low expectations to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn." As leaders, we must, ourselves, embody high expectations for our educators and students. But we also must ensure others have high expectations for each student. When we see evidence of low expectations, we should be confronting and altering those expectations. Addressing mindsets and beliefs, having hard conversations about why the problems we know have continually existed in our systems and are held in place by mindsets, will make for transformative change.

It's time. This is your call to action to make a change in what you do to move to more action and better outcomes for our students! BOLD mathematics leaders, we need to see progress

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## From the NCSM President (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

and measurable change for all our students. Is it difficult and complex? Absolutely. But it is at the heart of our job. The *NCSM Essential Actions for Instructional Leadership* book says “Equitable practices combined with high expectations, high-quality content, and strong family-community relationships have a positive effect on mathematics learning and achievement. *Here lies your work with teachers and students* [emphasis added]” (NCSM, 2019). This is your work as a leader.

What is it that you need to take your leadership to new levels and place emphasis on action with your teams? It can be difficult to ask teams of hard-working teachers to do something differently, and you should work with the educators and students to make decisions about how to make significant, positive change.

Don't know where to start? Look for tools, like the “What School-Based Mathematics Program Needs Assessment Tool” on pages 18–20 of the *NCSM Essential Actions for Instructional Leaders* book. Educators can complete this tool to find out more about what is happening and how their educators are feeling about your mathematics instructional program. It could be the start of a meaningful conversation about what to do next!

Also, keep in mind that while we need progress, no one should feel like the

expectation is for them to be perfect immediately. Look for tools that help you to both make and monitor for progress. An example of this is the Mathematical Teaching Practices Continuum in the *NCSM Essential Actions for Instructional Leaders* book on pages 54–57. These charts show what the research-based Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) look like on a continuum of teacher-centered to student-centered implementations. The charts can serve two purposes. First to identify the practices currently exist and where they land on the continuum, and then to help choose how to move further toward implementing practices in student-centered ways.

The most important thing is that action is happening to produce better outcomes for all students. Major changes start with one single step, so be brave and take it! As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said about making change “Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” You have lots of supports as a member of NCSM. Please contact an [NCSM board member](#), particularly your [Regional Director](#), if you have questions or need help to find a resource or tool. We are happy to collaborate with you! 📧

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REGIONAL REPORTS

RETHINKING TEST PREP

NCSM Regional Directors from US Western 2, US Southern 2, and US Central 1 share reflections of sentiments: Leadership, relationships, and the beauty of in-between.

Sean Nank, NCSM US WESTERN 2 REGIONAL DIRECTOR

*Attending a mathematics leadership conference is a profound opportunity to reflect on the nature of leadership, relationship building, and amazing sessions, keynotes, and conversations.*



SEAN NANK

I don't mean to sound weird but half-way through mathematics week, I start to wonder about my purpose, about why I take time to reconnect in such a way. For me, it all points to the in-between moments when I see someone in a hallway I haven't talked to in a while, when I volunteer and laugh with others, and when I sit on a couch with a friend to have a deep and moving conversation.

As leaders, we thrive for a blend of purpose and empathy, guidance and choice, action and existential considerations. The sessions I was able to attend centered on embracing different styles, often being able to feel how the presenter leads based on their presentation style. I learn just as much from their actions as I do their words. Our conference reminds me of the bigger picture of leadership in mathematics education while firmly rooting it in individual interactions.

One of the critical aspects of effective leadership discussed at the conference was the role of

relationships in education. I was reminded time and again to embrace who I am as a person and leader, authentically being myself so I could embrace others as who they are and love them in these moments, rather than for their potential. Inherent in this is the idea of inclusive leadership. In diverse educational settings, it is vital that leaders intentionally create spaces where all voices are heard and valued. Mathematics leadership requires a concerted effort to engage with diverse perspectives, understanding that there is a diversity of diversities, whether it's involving teachers in decision-making processes or ensuring that students from different backgrounds have equitable opportunities in mathematics education. Inclusive leadership fosters a sense of belonging and enhances collaboration, which is critical for building strong educational communities.

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Sean Nank, NCSM US WESTERN 2 (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

Beyond the keynotes, panels, and breakout sessions, some of the most meaningful moments at conferences happen in the in-between spaces. These informal moments—whether it’s a conversation over coffee (I don’t drink coffee, but I’ll accompany you for a cup anytime!), a shared lunch, or the chance to chat with colleagues between sessions—are where deep insights and genuine connections are often formed.

At this particular conference, it became clear how important the informal exchange of ideas can be. Mathematics leaders from different parts of the country came together, and these brief conversations sparked new ideas, collaborations, and partnerships. Some participants shared innovative approaches to problem-solving, while others offered advice on navigating the complexities of leadership.

These in-between moments also provide opportunities for reflection. Stepping away from the daily grind allows leaders to take stock of their practices, evaluate their goals, and consider how they can improve as educators, leaders, and people. The conference emphasized that leadership is an

ongoing learning process, and that moments of pause can be as instructive as formal training.

Leadership in mathematics education requires a delicate balance of fostering relationships, adopting effective leadership styles, and finding moments of reflection in the busy life of a leader. The conference underscored the value of both structured learning and informal connection, reminding participants that leadership is as much about building strong teams and communities as it is about setting and achieving goals.

Whether it’s learning from a keynote speaker, a colleague, or an impromptu hallway discussion, NCSM’s annual conference offers a valuable platform for professional growth. As leaders return to their “day jobs,” they are equipped with new strategies, strengthened relationships, and the inspiration to lead with purpose and passion. The lessons learned at these conferences serve not only to enhance leadership skills but also to build a more collaborative, supportive, and effective educational system. I truly miss you all already and cannot wait to see you in Atlanta... 📍

Michael Greenlee, NCSM US SOUTHERN 2 REGIONAL DIRECTOR

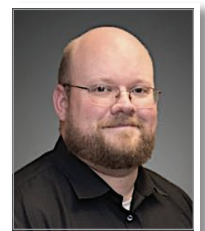
## RETHINKING TEST PREP: FOSTERING LIFELONG PROBLEM SOLVERS

*As mathematics educators and leaders, we’ve all faced the annual ritual of preparing students for state standardized tests.*

However, I invite you to consider a different approach—one that aligns more closely with our broader mission of preparing students not just for a test, but for life.

The traditional notion of test prep suggests a narrow focus: drilling students on specific types of questions, reviewing formulas, and

memorizing processes. But this approach, while it might offer short-term gains, misses the mark when it comes to cultivating the kind of thinkers our society needs. I believe that if we teach students properly, formal test prep becomes



MICHAEL GREENLEE

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**Michael Greenlee**, NCSM US SOUTHERN 2 (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

unnecessary. Instead, our role should be to prepare them for whatever life throws their way.


Think about it this way: when we prepare students for a standardized test, we are essentially preparing them for a single moment in time—a snapshot of their ability to answer a specific set of problems. But life isn't a series of neatly packaged, multiple-choice questions. It's unpredictable, dynamic, and complex. Our goal should be to equip students with the skills to navigate this uncertainty, to think critically, and to solve problems creatively, regardless of the context.

What does this mean for how we approach test prep? It means shifting our focus from short-term test performance to long-term success as thinkers and problem solvers. Rather than inundating students with practice tests, let's engage them with challenging, open-ended tasks that promote reasoning and collaboration.

For instance, instead of a typical practice session filled with repetitive problems, why not present students with one complex, engaging

problem? Strip away the elements that make it feel like a test—remove the multiple-choice options, the provided formulas, the rigid structure. Encourage students to tackle the problem in groups, allowing them to reason through it, debate different approaches, and explore various strategies. This approach not only exposes students to the kinds of questions they might encounter on a test but also helps them build the confidence and skills to face any problem, in any context.

When we shift our thinking about test prep in this way, we're doing more than just preparing students for an exam. We're preparing them to be successful in life, ready to contribute meaningfully to an ever-changing and competitive society. And ultimately, isn't that the true purpose of education?

As leaders in mathematics education, it's our responsibility to advocate for and model this kind of teaching. Let's lead the charge in redefining test prep—not as a means to an end, but as a pathway to lifelong learning and problem-solving. 

**Nicole Stommel**, NCSM US CENTRAL 1 REGIONAL DIRECTOR

## **BALANCING TEST PREP AND CRITICAL THINKING: SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS IN A STANDARDIZED WORLD**

*As I sat down to write this article about test preparation, I found myself reflecting on my role as a high school mathematics department head in an Illinois school district.*

Over the years, Illinois has cycled between using the ACT and SAT as standardized measures of a high school student's performance. This year, the state has returned to the ACT, a shift that has reignited debates over the value and impact of standardized testing. While I firmly believe that a student's

test score is only one small part of their academic journey, it is impossible to deny the weight it carries. Test scores can influence college admissions, scholarship opportunities, and even public perceptions of a school's quality. The challenge I face is balancing my



NICOLE STOMMEL

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commitment to teaching critical thinking skills with the growing pressure to prepare students for these high-stakes exams. While my instinct as an educator tells me that test preparation should not be necessary if we are teaching critical thinking effectively, the reality of the situation raises difficult questions about how best to support our students.

Standardized tests, such as the ACT, serve a multifaceted role in the academic world. They are widely used as a benchmark for college readiness, offering a snapshot of a student's ability in key areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Colleges and universities might rely on these scores when making admissions decisions, and high scores can also open doors to merit-based scholarships, which can significantly reduce the financial burden of higher education. Additionally, standardized test results are often included in the public report cards for schools, which can influence the reputation of a school district. As a result, test scores have become an important measure of both student achievement and institutional performance. While I understand the limitations of using test scores as the sole measure of a student's capabilities, they remain a significant factor in determining future opportunities.

As a mathematics leader, I struggle with the idea of formal test preparation. I have always believed that high school mathematics instruction should focus on developing critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a deep understanding of mathematical concepts, rather than teaching students how to fill in bubbles on a standardized test. Critical thinking is an essential skill that students will need throughout their lives, and it seems to be at odds with the concept of drill-and-

practice test prep. The concern is that focusing too much on test-specific strategies could undermine the broader educational goals of fostering analytical skills and intellectual curiosity. I want to ensure that my students are not simply trained to do well on a test but are equipped with the tools to think critically and adapt to a variety of real-world challenges.

However, I also recognize the reality that many students benefit from structured test prep, especially when it comes to familiarizing themselves with the format and types of questions they will encounter. The challenge, then, lies in finding a balance between providing effective test preparation and maintaining a focus on critical thinking. By integrating meaningful test prep into our curriculum in a thoughtful manner, we can support students in achieving their best potential without sacrificing the development of essential skills. So, what might this look like?

To effectively incorporate test preparation into our mathematics curriculum, we must adopt a strategic approach that complements our existing instructional methods. One possible, yet less obvious avenue is to focus on fostering self-efficacy in students. Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed, plays a crucial role in students' academic performance. When students feel confident in their mathematical abilities, they are more likely to approach challenging problems with a positive attitude and persistence. This belief is especially important in standardized testing, where time, pressure, and unfamiliar question formats can cause anxiety and self-doubt. To build self-efficacy, it is essential that we create an environment where students are


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Nicole Stommel, NCSM US CENTRAL 1 (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them. By providing opportunities for students to solve a variety of problems, not just those that appear on standardized tests, we help them develop a sense of competence and resilience. This, in turn, increases their belief that they are capable of succeeding on any exam, including the ACT or SAT. Building this sense of mathematical confidence is an essential part of both long-term success and effective test preparation.

Additionally, we can employ problem-solving techniques that mirror the structure of standardized test questions, enabling students to practice their analytical skills in a context that prepares them for assessment. Incorporating collaborative learning opportunities, where students work together to solve problems and discuss strategies, can also enhance their critical thinking abilities while reinforcing test-taking skills. By embedding this type of test prep into our daily lessons, we can create a learning environment that prioritizes both academic achievement and intellectual growth.

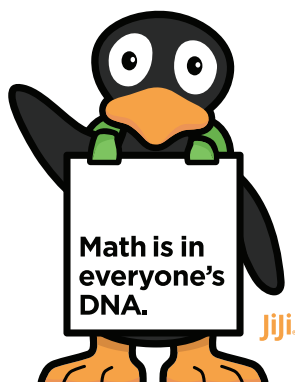
In conclusion, the question of whether to include test preparation in the school day is a complex one. While I remain committed to teaching critical thinking and preparing

students for lifelong success, I cannot ignore the practical realities of standardized testing. Test prep, when done thoughtfully and in moderation, can serve as a useful tool in helping students succeed on these exams without compromising the quality of their education. As educators, our goal is to help students thrive both in the classroom and beyond, and this sometimes means finding a balance between teaching for the test and teaching for life. By carefully integrating test preparation into our curriculum, we can ensure that students are not only ready for college but are also equipped with the critical thinking skills they will need to navigate an ever-changing world. 

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## LEARNINGS FROM LEADERS

NCSM Regional Directors from Eastern 1, Central 2, and Western 2 have found leaders in their regions to discuss what motivates them, their mathematical leadership journey, their most memorable moments or mentors, and impactful professional development.

### US WESTERN 2 REGION

Meet *Katie Holtz* (NBCT), Secondary Math TOSA, Newport Mesa Unified School District. —Sean Nank, W2 Regional Director



KATIE HOLTZ

### LENS ON ASSESSMENT:

#### HOW MY VIEW HAS CHANGED SINCE BECOMING A MATHEMATICS COACH

I have been a secondary mathematics teacher on special assignment for only a few months and although I feel quite confident about my teaching abilities and content knowledge, I am learning there is a whole other world of mathematics teaching out there. This is a world of previous mathematics teachers and mathematicians who now spend their days studying data and trends in education and make it their mission to better mathematics education for their schools, districts, and states. The transition from the classroom to a mathematics education leader has been exciting but has also made me realize that I have a lot to learn about my new role. I am energized when I go to county meetings or conferences with other teacher leaders and feel that I have so much to learn about the other side of teaching, especially when it comes to assessment.

As a classroom teacher, assessment to me was not just a tool for grading but also provided insight into student understanding, identified student areas of improvement, and helped me guide instruction and improve my teaching based on the results. I used ongoing formative assessment with check ins, whiteboards, partner and small group work, observations, questioning, and exit tickets.

I used these to address gaps in understanding early in the lesson or unit and to reassess my lessons or pacing to help my students. The formative assessments would increase student engagement by holding them accountable in the lessons and provide data on how my students were responding to my lesson.

I used summative assessments to measure overall student achievement and provide final grades for units. These would be the standard tests, quizzes, and projects. They would be comprehensive and assess a wide range of skills and knowledge, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and application of mathematical concepts. I would align them with our learning objectives and state standards. The most difficult part of summative assessments was working with a mathematics team that might think or teach differently to come up with a standardized test among a site department or even harder, a final with the entire district. These tests are often high stakes, determining final grades, future mathematics course placement, and graduation credits. In my district we span the socio-economic and language spectrum so creating a summative final assessment seven sites would agree to was challenging and my

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first dip into the world of a mathematical education leader and how assessments and their data are portrayed differently.

As a classroom teacher I have also been a part of helping to create and write district mathematics benchmark exams to track student achievement and growth from grades 6 to 11. As a teacher I saw the value in having standardized assessments across our district in the fall and spring to gauge student progress more than just the CAASPP assessment (California's statewide student assessment program) in the spring, but I didn't fully understand why the data were necessary. I would look at my student data and decide what my students understood and what I needed to re-teach or pre-teach during the year and could monitor the growth in the spring. I was focused only on my courses and my students. The only time I attended to other student data was to place students in enhanced or accelerated courses in my roles as a department chair and enhanced course teacher.

As a mathematics education leader, I am seeing assessment through a different lens. Now I find that my job is to try to create a data culture in my district so that data information is consistent and comparable across classrooms, sites, and hopefully the district. That data needs to be quick and easy for educators to access and understand so we can consider what steps are required in the immediate and long-term future to support our students. My new focus is on our assessments themselves and creating data studies and fostering department discussions on how we can use the data to track student

progress, reflect on what lessons or strategies are successful, and to fill gaps in the curriculum as needed. As I dive into our district data, I need to be conscious as to how easy or difficult it is to mine the data and how the data should be presented to my teachers so that we have strong professional learning discussions around the data to inform instruction across all our sites holistically.

Part of my new role is also looking at our current district wide assessments and data and determining if the current assessments are effective or if we should be using some other type of assessment. If we want to continue using our current assessments, my job becomes coaching our teachers on how to find, analyze and understand the data and to guide them in utilizing the data to reflect on their teaching and inform next steps in their instruction. If we decide our current assessments are not meeting our and our students' needs then my job becomes conducting surveys and panels and discussion groups around what are appropriate assessments and doing research on other assessment options.

The transition from classroom teacher to mathematics education leader entails adapting a more global view of assessments. As I do this, I want to embrace an overarching view while holding on to what assessments mean to me as a classroom teacher. This will allow me to have the conversations as a leader while always respecting every teacher's expertise and views on assessments. 

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Submitted by Sean Nank, Western 2 Regional Director

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## CENTRAL 2 REGION

**Kellie Joy-Clark** has dedicated the past 30 years to students in Nebraska, with almost all of these years in Title I buildings in Lincoln Public Schools. She began her career as a Special Education teacher, and then moved to teaching third grade. Kellie was known as a stellar classroom teacher; therefore, she was involved in numerous leadership opportunities at the district level as a teacher leader. After 15 years in the classroom and gaining a Mathematics Specialist Certificate, Kellie became a mathematics coach in the building where she taught. Through this role she assisted teachers in refining their instructional practices and helped students realize they were capable of doing mathematics. Seeking to have an even larger impact on student learning, Kellie transitioned into becoming the Instructional Coordinator at Lakeview Elementary. Three years later she became principal of that same building. Now, Kellie serves as the principal of the largest elementary building in Lincoln, Kooser Elementary, which has almost 900 students in grades PK–5. Kellie’s passion for teaching and learning is evident in all she does. She is recognized as a strong, courageous instructional leader who has high expectations for both teachers and students while fostering meaningful learning opportunities for all students. —Susie Katt, C2 Regional Director



KELLY JOY-CLARK

***What motivates you to be a leader in mathematics education?***

My motivation to be a leader in mathematics education is grounded in student learning and the impact we make as educators. As a reluctant mathematics learner early on, I understand the gaps that surface when teaching is centered solely on procedural knowledge and tricks. I wanted to provide my students, and now teachers, a model where conceptual understanding is at the forefront. The impact of background knowledge, strong professional learning, and a desire to learn can truly make a difference in the lives of students when a leader is focused on shrinking the mathematics knowledge gap for students as they progress to higher grades.

***What do you feel is your greatest contribution to mathematics education?***

My greatest contribution is my classroom experience and professional learning training. Due to the opportunities I had in my 30 years

as an educator, I am able to have conversations about mathematics content and pedagogy while visiting classrooms, conducting observations, co-teaching lessons, or supporting teachers as they plan lessons. It is the ability to dive right in and talk about instructional strategies and support teachers, while also being in classrooms side by side with students posing questions and encouraging them to reason and explain their thinking beyond just looking for an answer.

***What is one area in which you feel you have really grown and developed in the past several years?***

Being a leader is not for the weak of heart due to the many demands placed upon you at any given moment. It can really be a lonely role and one I take very personally, too personally sometimes. With that, I have learned that not everything is about me and that good quality feedback can really make a

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difference if you are willing to step back and use it to drive the work you do by going back to your mission, goals and purpose. Learning is about listening, observing, reflecting, and going forth with new and better informed ways of thinking.

***What is the most valuable professional development you have ever received?***

Primarily Math through the Nebraska Math program at University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Talk about a life changer! When you surround yourself with people who are continuing to learn, grow, and bond over overwhelming emotions of ineptitude, you find yourself wanting to lead others in achieving their goals. My decision to move toward principalship was grounded in wanting to be part of a larger community and impacting others on a greater scale while in this program. It was an 18-hour graduate program for K–3 teachers that led to a Mathematics Specialist degree. The focus was to build the pedagogical knowledge of teachers while they learned about children’s mathematical development. It enabled me to build my repertoire of skills in teaching and learning in mathematics, expand my own background knowledge, and understand the balance between the “how” and “why” of mathematics to implement lessons for students.

***Who, if anyone, has served as your greatest mentor? Describe how this person has provided support and guidance.***

My greatest professional mentor is Mona

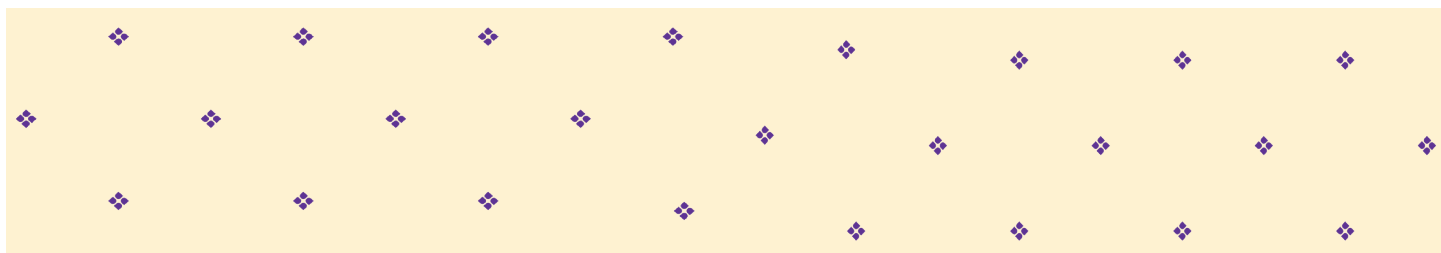
Manley, a former principal, due to her ability to see me for who I am. She recognized that my love of learning and passion for kids could make a greater impact by providing me opportunities, resources, and structuring the environment for me to succeed as a leader. The many articles she provided, the conversations about student learning, the professional learning, the modeling, and the schoolwide systems she created made a lasting impression on me. So much that I transitioned to an instructional mathematics coach under her leadership and now to a building principal.

***What words of wisdom would you offer to someone “new” in the field who is interested in developing their leadership potential?***

If you are interested in being a leader, know who you are as a person first. You can’t lead and guide if you don’t know your own values, beliefs, and mission. Be your authentic self and trust will come if you put in the work. While leadership can be a lonely job, you are not alone. Find your people and surround yourself with colleagues who give you connectedness, love of learning, and desire to serve as you once had in your teaching teams. Our impact is on a larger scale, and some days are overwhelming, but never let a bad day or situation take away your why. 🏠

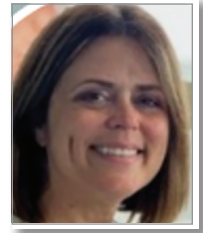
Interview by Susie Katt, W2 Regional Director

(LEARNINGS FROM LEADERS CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE)



## EASTERN 1 REGION

**Tammi Chandler** is the PK–12 Curriculum Director in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. She brings her experience as a sixth-grade teacher in a self-contained classroom, a seventh-grade mathematics teacher, and a district coach to this role. In 2014, Tammi was recognized as an Outstanding K–12 Educator by Fitchburg State University. Currently, Tammi also serves as an adjunct professor of mathematics methods for graduate students at LaSalle University and Fitchburg State University. Tammi offers inspiration for all of us through her passion and compassion.



TAMMI CHANDLER

—Amy Lucenta, NCSM Regional Director, Eastern 1

*What motivates you to be a leader in mathematics education?*

After starting a career in adult training and education, I found deep motivation to support learners in general. Despite enjoying learning mathematics, I bring my own experience of not having the opportunities in the mathematics classroom to develop confidence like I did in other content. Other classrooms provided structures that engaged me differently. My current goal is to ensure that today's classrooms provide structures so that students have additional opportunities and improved experiences. I'm driven to empower teachers to learn more about mathematics and instructional strategies in order to develop confidence and a commitment to implement these practices to engage all their students.

As a leader, it is not only important for me to be a lifelong learner of mathematics, but also to collaborate with teachers in multiple ways in service of student learning. Fostering collaboration means that I provide teachers opportunities to share best practices, observe each other in classrooms, and engage in conversations that are reflective about their teaching students' learning.

*What is one area in which you feel you have really grown/developed in the past several years?*

I am always thinking about how to push my learning forward. I've been fortunate in my role as curriculum director to partner with external leaders that helped me to understand how best to refine coaching practices and support the coaches in my district as they support teachers. Understanding the mathematical practices and effective teaching practices deeply has helped me understand what student thinking will look like and sound like. This, in turn, helps me understand how to support teachers and coaches to elicit and develop that thinking. As a PK–12 coordinator, the trajectory of thinking has been the focus of improving instructional practices, and we have begun to see the impact of teaching for thinking in various ways.

*What model of professional development have you provided for teachers?*

My model for professional development is to have all stakeholders involved in the process. Without that, we risk misunderstanding our roles in the work and losing potential impact. I began by identifying stakeholders, ranging

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)



from the ESL Director, Assistant Superintendent, Social Studies Director, Student Support Administrators, families, and more. I then invited them into professional development experiences, in a relevant capacity, to work toward our shared goal in the city. We each play a part toward achieving the goal, but the common vision guides us. So, when we are trying to improve student engagement, we have come to realize that the strategies work whether the pedagogies we name and practice are happening within mathematics classrooms or other contexts. The relevant readings, classroom observations, professional development, coaching cycles, and learning labs are valuable for everyone. The end result is that the district as a whole begins to own the goals rather than feel like they need to be complicit, and all stakeholders own the impact of the professional learning and develop sustainability.

*What words of wisdom would you offer to someone “new” in the field, one who is interested in developing his/her leadership potential?*

Any words of wisdom I can offer come directly from what gives me satisfaction in my work.

## TRANSFORMING MATHEMATICS EDUCATION: BRIDGING HIGH SCHOOL AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS


By Joan Zoellner

*Joan Zoellner* leads the Charles A. Dana Center’s Launch Years Initiative, which seeks to usher in a new paradigm to support students with math pathways that are aligned to their goals.

The postsecondary mathematics education landscape has seen several widespread changes over the past decades: the

I feel most satisfied when teachers feel empowered to share best practices, and when I am working from the sidelines toward that goal. I might guide them in coaches meetings or professional development, but they are the ones doing the work, and I feel most inspired when I see them impacting student experiences.

Here are some tips:

- Lead with a vision that focuses on students;
- Never lose your teacher hat, remember the demands of the classroom;
- Spend time in classrooms to stay connected to teachers’ strengths and challenges;
- Hear from students to inform your work;
- Build trust with colleagues so that they can collaborate in the vulnerable spaces together;
- Listen authentically to teachers so that you can incorporate their voice; and
- Focus on the positive even when it’s hard—identifying the little wins keeps us going. 

Interview by Amy Lucenta, NCSM Regional Director, Eastern 1



JOAN ZOELLNER

transition from stand-alone remediation to concurrent corequisite remediation for

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

LEARNINGS FROM LEADERS (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

students deemed underprepared for college-level mathematics, movement away from “college algebra for all” to gateway mathematics courses aligned with students’ programs of study, and a move to placement policies that take numerous metrics into account when placing students rather than relying solely on high-stakes placement tests.

Each of the research-based trends—corequisites, mathematics pathways, and multiple measures placement—have led to measurable positive impacts on student success and retention. However, several factors have prevented them from being as impactful as they could be—lack of family, parent, and student awareness, outdated policies, and misaligned high school graduation requirements with postsecondary admissions criteria.

The Launch Years Initiative (LYI) is a national initiative led by the Dana Center to support the scaling of mathematics pathways from high school through postsecondary education and into the workplace, aligned to students’ goals and aspirations. Currently, 22 states are part of LYI, tackling the above challenges (and more) in ways that address their unique state context and remove barriers to a smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary mathematics. States are working in a variety of focus areas, including designing and implementing postsecondary and high school mathematics pathways, postsecondary corequisite supports and multiple measures placement, modern high-school mathematics courses and content, equitable impact, strategic communications, and advising practices. Louisiana is developing course descriptions for fourth year high-school mathematics

courses which previously only had common titles, Rhode Island has identified topics in Algebra 2 that are more appropriate for Pre-Calculus, Nevada is considering developing a postsecondary statistics pathway, and several states (Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, New Mexico, New York, Utah) are developing secondary and/or postsecondary data science courses.

In addition to the work happening in each state, leaders from major national mathematics organizations (including NCSM) have joined to form the [Launch Years Math Organizations Leadership Network](#) (LY-MathLN). Leaders from the Alliance of Indigenous Math Circles, American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges, American Statistical Association, Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics, Benjamin Banneker Association, Conference Board of Mathematical Sciences, Mathematical Association of America, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, NCSM: Leadership in Mathematics Education, and TODOS: Mathematics for ALL, meet quarterly to strengthen and advocate for work that improves the experiences and outcomes for students transitioning from high school into postsecondary education.


The network published the LY-MathLN [Call to Action](#), a unified message from their organizations to share their vision and support for the continued work needed to improve the mathematics experiences and outcomes for students transitioning from high school into postsecondary education. The Call to Action includes six recommendations with guidance for

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

## LEARNINGS FROM LEADERS (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

analysis of relevant aggregated and disaggregated data, a vision for the desired outcomes, and specific actions for distinct stakeholder groups.

While the initiatives discussed here largely pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, their successful implementation is crucial to supporting our students whose

mathematical education was impacted in significant and widely varying ways. To learn more about this work nationally or in your own state, please visit the [Launch Years website](#) or contact the Dana Center at [launchyears@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:launchyears@austin.utexas.edu). 

## AFTER THE CONFERENCE

By Brian Buckhalter | NCSM President Elect

I found myself leaving this year's annual conference in Chicago feeling renewed, refreshed, and reunited with what I love—supporting networks advancing mathematics education and ensuring all students can learn-and eventually live at high levels. One of my favorite parts of the conference is making new connections with mathematics leaders from around the world. Upon returning home from moments like this, I often have the best intentions to keep in touch with new friends and colleagues, but those intentions easily become pushed back with the realities and demands of home life. Ever the growing mathematician focusing on problem solving, this year, I intentionally tried a few new techniques to help me stay in touch and follow up on new connections made.

- Take a selfie. When I make new connections, I often record a few key words with the contact name to help me remember where we met. To help me remember the moment of meeting,




I decided to take a selfie with anyone whose contact would be new in my phone and assign it as their contact photo. As a visual learner, seeing the picture helps me remember who's who.

- Email right away. As I swap email addresses with new friends, it is helpful for me to email them right away so the email address is already in my email system.
- Draft now, send later. As I engaged in conversations, I found myself making promises to reconnect at a specific time and continue the discussions started. One way to help me fulfill this promise has been to draft the follow-up email and set it to deliver at the specified follow-up time.



BRIAN BUCKHALTER



Here's to continuing to make new connections, and growing the ones already established! 

## NCSM IS EXCITED TO INTRODUCE THE NEW NCSM PODCAST HOSTS, KAREN RILEY JEFFERS AND ABEL MAESTAS!

Their engaging series, *"Everyone Belongs in Mathematics,"* aims to create an inclusive dialogue around the importance of diversity in mathematics education. With their combined expertise and passion for fostering a sense of belonging, Karen and Abel will share insightful discussions and interviews each month.

THE PODCAST IS RELEASED ON THE 11TH OF EACH MONTH.

LISTEN IN WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS!

PODCAST: LEARNING WITH LEADERS

# Everyone Belongs in Mathematics

with hosts:



**Karen Riley Jeffers & Abel Maestas**



**nscsm**  
Leadership in Mathematics Education



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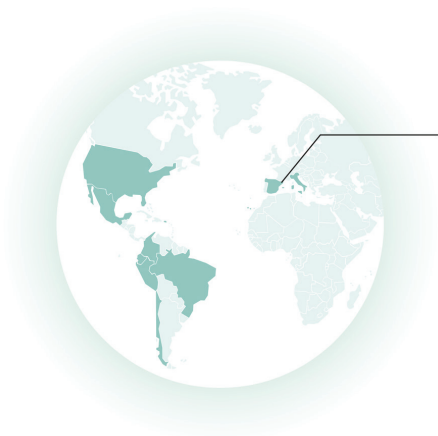
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## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING UPDATE

**VIRTUAL COACHING LABS** are 90-minute virtual sessions in which leaders and coaches learn about mathematics coaching, hear from featured speakers, and have the opportunity to practice coaching skills.

Each session will be held from 5–6:30PM EST/2–3:30PM PST and will highlight a specific aspect of coaching.

Space is limited! Registration information will be sent out via email blast. [Visit our website](#) for the most updated information. If you are a teacher leader, coach, administrator, or supervisor, you won't want to miss out on these professional learning coaching labs!

## WE HAVE AN AMAZING LINE-UP OF FEATURED SPEAKERS FOR THIS YEAR:



MONA TONCHEFF

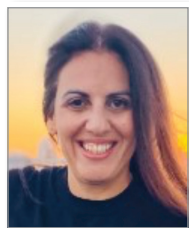
January 7, 2025:

***Mona Toncheff***

### **NAVIGATING DIFFICULT COACHING CONVERSATIONS**



BARBARA DOUGHERTY



NICORA PLACA

January 28, 2025:

***Barbara Dougherty and Nicora Placa***

### **COACHING WITH A LENS ON TIER 1 AND 2 INTERVENTIONS**



DIONNE AMINITA



DEBORAH PEART

February 28, 2025:

***Dionne Aminita & Deborah Peart***

### **CULTIVATING COLLECTIVE AGENCY THROUGH RESPONSIVE COACHING**



ABEL MAESTAS

January 7, 2025:

***Abel Maestas***

### **LEVERAGING STUDENT THINKING**

## ROSS TAYLOR/GLENN GILBERT NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

### THE NCSM 2024 ROSS TAYLOR/GLENN GILBERT LEADERSHIP RECIPIENT IS NONE OTHER THAN DR. DAN MEYER.

He is a former teacher who has been a longstanding advocate for better mathematics instruction, especially for those students who generally do not like mathematics. Dan has delivered addresses on mathematics education in all 50 US states and around the world.

He has appeared frequently in the popular press, including CNN, Good Morning America, and Everyday with Rachel Ray, never in a self-promoting way, but to demonstrate the power of mathematics and the importance of mathematics education. He was the Chief Academic Officer at Desmos where he led the development of the new interactions between teachers, students, and computers which would eventually result in the core curriculum and digital authoring platform Amplify Desmos Math. He earned his doctorate from Stanford University in mathematics education and lives in Oakland, California. Currently, he is the Vice President of User Growth at Amplify where he focuses on teacher efficacy and student learning across Amplify's suite of curriculum and technology products.

Dan has made major contributions to mathematics education in the important areas of technology, professional learning, and advocacy. His achievements in many cases link the three, by using technology in new, creative, and ethical ways for the benefit of students, teachers, and the field. Historically speaking, technological innovation in mathematics education has functioned as a means for isolating students, promising personalization while calcifying inequity. Dan pioneered a different way of thinking about technology, one that emphasizes whole-class instruction, student collaboration, mathematics identity, and an approach to



DAN MEYER

pedagogy that helps teachers graduate beyond “just-telling-how.”

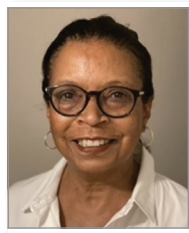
Dan exemplifies bold leadership in the field of mathematics education. For many years now, his presentations at NCSM, NCTM, AMTE, and other gatherings of professional

organizations have been standing-room-only affairs, which is a testimony to Dan's long record of generating important, incisive and inspiring ideas, always delivered with passionate moral force. To further facilitate the interchange of ideas, he co-founded ShadowCon, an experimental addition to the NCTM conference experience designed to expand the reach of a conference session and extend its impact over time. His popular TED talk, “Math Class Needs a Makeover,” has three million views, which supported mathematics supervisors, coaches, and educators in a time of national transition to the Common Core. Currently, Dan has a weekly newsletter that has over 30,000 subscribers and is used by coaches, teachers and teacher leaders in PLCs across the nation as a catalyst for discussions about our profession and the needs of learners in an ever-changing world.

In these capacities and activities, Dan has become a powerful voice for students, teachers, and researchers in taking on the hard issues of change, equity, quality, and common sense. Rather than pontificate from the stage, Dan can always be found modeling and challenging us to do better for all students. Dan exemplifies the prestige of this national recognition in mathematics education through his notable contributions and means of furthering the aims and purposes of NCSM, therefore we congratulate him as this year's recipient of the 2024 NCSM Ross Taylor/Glenn Gilbert Leadership Award. 🏆

## KAY GILLILAND EQUITY LECTURE AWARD: LYNNE GODFREY

**LYNNE GODFREY** began her career in education in 1978 as a first-grade teacher at The Advent School in Boston after completing her apprenticeship in fifth and sixth grade classrooms at the Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For over 10 years (1979–1991), Lynne taught fifth and sixth grade at the King Open School and worked alongside Bob Moses to design and implement The Algebra Project Transition Curriculum. As a certified Algebra Project Professional Developer and Facilitator, Lynne worked with school districts locally and across the U.S. to engage teachers, students and families in creating more equitable mathematics communities focused on putting a floor under all students and teachers, especially those who have been underserved in mathematics classrooms. Throughout her time as an educator, Lynne has served Cambridge and Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teacher Residency, a graduate teacher preparation program, in various capacities. (District Math Coach, Upper School Coordinator, Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Adult Learning, and Clinical



LYNNE GODFREY

Teacher Educator). As BTR's Induction Director and Co-Director, Lynne helped build a professional learning community of content-focused coaches.

Under her leadership, this group came together bi-weekly to reflect on coaching practices, addressing challenges, and sharing learning. The community of CTEs worked together to sustain pre-service and novice teachers' commitment to ambitious instruction and rigorous learning for their students.

Since retiring in 2019, Lynne has coached teachers in the facilitation of equitable discourse in K–12 mathematics classrooms, and consulted with school districts in Massachusetts, Florida, New Jersey, and Missouri to implement Algebra Project pedagogy. Most recently, she consulted with the Investigations in Number, Data and Space team at TERC to create teacher reflection tools and resources aligned with an equity framework. During the pandemic Lynne homeschooled her four-year-old grandson for a year and a half. To date, the most exhilarating, exhausting assignment she's ever had. 🏠

## IRIS CARL TRAVEL GRANT



RACHEL BENOFF  
New York, NY



AVINASH GHOSH  
Chatham, Ontario (Canada)



ERIN McCLURE  
North Collins, NY



MAGGIE MCHUGH  
Sparta, WI



VI TAMARGO  
Murrieta, CA

## NCSM FELLOWS PROGRAM

Judy Carlisle-Dunmire | NCSM Professional Learning Director

Incredible mathematics education leaders across the country are seeking opportunities to grow and connect with other leaders, but not all of them have equal access to the support they need and many are not recognized for their experience and potential in their local communities.



JUDY CARLISLE-DUNMIRE

The NCSM Fellows Program began as a dream and over the past five years (spanning across three NCSM Presidential terms) has become a reality. Under the leadership of Mona Toncheff (NCSM President, 2019–2021), the NCSM Professional Learning team proposed the NCSM Fellows Program reach out to mathematics leaders across the country (and beyond!) and provide a structure to support them through connections to other leaders and leadership development. Unfortunately, the Pandemic interrupted the work—but only temporarily. When Mona passed the presidential gavel to Paul Gray, the work continued with enthusiasm. Brian Buckhalter, Professional Learning Director (2023–2024), coordinated the work and the pilot cohort application process began! Finally, Cohort 1 launched during Katey Arrington’s term and she has secured funding to equip the program to grow for years to come.



MONA TONCHEFF  
NCSM PRESIDENT 2019–2021



PAUL GRAY  
NCSM PRESIDENT 2021–2023



KATEY ARRINGTON  
NCSM PRESIDENT 2023–2025



BRIAN BUCKHALTER  
NCSM PRESIDENT ELECT 2024–2025  
(NCSM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
DIRECTOR 2023–24)

The NCSM Fellows Program was developed to support the NCSM mission to “equip and empower a diverse education community to engage in leadership that supports, sustains, and inspires high-quality mathematics teaching and learning every day for each and every learner.” NCSM offers a variety of empowering and inspiring professional learning opportunities for leaders. The NCSM Fellows Program is unique in that it is an ongoing professional learning opportunity with a structured network that brings emerging and experienced leaders together with shared learning and embedded one-on-one mentoring.

The NCSM Fellows Committee was led by Brian Buckhalter and Judy Carlisle-Dunmire in 2023–2024 and will move forward in 2024–2025 under the leadership of George Cage and Haley Galyean. The program begins with a pre-conference session where mentors and fellows are paired and begin setting goals together. Throughout the year, the group meets for five two-hour virtual sessions with one-on-one mentoring between each session. Then, we wrap up the year at the next year’s pre-conference session where the “graduating” cohort shares their experiences with the next cohort of Fellows and Mentors.

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Our pilot cohort shared their excitement and expectations in an NCSM Podcast, episode 94 (February, 2024) "Sharing the NCSM Fellows Program."

## HEAR FROM OUR PILOT COHORT

Two of our mentors, Mona Toncheff and Rebecca Angus (NCSM Fellows Committee Member 2020–2023), were significant in establishing and launching the NCSM Fellows Program and have shared how incredibly proud they are of their fellows, but also the program itself and how it has developed and come to life.

*In our last virtual session with our pilot cohort, our fellows and mentors share a few words:*



JOHN FISCHER

**John Fischer (Fellow)**, K–12 Mathematics Coordinator at Greeley-Evans School District 6, Greeley, Colorado, considered his growth and learning, noting that while some aspects of maturation are subtle, he

appreciates the tangible progress he has made. He feels influenced by John Staley's (his Mentor) guidance in his daily life and celebrates the positive developments in his system that he has been able to discuss and work through with John Staley and the other fellows and mentors.



NANCY SMITH

**Nancy Smith (Fellow)**, Secondary Math Curriculum Specialist/Coach at Compton Unified School District, Compton, California reflected on her plans for the upcoming year, leaving herself reminders to stay on track. She celebrates the 8% growth

her team achieved in state testing, marking her first full year with them. She looks forward to collaborating with her team and making a positive impact on their students.



JOHNNY STITTS

**Johnny Stitts (Fellow)**, Secondary STEM Specialist at Jonesboro Public Schools, Jonesboro, Arkansas, shared his appreciation of NCSM and Dr. Angus, his mentor. During their initial conversation, she asked, "What is it that you want to accomplish in the fellows program?" He realized he had much to learn from her experience and appreciated being able to discuss his challenges and share resources, acknowledging his growth through these conversations. He celebrates how much he has changed as a leader since he first entered that room, and he values her constant availability.

**Mona Toncheff (Mentor)** is an author, consultant, and NCSM Past President, from Phoenix, Arizona. She enjoyed listening to the fellows share their successes, feeling fulfilled by the mentor group's achievements. She reflected on how this group has realized the hopes they once had when it was just a dream. Despite the challenges her fellow was facing, her fellow established a clear vision for her goals and has data to support the positive impact she and her team have made.



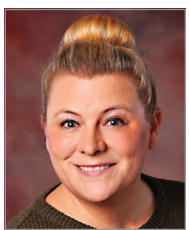
JOHN STALEY

**John Staley (Mentor)**, Coordinator Special Projects at Baltimore County Public Schools, Baltimore, Maryland, shared that, sometimes, being a teacher leader means

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listening and assuring other leaders they aren't crazy and they aren't alone. Leadership can often feel lonely, but the strength comes from a collective group of mentors who share and build knowledge together. He celebrates that school systems are exploring new pathways to change long-standing perceptions of who can be a "math person."



REBECCA ANGUS

**Rebecca Angus (Mentor),** Mathematics & Leadership Consultant; CORE Learning Mathematics Coach; NWTC Mathematics Instructor, Oconto Falls, Wisconsin, shared that

finding satisfaction in our careers requires intentional actions to fill our own "buckets" so we can support others in filling their own bucket. This experience affirmed her belief in equity—everyone deserves mentorship and access to opportunities to continuously grow and thrive in their careers throughout their entire career.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

This amazing group of fellows and mentors shared from their experience for the incoming cohort in a panel discussion. Emotions were felt across the room as we observed the close relationships between mentors and fellows, heard the stress and strains when they shared the impact they were trying to make, and in the excitement in their voice as they talked about their growth and gratitude as always-developing leaders and their hope for the coming year. Here is a glimpse into their empowering words during the panel discussion:

*What had the greatest impact from the big ideas ignited through this process?*

**Johnny Stitts:** The greatest impact has been the power of networking and learning from others. I attended NCTM for the very first time. I attended NCSM for the very first time. It opened my eyes to the vast knowledge beyond my school district. It was a game-changer for me.

**Rebecca Angus:** It's essential to prioritize our own well-being while also ensuring those we work side-by-side with, day-by-day can do the same for themselves. This dual focus enhances joy in our careers and fosters a collaborative environment where everyone can thrive.

**Nancy Smith:** The greatest impact has been the emphasis on transformational leadership and equity in mathematics education. I learned to inspire colleagues and advocate for inclusive practices, while honing my data-driven decision-making skills to improve student outcomes.

**Mona Toncheff:** The greatest impact has been the importance of clarity in supporting teachers and influencing administrative decisions that affect student learning. I've enjoyed collaborating with new leaders as a thought partner, while also revisiting foundational steps as a veteran leader to positively impact those I serve and foster a culture of continuous learning.

**John Staley:** The greatest impact from this process has been recognizing that leadership doesn't have to be a solitary journey. Many leaders, both formal and

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informal, are eager to listen, learn, and support each other. This sense of community fosters collaboration and growth, reminding us that we can share the challenges and triumphs of leadership together.

*In what ways has your educational lens changed?*

**John Fischer:** My leadership lens has evolved to focus on empowering others. My first year in leadership, I didn't really know what I didn't know. My second year, I started to feel like I knew what I wanted to do. My third year, I felt like there was so much to do that I didn't know where to start. That's where I was when I entered the program. That's where conversations with my mentor and others helped me figure out what was the biggest priority. I also shifted from "giving others a fish" to "teaching them to fish," and even "teaching others to teach others to fish." How to build the capacity of the people in your system. This mindset emphasizes sustainable growth and fosters a culture of collaboration and independence in learning.

**Johnny Stitts:** Through this program and my work with Dr. Angus, I believe my understanding of equity and access have deepened. I began to notice I have pockets of culture where learning is required, but there are also pockets where learning is optional.



I now understand the cultural differences in schools regarding education's value. To promote a mindset where education is essential, Dr. Angus shared a book written by Lacey Robinson called "Justice Seekers" and from there I've trained teachers in the [GLEAM™](#) Philosophy, enabling them to set goals and fostering productive conversations around equity and access.

**Rebecca Angus:** This experience has reinforced my core belief in equity and that everyone deserves mentorship and access to opportunities to grow professionally, something that is currently often reserved for a select few.

*How did the two of you decide what topic to focus on together?*

**Rebecca Angus:** We started with a conversation about our goals for the program. He gave me the most thoughtful, deeply analyzed, hopeful, idyllic answer one could possibly give! I said, "Me, too!" But what really stands out is the fluidity of this program, that life happens, and we can navigate through those changes together. Our ongoing discussions naturally led us to concentrate on equity, reflecting on our own biases and engaging in difficult conversations with staff.

**Johnny Stitts:** We decided to focus on ensuring all students have access to quality education. It all comes down to me wanting all students to have access to the education they deserve. Through a lot of conversations, I recognized that I can't teach every student directly; I have to build capacity. I recognized the importance of empowering teachers to

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better support their students, which guided our topic choice. My whole coaching and interactions with teachers has changed to having an authentic dialogue and understanding their reality.

**John Fischer:** I initially brainstormed a list of my top concerns before discussing them with Dr. Staley. We explored several topics together to find what resonated with both of us. Although we eventually settled on a topic, plans changed partway through the year because funding changed my work. By then, I realized the real value lay in our conversations and relationship, regardless of the topic. It was good to have a topic, but it was nice to not be bound by the topic.



**John Staley:** Selecting a focus topic was an iterative process that allowed us to unpack various issues John was facing in his school system. Our conversations created space to explore several topics before identifying the one most relevant to his work this school year. This collaborative approach ensured we addressed the most pressing challenges effectively.

**Mona Toncheff:** We had goals and action plans in the beginning, then reality hit. We tackled several different challenges together throughout the year. When you leave the classroom and step into a leadership role, that group you collaborate with shrinks. This opportunity allows you to have other people in your circle with you that aren't judging your

work, they are willing to listen and support you in growing your leadership skills.

**Nancy Smith:** One of the things we decided to focus on was coaching. I presented her with all the things I wanted to do and Mona said, "You can't do everything—at least not this year." We decided I needed to pick my battles and decide what to tackle this year.

### *How did you grow/change as a professional leader?*

**Johnny Stitts:** Working with Dr. Angus, I have changed my entire coaching lens. I grew as a professional leader by transforming my coaching approach from directive to dialogical. I now enter every interaction with teachers believing they are content experts and I can learn from them. This shift has fostered more collaborative relationships and enriched my understanding of teaching practices.

**Rebecca Angus:** It is hard to capture this experience in words. Participating in the NCSM Fellows Program has simply been a journey of joy. The fellowship program has highlighted the importance of ensuring all professionals are supported to grow, fellows and mentors alike.

**John Staley:** This experience allowed me to continue to develop my capacity to support leaders.

**Mona Toncheff:** The NCSM Fellows Program was an idea to support new leaders and it truly exceeded my expectations!

**Nancy Smith:** The NCSM Fellows Program has significantly enhanced my leadership skills, focusing on transformational leadership and

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equity. I gained a deeper understanding of equity issues in education and developed strategies for inclusive learning environments. The program introduced innovative instructional strategies that improved student engagement, and it provided a valuable network of committed educators, empowering me to drive meaningful improvements in mathematics education. A piece of advice I took away from Mona was to position myself to learn and grow professionally and to not allow anything to create a ceiling to how I can grow.

*What is one piece of advice you would like to share with our new Fellows?*

**John Staley:** Don't rush the process. The NCSM Fellows Program gives you the space and time of one year to learn and grow with another leader in a space where you are safe and can be brave.

**John Fischer:** Stay flexible in your conversations. Don't feel confined to one specific topic. Instead, keep track of the big questions or challenges you encounter daily. As your relationship with your mentor develops, bring those issues into your discussions for richer, more meaningful conversations.

**Rebecca Angus:** This is a fluid and ever-evolving journey that changes as we learn and grow from each other. Learning together has been exceptionally fun, exciting, and a strong reminder that we do better together. The level of joy I had working with Dr. Stitts was simply amazing and I'm excited for the new cohort beginning their journey!

**Johnny Stitts:** Be vulnerable. It's okay to not know things. There is so much intelligence in the room. It feels, sometimes like people

expect us to have the answers, but it's okay to admit when you don't know.

**Mona Toncheff:** This is an incredible opportunity to learn with and from leaders that are grappling with the same challenges. Consider the fellows as thought partners as you work on being a change agent in your school or system!

**Nancy Smith:** Build a strong network of fellow educators and leaders to provide invaluable support, adverse perspectives, and innovative ideas that will enrich your professional growth and enhance your impact on your colleagues and students. Remember the collective wisdom and experience within this Fellowship are some of the greatest resources, so engage fully, share openly, and support each other through the process.



## SUMMARIZING AND IMPACT

Throughout the panel discussion, common themes were the value of having thought partners and conversations to build capacity, as opposed to just handing out answers. Mentors and fellows are learning from each other and building life-long relationships.

The NCSM Fellows Program was significantly improved by the fellows' and mentors' feedback and conversations. Their input

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NCSM FELLOWS PROGRAM (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

impacted the structure and content of virtual sessions that our next group will greatly benefit from.

There are no words, actions, or symbols that can truly communicate the NCSM Fellows Committee's appreciation to this inspirational group of leaders, but we tried. After the panel discussion, we celebrated our outgoing cohort with a red carpet walk and a presentation from fellow to mentor and mentor to fellow. There were tears and smiles across the room.



### INTERESTED IN JOINING THE NCSM FELLOWS PROGRAM?

Every leader has been encouraged and inspired by someone, but not every emerging leader has benefitted from encouragement and inspiration. Leadership can be a lonely endeavor. We all benefit from a network that supports our ongoing growth. Are you on a leadership journey and need support to reach, or extend beyond, your goals? Are you an experienced leader who is looking for an opportunity to give back to the mathematics leadership community? The NCSM Fellows Program is a great way to give or receive that support. [Applications for 2025–2026 are open!](#) Don't hesitate! Apply! 📄



As sad as we were to say goodbye to last year's Cohort, we are excited to welcome our 2024–25 fellows and mentors! Our cohort has doubled this year and includes our first international Fellow! We look forward to continuing to grow and expand as the program continues.



## NCSM AFFILIATES NEWS


### ON A TUESDAY AFTERNOON IN SEPTEMBER,

nearly 40 school and district mathematics leaders gathered on a Zoom call for collaboration and shared learning during the monthly meeting of Colorado Math Leaders ([CML](#)), an NCSM affiliate. The agenda included a mathematics task resource ([SolveMe Mobiles](#)), committee updates, and information about an upcoming book study. Members of the Colorado Launch Years Pathways task force shared an update and invited CML members to attend an informational meeting; representatives from the Colorado Department of Education invited members to join a leaders-only discussion about Powerful Practices, the free, online mathematics professional learning for Colorado mathematics teachers. President John Fischer invited attendees to sign up to lead a portion of a future meeting, either by sharing a mathematical task or resource, or facilitating a problem of practice conversation. Small breakout group conversations allowed attendees to connect personally and get support on common issues facing the many districts in Colorado.

The Colorado Math Leaders have been an NCSM affiliate since 2018, but the group has been meeting informally for more than 20 years. In the early days, the group consisted of three or four Denver metro-area district leaders connecting in a conference room for a couple of hours of problem solving together. Although CML is not the largest NCSM affiliate, their growth from three or four members to over 40 includes some strategies and lessons that might help other

affiliates looking to grow their membership. Some of their key lessons learned:

- A partnership with the state content specialists is important, but having CML leadership roles filled by educators ensures the meetings don't become top-down policy-focused sessions.
- Being an NCSM affiliate provides cache for the organization and its members, knowing that they can refer to NCSM position papers, publications, and other resources when facing challenges in their districts.
- Intentional focus on inclusion, including researching new district math staff, shoulder tapping teacher leaders, and encouraging every member to bring a friend helped grow the membership over the years.
- In-person meetings are valued, but virtual meetings allow for more attendance.
- Building meetings around specific topics relevant to most districts across the state (e.g., intervention, high school pathways, graduation requirements, state testing) makes attendance more enticing.
- Sharing the meeting facilitation among board members and attendees lightens the load so one person is not burdened with too much workload.
- A shared leadership model ensures diverse voices are contributing to the work of the organization.

***Want to learn more about growing your affiliate's membership?*** Join NCSM Affiliate Coordinator Joanie Funderburk and other affiliate leaders on our January 8, 2025 virtual meet-up. Register to attend [HERE](#). 

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Joanie Funderburk | NCSM Affiliate Coordinator (2023–2025)

## NCSM MISSION STATEMENT

NCSM is a mathematics education leadership organization that equips and empowers a diverse education community to engage in leadership that supports, sustains, and inspires high-quality mathematics teaching and learning every day for each and every learner.

## NCSM VISION STATEMENT

NCSM is the premiere mathematics education leadership organization. Our bold leadership in the mathematics education community develops vision, ensures support, and guarantees that all students engage in equitable, high-quality mathematical experiences that lead to powerful, flexible uses of mathematical understanding to affect their lives and to improve the world.

High-quality leadership is vital to this vision. NCSM is committed to:

### *Developing and Informing Vision*

- Provide leadership to influence issues and policies affecting mathematics education in ways consistent with the mission and vision of NCSM;
- Equip leaders to be critical consumers of educational information, research, and policy to become change agents in their communities;
- Support leaders to develop an actionable vision of mathematics instruction consistent with a view of mathematics as a sense-making endeavor.

### *Ensuring Support to All Stakeholders*

- Develop networking and communication opportunities that connect the mathematics education community, as well as the broader education community;
- Equip leaders with the tools to create and sustain systems that fully align with the vision of mathematics and mathematics instruction promoted by NCSM;
- Equip leaders with the understanding, knowledge, and skills to continue their own personal growth, support emerging leaders, and further develop excellence in mathematics teaching.

### *Guaranteeing All Students Engage in Equitable, High-Quality Mathematical Experiences*

- Provide advocacy and support regarding issues and policies affecting mathematics education in ways consistent with the mission and vision of NCSM;
- Provide resources for implementation of research-informed instruction to ensure students engage in relevant and meaningful learning experiences that promote mathematics as a sense-making endeavor;
- Advocate for each and every student to have access to rigorous mathematics that develops their understanding, skills, and knowledge, along with the confidence to leverage their learning, in order to improve their world.

## ABOUT YOUR NCSM *Inspiration!*

The purpose of your NCSM *Inspiration!* is to advance the mission and vision of NCSM by informing the membership of the on-going activities of NCSM, by providing up-to-date information about issues, trends, programs, policy, and practice in mathematics education, and by promoting networking and collaboration among NCSM members and other stakeholders in the education community. *Inspiration!* is published electronically four times a year—fall, winter, spring, and summer—and is available to NCSM members only via the NCSM Website, as a benefit of your NCSM membership.

*Inspiration!* seeks articles on issues of interest to mathematics educators, especially K-12 classroom teacher leaders. All readers are encouraged to contribute articles.

Please send newsletter articles and comments to:  
Heather Crawford-Ferre • [hcrawford-ferre@mathedleadership.org](mailto:hcrawford-ferre@mathedleadership.org)

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