

## **Closing Comments**

*Larry R. Faulkner, Chairman*

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Final Meeting of the  
National Mathematics Advisory Panel  
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Today, this Panel is reporting to the Secretary, to the President, and to the public. The next steps in the improvement of mathematics education are in the hands of people in this audience – all of you – and people all across the nation. The Panel evaporates after having done its work – having given the best analysis and recommendations that it can provide.

We have heard comment this morning about the exceptional effort made by the Panel. It has indeed been so. But I do not mean for such claims to come across as mere bragging about the time that has been committed by this body. The important point is this: Only rarely in the life of a nation is it possible to bring such resources to bear on any problem.

- There is the knowledge of all the people around this table.
- There is the time they have committed.
- There is the two-year term of work.
- There is the scope of charge.
- There is the sizable dollar expenditure from the U.S. Department of Education and from external sponsors.
- There is the work of dedicated and skilled consultants who were hired to address particulars of the Panel's agenda.

Rarely does one find a group that can handle, and actually does address, such a scope of literature, such a scale of literature, such a range of phenomena. The number of times this can be done for any subject in anyone's lifetime is small. The likelihood that it will be done again any time soon for mathematics is tiny.

All of these considerations help me to realize how unusual is the existence of this Panel and how important it is that the Panel have done all possible to make sound judgments on behalf of the American people.

This Panel has lived up to that responsibility. I know that it has contributed every last ounce of energy and commitment that were possible for it to give. It has adhered to a standard of evidence and judgment has been remarkable in my experience. We have done the very best we can. Now we will see what use the public makes with what we have had to say.

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There is an observation in this report that I think is an important one, which is that public education in the United States is in the hands of a great many different people across the country — in individual districts, in individual schools, at the state level, at the federal level, in textbook publishing houses, in accountability and assessment

organizations, in lots of other places. And all of that participation is knitted together, most importantly, by a set of associations.

This Panel has consistently believed that among the most important constituencies for us are those associations that bind together people who are important in actually bringing about improvement in the schools or actually carrying out the day-to-day work of the schools.

Many are seated here in this audience, and I want to re-enforce for the audience how important it is that you walk away from this room thinking about mathematics education – and especially the improvement of it – as your responsibility. We are giving you our best thinking about what next steps to take, what kinds of investments to make, what kinds of changes to engage in. In the end, you will decide, but there is work to do, whatever you decide.

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Mathematics education in this country can be improved without an act of Congress. Whenever a federal panel is created, there is a sense that the primary responsibility for follow-up is with the federal government. But not in this case. It is instead with local people and specialized organizations across the nation. It is important for these messages of improvement to be thought about, and to be acted upon, by people other than Congress. By you.

Congress may help. They may appropriate some money that will help mathematics education in this country, and they might, in the end, take on a significant role. But they aren't going to have the determinative role. The determinative role is local, and I want no one to lose sight of that.

There is quite a lot in this report that could be acted upon tomorrow at almost no cost, and I think that's also an important message. This report is not really about dollars. It is about getting our ideas straight, and making the right choices first. Dollars will be needed for some of the things that the Panel deals with here. We, as a nation, can get to those as we move along, but there are actions that can be taken right now that are not dependent on legislation, that are not dependent on federal action.

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Finally, I would like to note that mathematics education is not just about a school subject. It is easy to think about what we are doing here in that way. But it fundamentally is about the chances that real people all across this country will have in life, and it is about the well-being and safety of the nation. Those are very important things, and they are worthy of our best effort at mathematics education at every level in this country.