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# PCSM NEWSLETTER

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Leaders in Mathematics Education

September 2009

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PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF SUPERVISORS OF MATHEMATICS

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*From the President*

- Jane Wilburne

By now, you have probably settled into the routine of school bells and alarm clocks! It is an exciting time of year full of new students, new classes, and new colleagues. As you begin creating lesson plans and organizing tasks that will engage and inspire your students, check out the resources and information available on the PCSM website: [www.pcsmonline.org](http://www.pcsmonline.org). The resource link on the webpage provides members with access to the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM) Report Summary Service, links to other professional development organizations' websites, and links to the U.S. Educational Organizations and resources. The report summary service includes access to research reports and classroom studies that highlight best practice for teaching mathematics. It is definitely worth your time to scan through these valuable resources.

**Please check the date on the mailing label of the newsletter. If the date is 2009 (09) or earlier, it is time to renew your membership. Save money by renewing for three years. If each of us signs up a new member, our membership will double!**

Mark your calendars and be sure to register for the 32<sup>nd</sup> PCSM Annual Conference to be held Wednesday and Thursday, November 4 & 5, 2009 at the Greentree Radisson Inn in Pittsburgh. More information regarding the conference can be found in this newsletter and on the PCSM website. The conference is free, but you need to be registered to receive the complimentary gifts from various supporters. The conference will begin with registration at 11:00am and lunch at 11:30am, and speakers will focus on current topics related to leading mathematics educators across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

We hope to see you in November!

*Jane Wilburne*  
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*From the Editor*

- Cathy Schloemer

If you have been on the mathematics education scene for a while, the options for how to proceed can seem dizzying. Computer? Calculator? WolframAlpha? Pencil and paper? Chalk? “Smart” board? Books? Worksheets? Manipulatives? Small groups? Direct instruction? Remediation? Supplementation? In the first seven days of classes, I have used eleven of these options, and I will bet many of you have used them all, always in an effort to help your students achieve. In a world increasingly dominated by standardized tests, including the current PSSA tests and the soon-to-come Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II competency tests at the state level, test performance is king.

This fall as we begin anew, however, I would like us to remember that, while we certainly want our students to be able to “know and be able to do” mathematics, that baseline is probably not what got us excited about mathematics or what will attract our students to turn on to learning or to pursue mathematics in the future. In a recent letter to U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Herbert Kohl, author of the education classic, *36 Children*, wrote, “how important it [is] to provide [an] interesting and complex curriculum that integrates the arts and sciences, and utilizes the students' own culture and experiences to inspire learning. I discovered ... in my early teaching career, that learning is best driven by ideas, challenges, experiences, and activities that engage students.” Thus, as we help our students to achieve, let’s seek ways to excite them about wanting to achieve and to experience the delight of genuinely understanding. Isn’t the ability to think and to solve problems in context the real prize we take away from our mathematics education? (You

can read the entire text of Kohl’s letter at Rethinking Schools, Summer 2009, Volume 23,

No. 4. See

[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/23\\_04/good234.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/23_04/good234.shtml)

As always, Chris Czapleski, thank you for your faithful editing! I do this only because you always “have my back.”

Remember, this is your newsletter. What would you like us to share? Please send correspondence to me at:

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## Register Now!

The PCSM 2009 Annual Conference is in Pittsburgh on *Wednesday afternoon* and Thursday morning, November 4 - 5 this year. The program promises to be informative and there will be lots of time for members to network and share ideas. The cost for this conference is just right – **free** to those whose PCSM membership is paid up.

Be sure to use the blue registration form in the Newsletter to register, or go online at [www.pcsmonline.org](http://www.pcsmonline.org) to register online.



## PCSM Elections

Online PCSM elections will be taking place September 1 - October 1. Please log on to <http://www.pcsmonline.org> to vote.

## Check Out the PCSM Website

The PCSM Website is up and running and has lots of valuable features and information. On the Website at <http://www.pcsmonline.org> you can:

- Get announcements on things going on in NCSM
- Get to know the PCSM officers and to contact them – both the officers who are elected and those who are appointed to various positions
- Volunteer to help with PCSM tasks
- Dates and locations for upcoming PCSM events, and information on past PCSM events.
- Back issues of the PCSM Newsletters
- Link to the Websites of other Pennsylvania math organizations
- Link to the Websites of other national mathematics organizations and educational organizations that are pertinent to mathematics education
- Link to the Kanskey reports, which are summaries of valuable and important mathematics studies. These reports also give links to the entire study, if more information is needed.

This PCSM Website is the brainchild of your Board, and was designed by Janie Zimmer and Carol Buckley. Carol will continue to manage the Website as the WebMaster. Thanks, Carol!

*- Submitted by Janie Zimmer*

## INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES ARE LEADERS

PCSM members who also belong to NCSM have likely noticed a new feature added to the NCSM Newsletter beginning with the Summer 2009 edition. The new column, “Coaching Matters”, according to the words of the author, Grace Kelemanik, is in response to the “growing national enthusiasm around coaching as a key strategy for improving mathematics learning in schools.”

In Pennsylvania, a growing number of schools employ instructional coaches at different levels. Some are designated to work in particular initiatives or specific content areas while others “coach” across the curriculum. In any case, one of the key roles of an instructional coach is that of leader and change agent. Given that PCSM is dedicated to promoting effective leadership in mathematics education, it behooves members to reach out to instructional coaches, in particular, those who may be designated as math coaches and invite their participation in PCSM.

PDE has adopted the Standards Aligned System as a framework for aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with state content standards. Currently the SAS framework is more fully articulated in mathematics than other content areas. A daunting challenge is to provide the professional development required for teachers to envision how the competencies enumerated in SAS are translated into classroom practice. Instructional coaches can lead sustained, job embedded professional learning required to guide the implementation of the SAS framework in schools. Teachers working in partnership with effectively trained mathematics coaches can begin the conversation of translating competencies into improved student learning. PCSM members should seek out mathematics coaches in their own and nearby schools and encourage them to recognize themselves as instructional leaders and offer PCSM as one vehicle for promoting leadership growth.

For information about instructional coaching in Pennsylvania and links to coaching resources, visit [www.pacoaching.org](http://www.pacoaching.org).

*- Submitted by Gen Battisto*

## Snippets: News You Can Use

### (1) New Model for Curriculum

"Connecticut District Tosses Algebra Textbooks and Goes Online" by Winnie Hu

Source: *The New York Times* - 8 June 2009

URL:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/08/education/08math.html>

What would happen if a school district did away with textbooks, rewrote their curriculum, and employed HeyMath to use animation and sound to reformat their lessons? Maybe, like Westport, CT, they would get less frustrated students and higher achievement.

Source: COMET 10(15) 10 June 2009

### (2) WolframAlpha

From the Chronicle of Higher Education [Today's News], Friday, June 12, 2009. See

[http://chronicle.com/free/2009/06/19910n.htm?utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/free/2009/06/19910n.htm?utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)

Move over CAS calculators and old Mathematica – here comes WolframAlpha. This website can instantly solve most step-by-step math problems, including showing the steps – and it is available at no cost. Whether the service is a curse or a blessing is presently a matter of debate. What do you think?

### (3) Malcolm Gladwell: Lessons from Fleetwood Mac

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2009/06/malcolm\\_gladwell\\_lessons\\_from.html?print=1](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2009/06/malcolm_gladwell_lessons_from.html?print=1)

Author Malcolm Gladwell tells us that Fleetwood Mac has lessons for us about education: (a) Effort is more important than talent. (b) Instead of building on success, students need to compensate for their weaknesses. (c) Students learn through the struggle to learn, not in a burst of genius.

### (4) Common Core State Standards

From the National Governors Association ([NGA] Website, Wednesday, July 1, 2009. See

<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.6c9a8a9ebc6ae07eee28aca9501010a0/?vgnextoid=60e20e4d3d13221>

If you are interested in the Common Core State Standards in mathematics - and who is developing them, as well as who is offering feedback - check out the names in this article. I was personally impressed by the number of unfamiliar names in the development group and the number of familiar names in the feedback group.

### (5) When Computers Leave the Classroom...

From the Chronicle of Higher Education [Section: Information Technology], Friday, July 24, 2009, Volume 55, Issue 42, p. A1. See

[http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i42/42a00103.htm?utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i42/42a00103.htm?utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)

For many students, ubiquitous PowerPoint presentations have become powerfully boring. In this article, Jeffrey Young says students should view podcast lectures outside the classroom and use class time for discussion and problem solving. Although some students resist the change from traditional methods, he reports that students are more engaged and learn more with this unusual approach.



## Upcoming Conferences and Events:

### PCSM Annual Conference

November 4-5, 2009

Radisson Hotel (Greentree)

Pittsburgh, PA

More info at <http://pcsmonline.org>

### PCTM 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

November 4-6, 2009

Radisson Hotel (Greentree)

Pittsburgh, PA

For more information visit: [www.pctm.org](http://www.pctm.org).

### NCTM Annual Conference

April 21-24, 2010

San Diego, CA

**NCTM Regional meetings this fall:**

October 21–23, 2009

Boston, MA

November 4–6, 2009

Minneapolis, MN

November 18–20, 2009

Nashville, TN

More info at [www.nctm.org/meetings/](http://www.nctm.org/meetings/)

**ELECTRONIC RESOURCES****NCTM Online Courses**

If you are seeking evening workshops for groups of teachers, these 90-minute sessions could be just right for you. Visit [www.nctm.org/eworkshops](http://www.nctm.org/eworkshops) for more information and to register.

**[Implementing the Algebra Standard in Grades 9-12](#)**

**Date:** Tuesday, September 29

**Follow-Up:** Tuesday, November 10

**Time:** 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm ET

**[Geometric Thinking in Grades 9-12](#)**

**Date:** Wednesday, October 14

**Follow-Up:** Wednesday, December 9

**Time:** 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm ET

**[Focus in High School Mathematics: Reasoning and Sense Making in Grades 9-12](#)**

**Date:** Monday, November 2

**Follow-Up:** Monday, December 14

**Time:** 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm, ET

***Everyday Math Controversy***

If your school or community is struggling over math at the elementary level, check out this website about *Everyday Math*: Rational Mathematics Education: <http://rationalmathed.blogspot.com/search?q>

(The blogger is Michael Paul Goldenberg, a mathematics educator from Ann Arbor, Michigan.)



**Planning ahead?  
The NCTM Annual is in Philadelphia,  
April 25-28, 2012.  
Be there or  $B^2$ !**