

# Coaching Chronicles

News and Events for EMC Project Participants

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## The PI’s Corner: Your Valuable Service Still Matters

BY DAVID YOPP

In many ways, the work of the EMC Project, now in Year 3, has just begun. As you know, EMC seeks to identify the types of knowledge that coaches need to help teachers deliver the best possible mathematics lessons. Identifying this knowledge requires a lot of data, collected over an extended period of time. Years 4 and 5 of our project—which will span the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years—are the most critical in terms of our long-term data collection.

That’s why your continuing participation is so very important to the field of mathematics education in this country.

This summer, coaches in our professional development “Group 1” will attend their second PD workshop, this time in Coaching Knowledge. Two summers ago, this group of coaches attended professional development in Mathematics Content. So by the end of this summer, Group 1 will be our first set of coaches to have received both types of training. Our researchers are excited by the opportunity we’ll have to understand the knowledge held by coaches with both types of training.

As teachers, we all know that it takes time even for the most effective teaching to impact learners. If we think about our

coach trainings, we expect it to take time before we see the effects of the professional development on the teachers who work with those coaches—and even longer before we see effects in student achievement scores. Thus, we need to follow our two groups of coaches and their teachers for at least two years after their most recent training. This includes our “Group 2” coaches, who received Coaching Knowledge professional development in the summer of 2011 and will receive Mathematics Content PD in 2013.

Since the beginning of our project, EMC has been fortunate to have experienced very little attrition among our participating coaches and teachers. (See “EMC Needs You Now More Than Ever” on page 3.) That’s a credit to your professionalism and your dedication to teaching. Sure, a limited number of coaches and teachers have had to leave the project because of district restructuring, retirements, or new positions, but the numbers are relatively small. (When we report our retention rate to other researchers in the field, they *ooh* and *ahhh* with envy.)

To those of you who have remained with us (in other words, all of you reading this), we offer our sincere thanks for



**Dr. David Yopp**  
EMC Principal Investigator  
Montana State University

your commitment to the project. By staying active in EMC until its end, you are *personally making a huge contribution to our study and its eventual impact on teachers nationwide.*

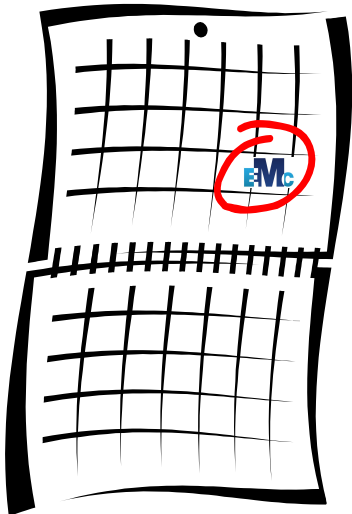
So as we approach the final two school years of our study, I want to humbly ask each of you to stay on board and keep up your outstanding efforts. The work we are doing together is, frankly, a *very big deal*. As the nation’s premier coaching knowledge project, we ultimately will help hundreds of thousands of teachers and coaches make the most of this exciting collaboration effort called “coaching.” But our work is completely reliant upon you. ▲



## EMC Events for Spring, Summer

Spring and summer are busy seasons for EMC, so here is your quick rundown of project activities for the last half of the 2011-12 school year. If you ever have questions related to the project, just send us an e-mail or check the "Participants" page on our Web site. Thank you in advance for your time and hard work in the coming months!

**Coaching sessions wrap up.** Project coaches should continue toward the goal of



completing a total of *eight* three-part coaching sessions with each project teacher during the 2011-12 school year. At least half of these sessions should cover mathematics content focused on numbers and operations. Coaches also should start rounding up notes on the year's sessions, which will help as they fill out the EMC Coach Reflection and Impact Survey sent later this month. Questions? Please contact James Burroughs at [emc@math.montana.edu](mailto:emc@math.montana.edu).

**Teacher observations soon underway.** This month EMC

Project observers are contacting all teachers to arrange their annual classroom observation at each teacher's convenience. These observations are separate from coaches' recurring classroom observations and occur only once each year in the spring. (For more info, see "Classroom Observations: What Are They For?" on page 4.) Please note that teachers who joined the project last fall (and were observed at that time) will be observed a *second time* this spring with the rest of our project teachers.

**Assessments coming later this month.** Like last spring, project teachers will take all of their online assessments near the end of the school year. (Thank you for completing them promptly, before school finishes!) The usual \$100 stipend will apply. In addition, coaches will complete the annual EMC Coach Reflection and Impact Survey, which reviews the year's coaching sessions. (See article on page 5 in this newsletter.)

**Professional development for "Group 1" coaches.** Coaches in Group 1 (PD 2010/2012) already have received and confirmed their assigned dates for their second and final EMC professional development workshop, this time in Coaching Knowledge. Separate but identical workshops are scheduled for June (in Denver) and July (in Bozeman, Mont.). These coaches will receive detailed information about the workshop in April, followed by travel arrangements later in the spring. If you have any questions about your workshop, please contact James Burroughs at [emc@math.montana.edu](mailto:emc@math.montana.edu). ▲

## EMC COACH PROFILE: CARLA HAAS

**Name:** Carla Haas

**District:** Mesa County Valley School District 51 in Grand Junction, Colo. Based at Central High School, where she is a mathematics teacher and department chair, in addition to her role as a coach at three middle schools.

**EMC participant since:** September 2009.

**EMC teachers:** Jennifer Lundin, Bookcliff Middle School; Kari Fyock, Grand Mesa Middle School; Melanie Kallemeyn, Orchard Mesa Middle School; and Chris Adkison, Orchard Mesa Middle School (beginning Fall 2012).

**Family:** "My husband, Kurt, is an English professor in Medieval Studies at Colorado Mesa University. Our son, Zane, is 10 (5th grade) and our daughter, Emma, is 13 (7th grade). We're from the Midwest and moved to Grand Junction when my husband got a job at the university 12 years ago."

**Years as a teacher:** 18

**Years as a coach:** Two

and a half years as part of EMC and another four years while serving as the district's middle school math content specialist.

**What do you find most rewarding about being a coach?**

"There are many rewards to the coaching part of my day. One of the biggest is that while I'm working with teachers on individual practice, I'm also learning from them and bringing ideas back to my own classroom. Our planning and post-observation discussions often become collaborative brainstorming. Because these are teachers at my own feeder schools, we're working together and learning from each other how to use some common approaches, vocabulary, etc., to better vertically align and transition our students from 8th grade to high school. I also recently had to smile when one of my teachers told me that while planning her lessons she now hears in her head the reflective questions she knows I always ask."

**Favorite pastimes away from school:** "Reading, camping with my family, hiking, skiing, watching my children play sports or play piano."

**Any big summer vacation plans?** "Summer always includes camping and hiking with my family. We just returned from a trip to Phoenix over Spring Break to visit family. We watched several Colorado Rockies spring training games."

**What are you reading right now?** "I just read two books over Spring Break: one was by Anita Shreve and the other was *Teammates Matter* by Alan Williams. My children are all caught up in the *Hunger Games* books, so I'm going to read those next."

**One goal for the next school year:** "I've helped develop a Unit Recovery program for our freshman students at CHS who do not show proficiency in a particular unit. It's been largely effective, but a professional goal I have is to continue to improve the program and tweak some areas so that we're getting the best results possible for the effort that's being put forth." ▲

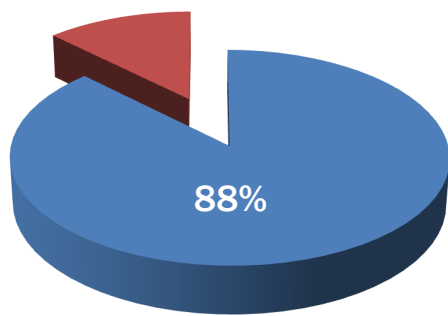


# EMC Needs You Now More Than Ever

## Why Your Continuing Participation Is Vital to the Project's Long-Term Success

No one knows better than teachers how much teachers' lives can change unexpectedly.

Teachers and coaches switch schools and grades. They move out of the classroom, or back into the classroom. They retire. They move to another district, sometimes out of state. They assume new and even more time-consuming



About 88 percent of EMC's coaches have participated since the beginning of the study.

responsibilities. They take leaves of absence to care for an infant or a sick relative. The list of possibilities goes on and on.

Attempting to follow a large and diverse group of teachers and coaches over five years amid all of this change is a tall order, but that's exactly what the EMC Project has set out to do. As you might expect, the project has had to adjust to its share of normal attrition among participants. These dedicated coaches and teachers who are no longer part of EMC had pledged to the best of their knowledge to participate for the duration of the project—until, well, life got in the way.

Now, as the project approaches the beginning of

Year 4 of a five-year study, the continuing participation of our original coaches and teachers who remain in EMC, as well as participants who have joined more recently, has become more important than ever. So project researchers are appealing to coaches and teachers to stick with EMC through the entire 2013-14 school year, until the project's end.

"We are so grateful and humbled by the commitment that our coaches, teachers, and administrators have shown so far, and we really need everyone to take us to the home stretch," says EMC co-PI John Sutton.

"The more information we can collect from our individual coach-teacher pairs over the full five-year study period, the stronger our conclusions about coaching effectiveness will be. And that should translate into an even greater impact on the profession at large when the study is all done."

To date, nearly 90 percent of the project's active coaches and almost three-quarters of its teachers have been with EMC since the very beginning

in Fall 2009. Compared to attrition in other similar research projects, the number of participants who have withdrawn from EMC is remarkably small, Sutton points out. In most cases, the effect of those withdrawals (in terms of lost research information) has been reduced by the coaches and teachers who have joined EMC as replacement participants. Even though these newer participants will serve for less than the full five years, they still contribute a vast amount of information to the study.

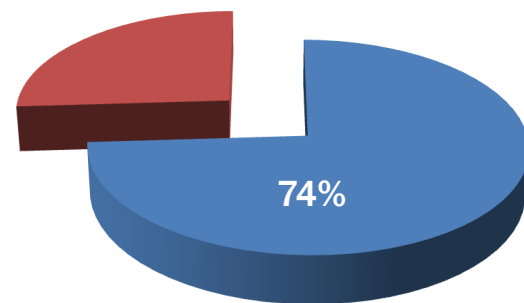
"We're really pleased with where we are right now," Sutton says,

*"To have been part of this study for the full five years, or even three or four? That will feel really special as the impact of EMC becomes apparent across the nation," says co-PI John Sutton. "So our message to our amazing participants is, 'Let's do this together and finish the great work we've started.'"*

"and we're excited about the potential we have with our current team of participants."

As the project continues over time, that "potential" becomes increasingly significant, meaning that each withdrawal of a teacher or coach can be more detrimental to the study's research aims. For that

reason, now more than ever before, project leaders are more likely to try and persuade a coach or teacher to stay involved when something unexpected comes up.



Three-quarters of EMC's teachers joined at the start of the study. Others joined in 2010 or '11.

"We know there will always be exceptions," says Project Director James Burroughs. "We can't expect someone to postpone retirement, for example, and in today's budget climate, we know districts are having to make some tough decisions about staffing that we must accept. But in many cases, we're going to try to work with a coach or teacher, and administrators, to see if we can't keep them involved in at least a limited way instead of dropping out altogether."

In the end, Sutton says, the outstanding service to the profession that EMC's coaches and teachers provide should result in an enormous feeling of accomplishment. "To have been part of this study for the full five years, or even three or four? That will feel really special as the impact of EMC becomes apparent across the nation," he says. "So our message to our amazing participants is, 'Let's do this together and finish the great work we've started.'" ▲

## “Coaching Knowledge” PD Returns This Summer

Coaches in EMC “Group 1,” or roughly half of all project coaches, will attend professional development in Coaching Knowledge during one of two separate but identical workshops held June 18-22 in Denver and July 23-27 in Bozeman, Mont. These Group 1 coaches, who attended their professional development in Mathematics Content two years ago, will become the first group to complete both EMC professional development workshops.

According to the project’s research design, coaches were sorted randomly into two professional development groups at the beginning of the study. Last summer, coaches in “Group 2” received their pro-

fessional development in Coaching Knowledge. Those coaches will receive their second workshop, in Mathematics Content, during the summer of 2013.

“Our professional development team is excited to see our Group 1 coaches again as we present this engaging and challenging workshop for a second time,” says EMC co-PI Beth Burroughs. “Last year’s workshop in coaching knowledge was very successful, so we think this year’s group will feel the same way. Coaches should return to school in the fall with a deeper understanding of research and resources that support coaching.”

Topics covered during the five-day workshop will in-

clude: how teachers learn; teacher practices and student learning; professional and interpersonal communication for coaches; and instructional coaching knowledge.

All Group 1 coaches have confirmed their assigned week and their plans to attend this summer. In April and May, Project Director James Burroughs will contact each coach with com-

plete information about this summer’s events, and to make travel arrangements. Until then, coaches with questions should contact James at [emc@math.montana.edu](mailto:emc@math.montana.edu). ▲



Twenty-nine coaches in Group 2 attended last year’s PD in Coaching Knowledge. Now it’s Group 1’s turn.

## Classroom Observations: What Are They For?

*(This article first appeared in the Fall 2010 edition of the EMC Newsletter.)*

Last spring, EMC staff visited each project teacher and conducted a classroom observation, and the process will repeat this spring, when observers return to schools during the months of April and May. But just what are these observations all about?

In addition to being a great opportunity for project staff to visit with teachers in their element, the observations are used to collect very important information for our study. The EMC Project wants to determine how specific kinds of knowledge among coaches may influence mathematics teaching. Eventually making those connections in a scien-

tific way means measuring a teacher’s practices in the classroom over time using a standardized assessment created for that purpose. All EMC observers are trained in using this assessment and have established “rater reliability” to ensure consistency across observers and school sites.

So, in effect, when an EMC

staff member observes a teacher, she or he is actually collecting data about the teacher’s *coach*. That may help answer one question we’ve heard from several teachers: “Why can’t my observer give me some feedback at the end of my class?”

“I understand the desire for feedback,” says David Yopp,

EMC’s principal investigator. “When I’m observed while I’m teaching, I always ask the observer to give me comments. I love to hear the impression of that ‘other set of eyes.’ However, because EMC is a research project, the observers can’t give feedback because they would then be coaching, not observing.” And that would taint the project’s measures of the coach’s effectiveness, Yopp explains.

Instead, he says, the best source of guidance about a teacher’s work in the classroom is the teacher’s coach.

*Teachers: Do you have any questions or concerns about EMC’s observation of your class? Let us put your mind at ease! Contact your district’s EMC observer, or e-mail Project Director James Burroughs. ▲*



## Coaches' Online Forum Changing Course

In recognition of how busy EMC's coaches are during a typical month, the EMC professional development team has decided to modify how it uses the project's online forums. Now, instead of posting monthly activities on the two "Moodle" sites for coaches in professional development Groups 1 and 2, project staff will maintain the sites primarily as a support tool for coaches who wish to post questions and ideas as they arise in real time.

"We're grateful to our coaches who have participated in the online components of

our PD," says EMC co-PI Beth Burroughs. "The sites will still be a great resource for those who want to reach out to their project colleagues and staff to get some feedback on a particular question or issue they're facing."

In addition, in the late spring, the sites will present readings and activities related to upcoming professional development workshops so that coaches can read ahead if they wish and get "energized" before attending the workshop, Burroughs says. Coaches can access the forums at [moodle.math.montana.edu](http://moodle.math.montana.edu). ▲

## Next Assessments Coming This Month

It's almost that time again. Beginning later this month, all EMC Project teachers and coaches will receive their annual assessments/surveys—project tools that are a crucial part of EMC's research efforts. Teachers will again receive a group of four: the EMC Teacher Survey, the Mathematics Knowledge for Teaching assessment, the EMC Teacher Reflection and Impact Survey, and the EMC Teacher Needs Inventory.

As usual, the project will mail out a \$100 stipend to each teacher upon completion of all four surveys.

"We know that our teachers' schedules only get more hectic as the school year comes to a close," says Project Director James Burroughs. "That's why we're so grateful for everyone's time, and we try to give teachers as much time to complete the surveys as we can. We have to administer these surveys toward the end of the school year so that coaches

and teachers will have completed most of their coaching sessions for the year."

At the same time, coaches will complete just one more survey this school year, the EMC Coach Reflection and Impact Survey.

Last year, project participants did a great job of completing assessments before the end of the school year. It's an accomplishment EMC hopes to repeat this year, Burroughs says. "Our goal is an average completion time of about two weeks after folks get the surveys," he says. "That way we can get their responses into the hands of our researchers—and allow our coaches and teachers to enjoy their well-earned summer vacation." ▲

### Have You Moved?

If you have any changes to your e-mail address, your name, your school location, or especially your home mailing address (where we send your stipends), PLEASE send us a quick note to let us know. *The Post Office will not forward or hold stipend payments.*

## EMC TEACHER PROFILE: MANDY BIGHORN

**Name:** Mandy Bighorn

**School:** Newman Elementary, Grade 4; Billings Public Schools, Billings, Mont.

**EMC participant since:** October 2009

**EMC coach:** Angel Zickefoose

**Principal:** Travis Niemeyer

**Family:** "In Billings I have the unconditional love and support of my boyfriend, Scott. In Missoula, Mont., my sister, Mattie, is in 7th grade. She always keeps me updated on the most current technology tools and is my inspiration in teaching. My mom, Colleen, is my role model. She has taught me a lot of important life lessons, especially that *all things are possible.*"



**Years as a teacher:** 6

**What's one way that your coach has helped you in your mathematics classroom?**

"Angel has been an absolute math angel in my life! She does an incredible job at giving positive, constructive feedback on my teaching and the students' learning with specific details and examples. She encourages me to work on the areas where I feel less confident by providing professional resources and personal experiences or lessons to deepen my knowledge and strengthen student understanding."

**What, in your opinion, is one of the biggest challenges that we face as mathematics educators today?**

"As teachers we sometimes feel the 'math fear' that our elementary students face. When we provide time for collaboration with our colleagues, we embrace our different comfort levels and are able to overcome this fear by focusing on learning as a teacher and student rather than just thinking of math as teaching."

**Favorite pastimes away from school:** "I love Montana for the outdoors: running, softball, camping, hiking, and boating. I also enjoy traveling to see friends and family. I have been very blessed this year to have Hawaii and New York City (*photo*) checked off my bucket list."

**Any big summer vacation plans?** "My plans are to try a new adventure—a backpacking trip in the Beartooth Mountains."

**What are you reading right now?** "*Thinking Mathematically: Integrating Arithmetic & Algebra in Elementary School* by Thomas Carpenter, Megan Franke, and Linda Levi. We are using it in our monthly Intermediate Professional Learning Community meetings, and it has really opened my thinking on how I teach and reflect with my class on the big ideas that numbers and operations lead us to."

**One goal for the next school year:** "My goal for next year is to strengthen my understanding of our Common Core curriculum by sharing and listening to others' experiences so we can overcome that 'math fear' our students and teachers feel." ▲