**Tips on Supporting All Students: Equity and Diversity**

"Equity" and "Diversity" are very deep topics, and as such, there are dangers in boiling them down to a list of tips. The following is not a list of activities one does to be equitable or to celebrate diversity, and should not be looked at as such. Rather, the goal is to provide a starting point for considering equity and supporting diversity within our classrooms. The following headings are very broad reminders of how we can continue our efforts to achieve the goal of a mathematics education experience that is equitable and celebrates diversity.

**Equity does not mean equal.** When considering how equitable one's teaching and expectations are, we must consider the diverse needs and strengths of individual students, as well as the needs and strengths of the whole class. One student may need only a few minutes of extra instruction to master a concept, while the next student may need additional time to work and struggle with a set of manipulatives to develop an understanding which will allow him to own the content. It is not about how much time each student gets, but rather, how to create the appropriate opportunities for each student to learn mathematics.

**Focus on the individual.** Learning our students' names is only the first step in developing a relationship with those individuals. The more we understand and respect the individual's background and strengths, the more we understand their particular needs. How do language, culture, gender, and socio-economics shape our students' world? More importantly, how can we, as teachers, understand, celebrate, and utilize the strengths and differences that make our classes unique? A first day handout or classroom exercise might include a survey that asks students to list strengths and rate past successes with mathematics. A simple exercise such as this can give us a good idea of students' feelings about mathematics and about themselves as math students, providing the contextual starting point for classroom interactions.

**Create an environment for success.** Do your students know how important their success is to you? It never hurts to remind them! The expectations that we hold for our students send clear messages of how we feel about their education. Holding high expectations for all students shows our confidence in their ability and translates into success for more students. An environment that fosters success can be one in which all ideas and strategies are valued, where students share their thinking, listen with interest, and engage all students in consideration of the ideas presented.

**Identify your biases, and then get over them!** Regardless of individual background or upbringing, we all carry own biases and stereotypes. As teachers, we are responsible for helping ALL students succeed, not just the ones that fit into our "box" of people who should do well. Set aside these biases and stereotypes and harness students' strengths to further every student towards the brimming mathematician and problem solver that they can be.

**Create an equitable curriculum that supports diverse needs and celebrates diverse strengths.** Not all students learn the same way, so we must vary our approaches to lessons and provide students with manipulatives, visuals, projects, technology and group work to reach as many minds as possible. Give every student the opportunity to shine every day. Most of us have to follow a state or district curriculum, but with some creativity and work, we can meet the state and district requirements while making math interesting, engaging, and attainable for our students.
Be aware of your questioning and listening techniques. How we ask questions, who we direct them to, and our interest in student responses can have lasting impacts on our students' achievement. We must believe that we can learn from all of our students' responses. We can learn about the students' thinking and often we can learn alternative ways of thinking about the mathematics itself. Are all students asked to engage in rigorous mathematical thought during the course of a lesson? Are all students given the time to think? All students should have the opportunity to tackle rigorous math every day, and carefully examining and altering our questioning and listening techniques can better assure that this happens.

Walk the tightrope. We need to meet the needs of all our students, but it often feels as though we walk a tightrope to do this. While I am praising and encouraging the student who sits in the front row and knows the answers to even my toughest questions, am I simultaneously discouraging and ignoring that struggling student who sits in the back, never offers answers, and avoids eye-contact when I ask a question? These two students have very different needs, and the one who shouts louder is often more likely to get my attention. After all, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, right? Engaging and supporting all students is not easy, but it is our duty as classroom teachers. I challenge you to touch base with EVERY student, EVERY day. Work to give them opportunities to shine, to show their strengths, every day. You never know when you will turn that corner with a student and have a young scholar on your hands.