

From the President's Pen

As another school year comes to an end, it is interesting to examine the changes that have occurred in our lives. Whether you changed positions, taught the new curriculum or a new course, or used a different approach, something new may have happened in your mathematical life this year. Students change every year, and the world around us changes at a phenomenal rate. How do we keep up? Do we hold on to the old, embrace the new or combine the two? With new curriculum being introduced, it is often hard to decide if our old tools are still applicable or if we need new tools.

Mathematical concepts remain the same. The laws of mathematics have not changed, but the methodology is quite different. I remember using the slide rule, and logarithmic and trigonometric tables in high school. I could multiply and divide using logarithms but never quite understood why I couldn't just use a pencil and paper. When I finally used a scientific calculator to do trigonometric calculations, I wondered why I had wasted my time with tables. Looking back, though, learning how to use any table was not a waste of time. Students often ask us why they need to know how to do things in mathematics. The dreaded "When am I ever going to use this?" question is asked as often today as it was years ago, but students today expect a better answer. With the information age, students expect instant answers to their questions. Learning for the sake of learning is not valued like it once was—or is it?

Teachers are expected to learn more now than ever. It is not enough to simply understand the material and know how to present it in many different ways. We need to understand how each student learns and differentiate for all. We must embrace all new ideas and stay on top of the latest educational research. New methodology and new technology mean that we must learn. Will SMART boards simplify mathematics? Do graphing calculators explain concepts? Of course not, but these tools help students make connections and visualize the mathematics. We have moved beyond having students memorize a single way of approaching a problem; they must use a variety of personal strategies to solve new problems. The world is changing, and we must change with it. Many things never change: the passion that mathematics teachers have for students and for the subject matter, the basic foundation that students must have to understand higher level mathematics and the sense of accomplishment that we all feel when we finally reach the student who is having difficulty.

Take time this summer to recharge and relax. Learn something new just for yourself. Thank you for all you do to make mathematics meaningful for students.

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