

On the afternoon of April 6th, the Grand American Hotel was busy with volunteers stuffing hundreds of bags ready for distribution later that evening. It was amazing to be a part of, and to see so many people willing to chip in, all the while smiling. Wow! What an illustration of teamwork! Having many hands sure made the work light. This was the beginning of my three-day experience at the NCSM Conference. I came away with many wonderful experiences.

Networking

I had the opportunity to network with others from various parts of the country who serve in the same or similar roles. During the Regional Caucus, I met and spent time with colleagues from my own region as well. I was reminded of Dr. Eric Jolly's call to "learn to feed each other" as mathematics leaders. I quickly realized through the many engaging conversations we had, that we share the goal of ensuring that all students are exposed to good mathematics. We also share similar challenges in our work as well as our common search for better methods to reach this ultimate goal. I attended a session "Challenges for New Leaders" by past NCSM Presidents, which provided strategies for dealing with such challenges. Making these connections to broaden my professional support network is important for ongoing learning, future collaborative partnerships, and keeping abreast of developments and changes in the field.

Opportunity to learn from Leading Mathematics Educators

As a member of our district's Math Area Resource Specialists team, I provide leadership and expertise in mathematics instruction, as well as support in curriculum development, assessment, and staff development at the elementary level. Our team supports district efforts of implementing national reform initiatives and helping to assure equity in classroom instruction and distribution of materials. The opportunity to attend the NCSM Annual Conference was a valuable venture. I was able to meet and learn from leading mathematics educators like Marilyn Burns, Deborah Ball, and others from across the nation. Participating in the conference not only allowed me to bring back and share what I learned with the rest of my colleagues, but also to continue to increase my ability to contribute to building mathematics leadership capacity in schools through my work with the elementary teachers and schools I support.

Diversity

The conference theme, *Widening the Circle through Celebrating Diversity*, was both fitting and timely. NCSM's leadership and actions embody this theme. I am hopeful that many districts will adopt this theme and implement the new *Principles and Indicators for Math Educators Leadership Framework (PRIME)* to promote and support significant improvements in the math achievement of all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, parental income, or home language. Therefore all students can perform at high levels.

Equity in Student Mathematics Learning and Achievement

Our district like many others across the nation is facing the challenge of persistent patterns of differences in academic success among student groups. One of the sessions I attended focused on NCSM's equity efforts. It is good to know that NCSM continues to lead the way in improving student achievement through its position statement that emphasizes the need to address equity with rigor and further suggests ways to best accomplish this goal and/or actions to move forward. Knowing that this issue is in the spotlight strengthens our efforts to promote equity in mathematics in our locale, and reinforces for me the reality opined by Forrest Cuch in his remarks that "conventional methods have not worked, therefore, we need to think outside the box." As an

NCSM member, I plan to continue to encourage dialogue with others in the professional learning communities I am affiliated with to examine critically the access (or lack there of) and opportunity gaps, as a way of understanding why the differences in students' achievement exists in order to collaboratively develop an even deeper understanding of effective teaching strategies for diverse learners to help bridge the gaps.

Leadership

In one of his presentations, Dr. Tim Kanold stated NCSM's vision indicating "it is the *PRIME* leader who will close the 'knowing-doing' gap between our knowledge about how to enhance student achievement and the commitment to actions we must take as a result of that knowledge" (*Becoming a PRIME Leader*, NCSM 2008). These words played in my head over and over as I reflected on my plane ride home and continue to do so. I continue to ponder what it would look and feel like to put them into operation, what individual and collective steps to take. There is no doubt in my mind that this process will take time and involvement of many in various ways and at various levels. We need to design activities to change habits of mind and habits of practice.

A Renewed Commitment

I came away from the conference with a sense of renewed commitment to mathematics professional learning and leadership, reinforced by the four leadership principles outlined in the *NCSM Principles and Indicators for Mathematics Educators Leadership Framework* (NCSM 2008). I believe this framework provides a research-affirmed guide in which to situate my work. Thanks again for the Iris Carl Award; I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend the NCSM Annual Conference, a historic 40th Anniversary appropriately titled *Taking Leaders to New Heights*. What I learned from the many conference sessions and from interacting with experienced leaders, mathematics educators and leaders in the field from across the nation and other countries, was both validating and inspiring!