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## New NCTM President: Math Is About More Than College and Career Readiness

By [Liana Heitin](#) on June 6, 2016 12:14 PM

Matt Larson, a former high school math teacher and K-12 math curriculum specialist for the Lincoln, Neb., public schools, [began his two-year term as president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics](#) in April. Larson is no stranger to the 70,000-member organization. He has worked for NCTM on committees and the board of directors for nearly two decades. *Education Week* had the chance to catch up with Larson recently and ask about his priorities as president and what he thinks are some of the biggest issues facing math teachers today. Here are some snippets from that conversation (with responses edited for length and clarity):

### Math as a Path to Democratic Citizenship

"I think traditionally, especially in the current era, the importance of mathematics education has always been positioned in terms of national defense and economic need and college and career readiness. And all of those issues are absolutely important, but I think we also need to keep in mind that we also teach mathematics to develop democratic citizenship through critical thinking with mathematics and that that is also an important goal for us.

Without quantitative literacy, citizens are unlikely to comprehend, let alone be able to influence, many of the decisions and actions of those in power in political, social, scientific, and economic institutions.

I want to make sure we remember that mathematics teachers in a very real way contribute to a democratic society. And we sometimes don't always appreciate that as much as we should compared to the college- and career-readiness and economic goals for mathematics education. All those are important; we just need to remember there's more to it than that as well."

### Supporting Teachers in a Time of Change

"I think K-12 math teachers are in a period of transition and flux. We've now moved from No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act, and so they're facing changes in accountability requirements at the state level, changes in assessment. So it's critical we provide teachers with the support they need to ensure that they don't feel professionally isolated, that they have access to high-quality professional development so they can focus on resource-informed instructional strategies to support each and every one of their students, and so they can understand more deeply the standards they're expected to teach, and the ways in which their students will be assessed."

### Assessments Under ESSA

"As a council, we want to ensure that as states may transition that their assessments address all aspects of mathematical knowledge—procedural skills, conceptual understanding, problem solving, and reasoning. We think it's important for assessments to have a performance component to them and not just be assessments of low-level skills that are assessed in a multiple-choice-only sort of format.

We also think it's important that there be a mechanism to ensure that different assessments states might use are of comparable high quality in assessing student proficiency. We know from studies that there are often large differences in states between the proficiency that's reported on NAEP results and individual state assessments. We want to make sure that there aren't significant differences in expectations across states. What you learn in mathematics should not be a function of your zip code."

### Equal Access for All

"In the [recent high school NAEP results](#) that were released there was evidence that the results for students who had access to high-level math courses were better than for those students who didn't. What we need to do is ensure that access to high-quality curriculum and instruction, with balanced attention to procedural fluency, conceptual understanding, reasoning, and problem solving, is universal.

There remain structural obstacles to that, such as tracking, that we have to address to make sure that each and every student has access to that. And I and NCTM as a council, we are concerned that some students are not expected to take higher-level coursework and that this negatively affects not only their preparedness for college and career once they've left high school but once again, and even more important from my perspective, their ability to participate fully in our democratic society."

### Modernizing Through Social Media and Blogs

"One of the things members and teachers often think of when they think of NCTM are our three practitioner journals. That's a traditional medium—a print journal. One of the things we've been working on is to modernize that so we have Twitter chats on particular journal articles, [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/06/new\\_nctm\\_president\\_math\\_is\\_about\\_more\\_than\\_college\\_career\\_readiness.html?cmp=eml-enl-eu-news3&...](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/06/new_nctm_president_math_is_about_more_than_college_career_readiness.html?cmp=eml-enl-eu-news3&...) 1/2



so that teachers who are used to getting their information through online communities and Tweeting to one another and engaging in those sorts of conversations can also engage in those conversations around some of the articles we have in our print journals.

Presidents of NCTM have traditionally published a monthly president's message. I've transformed mine into a blog that members can actually comment on and respond to and I have an opportunity to listen to members' reactions and respond to them."

#### Updates to the Annual Conference

"We've been working hard to change our conference experience to make sure that it includes aspects of community, so it's not just a meeting you go to for three days once a year and you drop it after you leave, but to have some of our focused and premier presenters have extended conference experiences online where they share their resources and continue to interact with interested participants after the conference actually ends so that the conference in some sense extends."

*Image: From the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*

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