

---

## Overview of the Conference

---

**Wendy M. Smith**, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [wsmith5@unl.edu](mailto:wsmith5@unl.edu)

The Seventh Annual Mathematics Teacher Education Partnership (MTE-Partnership) Conference was held at Magnolia Hotel in Denver, CO, from June 24–26, 2018. With 99 registrants from 32 of the 39 MTE-Partnership teams, the theme for this year’s conference was “The MTE-Partnership at Six Years: Transformation. Equity. Leadership.”

In support of the partnership aim, the goals for the 2018 annual conference were:

- The Partnership/institutional teams would plan next steps in transforming their programs.
- The Research Action Clusters (RACs) would continue their work, including considering how they share their work, in order to contribute to additional teams’ transformational efforts.
- The Partnership as a whole would grow its sense of joint purpose and identity as a networked improvement community supporting program transformation.
- A specific focus on equity and social justice would be included throughout the proceedings.

The MTE-Partnership conference opened on Sunday afternoon, June 24, with a brief welcome, followed by lightning-round poster sessions. Posters were shared by each RAC and Working Groups. The lightning-round format allowed participants new to the MTE-Partnership to learn more about each RAC, before the afternoon moved into RAC work time (see the RAC section of these proceedings for what each RAC worked on during this year’s conference). The RACs worked throughout the conference: Sunday afternoon, Monday morning, Monday afternoon, and Tuesday morning.

During the Sunday dinner hour, Susan Elrod and Marilyn Strutchens each gave brief talks about equity in program transformation. Their individual talks (in the Opening Address section of these proceedings) were followed by a question-and-answer period. Elrod highlighted the cyclical process of program transformation and used a river analogy: You can enter at any point and may encounter rapids and eddies. Strutchens followed this with a focus on equity. It is crucial that mathematics teacher educators keep equity at the heart of improvement initiatives in order to achieve program transformations aligned with the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (2017) Standards for Preparing Teachers of Mathematics. During the question-and-answer period, Elrod encouraged programs to disaggregate their student outcomes data by Pell-eligibility; she found this was an explanatory variable in some of her research and urged participants to consider how to better support such students. Elrod also encouraged local partnership teams to better include deans and other administrators in their work; support from administrators can provide necessary resources for change efforts. When asked how to handle positional leaders who announce initiatives but then do not support change efforts, Elrod suggested working around such people, so that they cannot inhibit change efforts. Strutchens was asked how we as a field can achieve true equity; she replied,

I think it takes more than a few people talking about equity issues in order to change systems... We can’t expect just the people who do research on equity to change things; it has to be all of us working together to change things.

The system didn’t get to be inequitable in a day nor due to a single person, so it will take all of us working together over a longer period of time to achieve more equitable student outcomes. Finally, Elrod advised potential change

agents to “build an army”—recruit a large number of people to join in the common vision and work toward common goals:

You have to enlist others, and get people working with you. I think that’s especially important because somebody moves on to be department chair, somebody goes on sabbatical, somebody takes a leave of absence, somebody leaves and takes another job; there’s always change and so the way you can buffer yourselves against change is to make sure you have enough of an army of people with you. One of the challenges I think we all face is, how do we get the army, how do we convince others of our passion? I think it’s important for everyone to get outside of yourselves just a little bit and try to learn about what others care about or are interested in and then connect your passion to that. Find common ground to enlist others and then you will hold each other up and form a larger community of people who can really keep the momentum going and stable.

Sustainable change efforts take lots of ongoing work, with intentional plans to account for turnover in personnel, particularly those in leadership positions.

On Monday, June 27, the day began with a plenary session that featured five panelists discussing transformation efforts at their local partnerships. The panelists talks are included in these proceedings: Alyson Lischka (Middle Tennessee State University), Jeremy Zelkowski (University of Alabama), Ruthmae Sears (University of South Florida), Mark Ellis (California State University, Fullerton), and Wendy Smith (University of Nebraska-Lincoln). Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning each included two sets of concurrent presentations by MTE-Partnership members, in 19 different presentations. Each of these presentations (abstract and/or full article) are included in these proceedings. Finally, Tuesday’s closing session featured reactions by Michael Steele (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and incoming president of the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators) and Cathy Martin (Director of Mathematics in Denver Public Schools and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Board member). These reflections are in the closing section of these proceedings. Both the Transformations Working Group and Equity and Social Justice Working Group met on Monday in the late afternoon. These discussion sessions moved the work forward while also sharing with new participants the history of these working groups. A summary of each working group discussion session is in these proceedings.

Overall, evaluations of the 2018 MTE-Partnership Conference were extremely positive. One hundred percent of respondents plan to attend future MTE-Partnership events; over 90 percent of respondents found the 2018 conference to be a good use of their time, with clear goals, and useful and productive interactions with other participants. MTE-Partnership attendees agreed it is important to have common measures and benchmarks across the partnership and approve of the two major areas of focus for the future: pathways to program transformation and equity and social justice.

### Reference

Association of Mathematics Teacher Education. (2017). *Standards for preparing teachers of mathematics*. Raleigh, NC: Author.