



Conference Background Statement

From 1776 to present day, our nation has never agreed that education is a Constitutional right. Rather, as Bob Moses put it, we have implicitly agreed to “an unannounced and ‘unannounceable’” national systemic education policy of “running failing schools and rescuing what students we can from failing schools.” The year is now 2022 and the United States of America still does not have a Federal, Constitutional guarantee for quality K-12 public education. Thus, young people are citizens of individual states and not of the nation when it comes to their education¹. Meanwhile, individual state constitutional provisions for public K-12 education vary widely in their stipulations for “adequate”, “basic”, or “minimal” education. A national conversation about guaranteeing high quality K-12 public school education as a federal right for all young people in the nation seems as remote today as when President Grant first proposed it in his 1875 State of the Union Address to the U.S. Congress². With this conference, we seek to spark a different national conversation about quality K-12 public school education, with students and teachers, and allies, demonstrating innovative strategies for expanding access to math literacy.

Throughout his life, Bob Moses struggled alongside local and national stakeholders to broaden access to civil and constitutional protections that enable access to “full personhood” in this country. First, in the Mississippi Theatre of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, a bellwether struggle to include Black Mississippians as full citizens of the nation with a guarantee of constitutional rights and protections for the right to vote and political access in America. Second, from the 1980s until his passing last summer in July of 2021, through the work of the Algebra Project, together with schools and collaborating organizations, Bob sought to catalyze multi-generational, multi-racial coalitions committed to “raising the floor” of mathematics literacy to ensure that Black, brown and poor children in the United States get the literacies they need to not only advance their educational and economic access in 21st century Information Age society, but to make full participation in American democracy possible³.

In the work of the emerging national We the People – Math Literacy for All Alliance since 2017, and building on Algebra Project with many collaborating organizations and institutions since the 1980s, we collectively seek to develop and share structured opportunities that ensure that all students graduate high school on time. This means ensuring math literacy, alongside reading and writing, is accessible and achievable by all students, especially for students in underserved and under resourced schools. It also means ensuring all students graduate ready for college or career mathematics without remediation⁴. In the same way we bear witness to those Black Mississippians who rose up as leaders among sharecroppers, day laborers, and domestic workers in the 1960s, we turn now to those students and teachers struggling for math literacy. Because, as Bob and community organizers like him would say, the people living with the

¹ Education, Equality, and National Citizenship, by Goodwin Liu, The Yale Law Journal, Number 116, 2006, pp. 330-411.

² President Ulysses S. Grant, December 7, 1875 State of the Union Address to Congress, <https://www.infoplease.com/primary-sources/government/presidential-speeches/state-union-address-ulysses-s-grant-december-7-1875> (retrieved 6/13/2022).

³ Radical Equations – Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project, by Robert P Moses and Charles E Cobb, Jr., 2001, Boston: Beacon Press

⁴ Consensus Document of the We the People – Math Literacy for All Alliance, September 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ut2A3VkpjEQ6eeVQj0Cba9-51kwfzm4G/view> (retrieved 6/13/2022)

problem everyday must be centrally involved in designing and implementing solutions to the problem.

“In this country, you have to earn your insurgency. You have to capture the imagination of the people in the federal government who actually want to close the gap between our espoused ideals and the practices that we tolerate. This gap has existed throughout our history, and there are always people trying to close it. The students in the Algebra Project and the Young People’s Project face the same problem we faced in the 1960s. America is as practical as ever; unless our youth can actually demonstrate that they are part of the solution, hammering away at the doors or in the streets isn’t going to create change.”⁵

In a July 28th – 30th, 2022 online national conference co-hosted by the We the People – Math Literacy for All Alliance and the Algebra Project, we aim to embody Bob’s vision for students and teachers to be at the center, along with mathematicians, mathematics educators, researchers and community activists, in designing and implementing strategies that raise the floor of math literacy, because math literacy is a key feature of Quality Public School Education as a Civil/Constitutional Right⁶. Our aim is to broaden participation in the We the People – Math Literacy for All Alliance, learn from each other, and inspire collective action that engages our local communities and the nation to continue this struggle together.

For the 2022 online national conference schedule, visit: <https://whova.com/web/hel%40gNXMszeWGZ6IbLF%40yqlqQhGH%40WWJNQbpGbATHhXw%3D/>

Free online conference registration link:
https://whova.com/portal/registration/wpmlc_202207

⁵ An Earned Insurgency: Quality Education as a Constitutional Right, Robert P Moses, The Harvard Educational Review, Volume 79, No. 2, Summer 2009

⁶ In Education, Returning to ‘Normal’ is Not Good Enough, Bob Moses, published posthumously on 8/24/2021, The Imprint, <https://imprintnews.org/opinion/returning-to-normal-in-education-is-not-good-enough/58069> (retrieved 6/13/2022)