The NCSM Vision of Equity Leadership

A growing body of research makes it clear poverty and ethnicity are not the primary causal variables related to student achievement... leadership, teaching and adult actions matter. Adult variables, including the professional practices of teachers and the decisions leaders make can be more important than demographic variables.

—Reeves, 2006, p. xxiii

A vision for equity begins with understanding our leadership responsibility to seek out and erase biases and inequities that exist in student learning and assessment experiences. Time and again, too many students—especially those who are English language learners, are poor, disabled, members of minorities, or female—are victims of low expectations by mathematics teachers and by programs with barriers of access to the best school curriculum. Students who do not have access to a rigorous and coherent curriculum that holds high expectations for each student will have limited opportunities available to them later in school and in life. Leaders in mathematics education have an obligation to provide students with a mathematics curriculum and learning experience that prepare them for their future, whatever that may be. As Kati Haycock (2001) indicates, “to increase the achievement levels of minority and low-income students, we need leaders to focus on what really matters: high standards, a challenging curriculum, and good teachers.”

It is the responsibility of mathematics education leaders to ensure underperforming student populations are identified and to provide teachers with the resources, structures, and accountability to address the identified gaps in student achievement and identified gaps in access to the curriculum. More specifically, it is imperative leaders help all teachers to collaboratively monitor the progress of traditionally underrepresented populations and create strategic plans to raise the achievement of all students, especially those who are underperforming. Mathematics education leaders are responsible for leading teachers out of private practice into a collaborative working culture focused on making thoughtful and consistent decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment that will meet the unique needs of all students while at the same time helping students develop deep and connected mathematical understandings.

Leaders need to eliminate practices that begin tracking students in the primary grades or lock students into particular levels of mathematical study, thereby essentially precluding opportunities to learn the mathematics necessary to open future opportunities for success. Effective leaders diminish barriers that limit student access to rigorous mathematics and at the same time ensure that every student is taught by highly qualified and well-informed mathematics teachers.
Action Indicators for Equity Leadership

The indicators for NCSM’s leadership standard for equity focus on the following key issues:

- Ensuring high expectations for each student
- Providing strong intervention and support for each student
- Orchestrating continuous improvement of achievement for each student

For every student to succeed, mathematics teachers must work together by grade or course level to build a foundation of challenging mathematics that present students with rich, engaging mathematical tasks and require higher-order thinking. Mathematical experiences must be meaningful and relevant; that is, the mathematics we teach should connect to student knowledge and personal experiences. Thus, leaders need to define effective teaching beyond content knowledge and classroom environment to one of developing and nurturing student, family, and community relationships by infusing culturally relevant, engaging, rigorous, yet accessible mathematics tasks into instruction (Haberman, 1997; Strutchens, 2000). It is up to the mathematics education leader to help classroom teachers create learning environments that place a high value and focus on student discourse. In these environments, teachers ask all students high-level, probing questions, while also providing differentiated instruction to support every child’s learning.

PRIME leaders also understand that if every student is to achieve high levels of mathematical skills and understanding, teachers must collectively and critically examine meaningful data—data that will identify where students are underperforming and provide direction for action and intervention. When used wisely, data on achievement, participation, and access to the curriculum help to address inequity in a straightforward and constructive way (Chu Clewell, 1999). Using research-informed best practices, the leader determines how best to address the needs of students and works with individual teachers as well as teacher teams to make instructional and curricular changes that will hold all students to high standards and expectations.