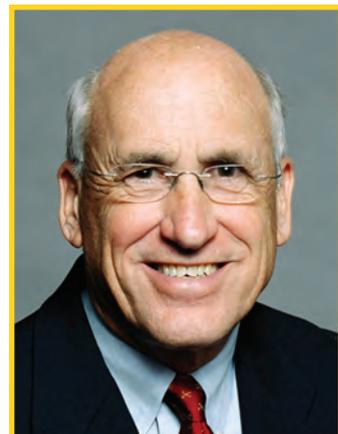


President's Message

For Principals ONLY!

Francis (Skip) Fennell



This article is *not* for you. But it is my hope that you will read it and give it to your principal. If my timing is right, you will be able to pass this article along before annual teacher evaluations or periodic observations of your classroom instruction.

The principal guides the culture and sets the tone for the success of a school. Some educators have actually transferred to a different school or school district to work with a particularly effective principal. Highly effective principals also spend time getting to know students by regularly going into classrooms, covering classes, or walking through the building to get a sense of what's happening in the school. In addition, they set high expectations for teachers and students.

To earn educators' respect, effective principals become more than building managers. They serve as instructional leaders who provide access to different paths to professional development for their staff. This support could include encouraging involvement with NCTM Affiliates and making it possible for teachers to take advantage of NCTM services and resources, such as regional and annual conferences, publications, and online learning opportunities.

Effective principals also understand the importance of teachers' mathematical and pedagogical knowledge. They find ways to help teachers develop, maintain, and deepen this knowledge—perhaps through an analysis of state or local curriculum frameworks, targeted professional development opportunities, or formal coursework.

Effective principals know that ample instructional time is essential for mathematics learning. They make it a priority not only to allocate time for mathematics teaching but also to find ways to provide more time for teaching mathematics. This may mean adjusting schedules in the school day or establishing before-school and after-school intervention programs. They recognize that intervention opportunities benefit students only if they are linked to the expectations within particular grades or courses. Effective principals also find ways to make it possible for teachers to plan with and learn from colleagues. Doing so creates invaluable professional development opportunities.

Effective principals are able to lead data-related discussions about student achievement because they know the students in their school. They acknowledge the importance of ongoing assessment in classrooms, and they are able to discuss students' progress on the basis of data from annual state or local assessments as well as from reports that teaching staff prepare related to the day-to-day progress of students.

Principals are responsible for annual teacher evaluations, and they should make sure that these evaluations start with a review of each educator's goals and expectations for his or her students' learning and achievement. Evaluations should also be based on multiple observations, which may include student progress reports and a range of classroom artifacts.

When effective principals or others (such as supervisors) pre-

pare to observe teaching, they often talk with teachers about the makeup of their classes, the curriculum they are using, and other factors that affect students and students' performance. They recognize that evaluations should be based on observations of mathematics teaching in a variety of contexts—that is, at different grade levels, with a variety of students, and across mathematical topics, such as algebra and geometry. Such variety furnishes a sound basis for observing teachers' expertise in dealing with students' needs, using a variety of instructional techniques, and teaching a number of mathematics topics. Some classroom visitations are scheduled for consecutive days to allow the evaluator to witness the continuity of classroom events. Effective principals know what to look for in an effective mathematics lesson, and they often identify “look fors” that will be important when they visit classrooms. These “look fors” may include the following:

- Are students engaged in the mathematics they are learning?
- Do both the teacher and the students recognize the importance of the mathematics being taught?
- Are the students solving problems and talking about the mathematics they are learning?
- Are the students genuinely interested in the mathematics they are learning?
- Is there energy and enthusiasm in the classroom—coming from both the teacher and the students?
- Do the students use a variety of representations, such as pictures, tables, graphs, manipulative materials, and words to communicate their mathematical thinking?
- Do the students use mathematical and technological tools, along with textbooks and other instructional materials?
- Is students' mathematical work displayed on the walls of the classroom?

Mathematics teachers at every level need to be supported. Teacher evaluations are not just a legal requirement but are also powerful professional development and teacher retention tools. The teacher is *the* crucial factor in high-quality mathematics teaching and learning. We certainly recognize that all teachers can improve, whether in their teaching, their work with colleagues, or their relationships with parents and other community members. They are all works in progress. Principals, as you consider your role in evaluating teachers and in establishing and supporting learning communities within your building, be sure also to recognize the importance and unique contributions of effective mathematics teachers who guide and support student learning in this vital subject area. Ω