



MI-AMTE Position Statement on Returning to In-Person Schooling

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The many challenges of mathematics teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic are well known, including multiple moves across remote, hybrid, and face-to-face instruction; exacerbation of equity issues; and adaptation of plans for curriculum and assessment to adjust to remote settings and shortened school days. As mathematics teacher educators and members of professional organizations, we continue to support mathematics teachers in whatever context they are teaching in and express our great appreciation for the extraordinary work they have done in a uniquely challenging context.

At the same time, we believe the time is now to develop humanizing and proactive plans for returning to full face-to-face instruction in the 2021-2022 school year. We are advocating for policymakers, school and district leaders, teacher educators, teachers, students, and families to begin to consider and make plans for mathematics teaching and learning as we emerge from the pandemic. Many have referred to schooling in the fall as a “return to normal” or the “new normal”, but we must expect and prepare for a time of transition in which nothing will seem “normal”. We must be prepared to address these differences with a strengths-based orientation toward teachers and students and not a deficit orientation. We must be planning now for:

- Supporting *new* teachers with additional mentoring, resources, and support. Next year’s first-year teachers are this year’s student teachers - and many of them have completed their student teaching or internship experiences mostly or entirely on-line. Working in a classroom of face-to-face students will be a new experience for these teachers and they will need support for this to be a successful experience for them and for their students. It will also be important to capitalize on the novel skill set these new teachers will have gained through their experiences during the pandemic.
- Supporting *all* teachers with the time and space to get to know their students not only as mathematics learners, but also as humans who have experienced a once-in-a-century (in the U.S.) time of pandemic, upheaval, quarantine, and loss. However, we must also recognize that, for some students, this time was a healing time away from the harms that schools can cause (Dingle, 2021) and a time of new learning. Thus, teachers must be supported in understanding what students have learned and experienced so that they can build positive learning experiences that start where their children are.

- Relieving the pressure to jump back in to grade-level curriculum and assessment without taking the time to understand students and where they are – and recognizing that teachers will need support and guidance to continue to teach grade-level standards while also accelerating students through content from the previous year for which their understanding is still developing.

As mathematics teacher educators, we advocate for beginning with the following action steps, both individually and collectively:

- Plan for and invest in additional mentor teachers and coaches in schools to work with new teachers who have been prepared primarily in on-line settings.
- Offer to be an additional listener in schools. Listen to teachers to understand how best to support them. Listen to students to hear what they have learned and experienced during the past year. Work with teachers to plan to build from these experiences.
- Develop models of curriculum scope and sequences that recognize that students will be re-entering schools in many different places. Allow for both differentiation and acceleration of those students through the use of rich tasks as well as effective and equitable teaching practices (e.g., Aguirre et al., 2013; Huinker & Bill, 2017).
- Provide examples of assessments that are strengths-based and focused on what students understand and are working on, not on wrong answers. Support teachers in enacting and making sense of these assessments.
- Counter public discourse around “learning loss” through talking with local leaders, writing op-eds, and communicating messages of support and appreciation to teachers.

We urge everyone to leverage what we have learned through the move to remote instruction and how that learning might shape how we think differently about face-to-face instruction: Do we connect to families and communities differently? Do we think differently about equitable teaching and learning? Do we think differently about learning goals and how to achieve them? It will take all of us using what we have learned and sharing our resources and expertise to support teachers and students returning to school buildings for something better than a new normal – a vision of teaching and learning in which all teachers and students are supported to grow and learn in ways that honor and build on their strengths and experiences.

References

Aguirre, J., Mayfield-Ingram, K., & Martin, D. B. (2013). *The impact of identity in K–8 mathematics: Rethinking equity-based practices*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Dingle, M. (2021). *The Idea of ‘Learning Loss’ Begg Us to Ask, ‘Loss From What?’* EdWeek Blog, February 4. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-idea-of-learning-loss-begs-us-to-ask-loss-from-what/2021/02>

Huinker, D. & Bill, V. (2017). *Taking Action: Implementing effective mathematics teaching practices*. NCTM: Reston, VA.