

NCTM president Jack Price, in his "President's Message" in *NCTM News Bulletin* (April 1995), issues a real challenge to those of us responsible for teaching students mathematics. We must challenge our detractors. His message, included below, sets the tone for this issue of *delta-K*.

*Arthur Jorgensen*

NCTM believes that all children can and should learn mathematics. We believe that children construct their own knowledge using reflection and accommodation. We believe that a standards-based classroom is a humane community of learners. And we think of mathematics as problem solving, communication, reasoning and connections.

We can do a better job of letting the public at large know what we profess. If we do not, the public may believe what the detractors tell them, regardless of how twisted, misinformed or incorrect the disparagement is. For example, the NCTM Standards documents are accused of eliminating algorithms and forsaking all drill and practice. That simply is not true. We know that children should be assisted in developing more efficient ways of using basic skills. That is what algorithms are. We encourage mental mathematics and estimation, and we realize that children need to have a good grasp of arithmetic operations before they can be effective problem solvers. Our quarrel is with the way in which these operations may have been taught in the past, not with understanding but with relatively mindless repetition.

This is just one example where our message is not reaching the public. Many other examples exist, such as the argument that "there is no mathematics in the Standards." Those of us who have read the documents know that they call for stronger mathematics earlier in the curriculum. They also call for new, useful topics to be introduced into the curriculum and for other topics—those that can be replaced by technology, for example—to receive less attention.

I could go on, but you know the stories as well as I do. What we need to do is get the word out. Each of us needs to tell what we, as mathematics educators, believe. If parents, for example, believe that their children are receiving a more challenging, more useful mathematics program, they will rally for our movement. Like you, they want the best for their children. Let's pledge to tell at least one nonmathematics person this month how much the Standards can mean for all children. Let's not hide our light any longer.

The Standards documents are a giant step toward better mathematics education for every child. They give us a guide, not a prescription. They tell what we value; they don't mandate a specific scope and sequence. Let's clear up the misunderstandings and provide knowledge where it doesn't exist. But let's also counteract the lies and innuendos. And while we are at it, let's tell the naysayers that the strength of the Standards will keep our efforts moving forward—we are not going away.

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