

A Spirit of Mathematical Fellowship: Early Visions of the Kansas Association of Teachers of Mathematics

Janet Stramel
Fort Hays State University

Abstract: This article traces the foundational years of the Kansas Association of Teachers of Mathematics (KATM) through archived bulletins from 1926 to 1935. In this formative decade, Kansas math educators documented their work, expressed shared concerns, and collaborated across geographic and institutional lines. Their words and images reveal a professional culture of reflection, innovation, and commitment, principles that still guide KATM today.

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It began with a cardboard box.

Tucked away in a closet and passed down through a colleague's collection, I came across a set of fragile, mimeographed newsletters – the early KATM Bulletins, dating back to 1926. Their pages were yellowed, the typewritten text sometimes faint, but their voice was clear: these were the words of Kansas mathematics teachers, writing to one another across distance, time, and circumstance.

Reading through these bulletins has been a journey, part historical research, part professional reunion. Each issue reveals a snapshot of its time: discussions about when to teach algebra, reflections on pedagogy during the Great Depression, and debates about how best to support students in rural classrooms. And yet, what struck me most was how *current* many of these ideas still feel.

Questions about curriculum alignment, student engagement, professional collaboration, and equity did not originate in recent decades. They've been with us all

along – considered, wrestled with, and passed forward by generations of Kansas educators.

In reading these pages, I found not only insight but connection. The math teachers of the 1920s and 1930s may have worked without Zoom or Google Docs, but they shared our spirit: a commitment to reflective practice, the courage to innovate, and a deep belief in the power of mathematics to shape lives.

What follows is both a tribute and a time capsule, a look back at the first decade of *KATM Bulletins*, told through the voices of the educators who helped build it.

A Voice Across the Prairie

Let us unite our voices – not only for curriculum, but for the betterment of our teaching and the love of the subject. (November 1926)

The earliest KATM bulletins were mimeographed newsletters, passed hand-to-hand or mailed to schools across Kansas. They provided teachers, often working in isolation, with a connection to a wider

professional world. These pages weren't simply newsletters; they were lifelines.

1926–1930: Unity, Curriculum, and a Growing Voice

Educators from schools large and small contributed reflections and posed questions still familiar today:

Shall we continue to treat algebra as a tenth-grade subject, or is it time we recognized its presence in eighth-grade arithmetic? (October 1927)

The curriculum discussions centered around the placement of algebra and the integration of arithmetic with real-world tasks. Articles such as “Practical Geometry for Farm Boys” emphasized relevance while maintaining mathematical rigor.

1931–1933: Depression-Era Adaptability

The bulletins of the early 1930s reflect both economic hardship and the profession's resilience:

Paper is scarce, but imagination is not. Use your blackboard as your canvas, and your students will color it with thinking. (February 1932)

Teachers submitted examples of lessons incorporating newspapers, seed catalogs, and kitchen measurements. One teacher offered a cross-disciplinary activity on rainfall data analysis, connecting math, geography, and science.

1933–1935: Shared Leadership and Innovation

These later bulletins reveal a growing confidence in teacher leadership. Rural and urban educators shared a spirit of fellowship, attending “mathematics institutes” and writing collaboratively.

We teach more than methods; we teach minds. Minds that must be taught to stretch and sometimes struggle. (April 1935)

Increased attention was given to student engagement and cross-disciplinary learning. One article from 1934 outlined how to integrate geometry into a woodworking unit, while another described a student-created newspaper column, “This Week in Math.”

Featured Voices: Then and Now

When the pupils begin to ask their own questions, then you have begun to teach. (October 1935)

Let us share what we try, whether it fails or flourishes. We are not alone. (April 1933)

These words, handwritten or typed nearly a century ago, still ring true. They reflect a teaching profession rooted in reflection, collaboration, and the belief that math is for every learner.

Enduring Lessons

Across the pages of the KATM Bulletins, three themes endure:

- *Collaboration Across Distance:* Despite limited transportation and communication, teachers found ways to visit one another's classrooms and share their work.
- *Professional Courage:* Teachers openly questioned practices, discussed reform, and proposed new methods, even without formal research to back them.
- *Equity Before It Was Explicitly Named:* Many articles mention the importance of ensuring quality mathematics instruction in rural schools and for girls, immigrants, and working-class students.

Legacy and Future

As I reflect on the Kansas Association of Teachers of Mathematics: *We began with bulletins. We now build with relationships.*

KATM today thrives because of this early foundation of shared inquiry and fellowship. The voices preserved in these early publications model not only what teachers do, but who they are: thinkers, collaborators, and advocates.

Looking Forward: Why This History Matters Now

For today's mathematics teachers, navigating standards, assessments, evolving

technologies, and the emotional demands of the profession, the early voices of KATM offer reassurance and resolve. The challenges we face are not new, and neither is our collective capacity to respond with creativity, collaboration, and care. These early bulletins remind us that professional learning has always been rooted in shared reflection and that progress is sustained not by quick fixes, but by community. As Kansas mathematics teachers continue to gather, question, and support one another through KATM, we do so as part of a legacy nearly a century in the making, one that invites us not only to teach mathematics but to teach with courage, curiosity, and fellowship.