

November 1, 2002

Sue Preussner
Rocky Mountain Middle School
3443 N. Ammon Rd.
Idaho Falls, Id 83402
preussnm@d93.k12.id.us

Dear Members of the Metric Forum,

My name is Sue Preussner. I am a 7th grade math teacher at Rocky Mountain Middle School in Idaho Falls, Idaho. I am a Board Member of the Idaho Council of Teachers of Mathematics, a 1999 National Presidential Award Winner, and on several state committees developing math programs for the state of Idaho.

I am very interested in the outcome of your forum as it relates to promoting the use of metrics. The TIMSS (Third International Math and Science Studies) show that our students do not perform well in the area of measurement and geometry. However, I do not need research to tell me something I have been observing in my classroom over the past thirteen years.

Last month I was trying to determine my student's base understanding of the Inch/Pound and Metric systems. What became apparent was how thoroughly confused they are about the differences. When asked to give examples of a U.S. Customary Unit they responded with meters, liters, and pounds. Any educator knows how difficult it is to correct misconceptions, and a lesson that I had planned on teaching in few days required two weeks.

We live in a world community and our children will be expected to compete on a global base. Understanding mathematics is a standard in which they will be judged and recently they have been coming up short. Measurement is a key principle in both math and science and if our students cannot communicate and understand metric measurement they will be hobbled before they get out of the gate.

Our children need to be more than just familiar with the metric system, they need to see and understand the relevance it plays in their own lives. I can teach my students the basic units, I can teach them the conversions, and I can teach them the notations but until metrics becomes part of their lives it will have little meaning for them. People will learn whatever is relevant to them; if they have a need for a computer, they will learn how to use a computer; if they have a need for a car, they will learn how to drive; if metrics becomes the U.S. unit of measure, people will learn metrics.

I think the time has come to make a choice and the choices made as a result of this forum could have far reaching consequences.

Thank You,
Sue Preussner