

A Joint Policy Statement of The Algebra Project, Young People's Project, and Quality Public Education as a Constitutional Right

To be Presented by *Ryan Mason, President Baltimore Algebra Project and Megan Sherman, New Member of Algebra Project*

Just as voting rights were required for full citizenship in the United States forty years ago, *economic access* is required for full citizenship today. In the 21st century, education is the essential pathway for young people to that economic access. Unless young people gain economic access through high quality education and meaningful employment, they and their children will be confined to the margins of life—often the criminal justice system—and caught in a relentless cycle of disenfranchisement.

A recent study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the top seven jobs of the future, in terms of income and growth, are computer/technology related jobs. National programs such as The Algebra Project have been at the forefront of improving math literacy as a prerequisite to this expanding part of our economy. The Young People's Project employs high school students to tutor junior high school students in math and to lead community math games through the groundbreaking Flagway program. However, even innovative programs such as these are not nearly enough to secure opportunity for all children.

Most work to improve public education is school, district, or state based. 45 states are currently engaged in lawsuits that confront educational inequity. For decades, youth advocates and research institutions around the nation have worked to challenge the over-emphasis on testing as the dividing line between school success and failure. Educators have fought to diversify curriculum and improve teacher preparation and training. Youth-led organizations have struggled to improve the food our children eat at school, the buildings our children learn in, and to increase opportunities for arts education. A national movement that aspires to guarantee high quality public schools for all children could offer media coverage, technical assistance, resources, and information to bolster this critical local work. This is part of the mission of Quality Public Education as a Constitutional Right.

Every community in America needs free, high quality public school education to thrive. A national movement is essential to connecting people from different communities so they can leverage their power into a force that could counterbalance the current trends toward the privatization of education in America.

The movement to replace public school education with private schools and quasi-public charter schools has money, momentum, and political power. The current national conversation on education is centered in the dominant narrative of 'the failing public schools' and the need for 'school choice.' According to a recent Washington Post article, George Bush, as part of his plan to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act, has proposed that for each public school student that transfers to a private school, the federal government would divert up to \$7500 of public school funds to private school scholarships. A recent report called *Strategic Grantmaking: Foundations and the School Privatization Movement*, states that "Privatizing public education transforms the educational environment from one that builds a sense of collective purpose and nurtures democratic ideals to one that emphasizes individual choice and makes education a commodity to be produced and consumed in the marketplace."

We believe that education is too important a public function to be run by corporate and private interests with any bottom line other than educational excellence for all students. We believe that a

free, high quality public education is a fundamental civil and human right that should be protected by the United States Constitution. We believe that the foundation and core of a democracy is an informed and engaged populace, and that the development of an informed and engaged populace *requires* a free, high quality public school education for every child.

We are committed to community driven education action and reform:

- We support local communities in discussing educational issues in ongoing community forums;
- We partner with local youth, education advocacy, and service organizations to promote student, parent, teacher and other community member's active participation in improving local public education;
- We promote civic engagement in historically disenfranchised communities;
- We build the skills of young people and other stakeholders in developing action research to support local, regional, and national organizing and advocacy;
- We promote a national conversation about the state of public education in America as a strategy for building demand for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing high quality public education for all of America's children.

Our question to you is:

How will you protect and improve access to high quality, *public education* and do you pledge to support a constitutional amendment guaranteeing high quality, public education for all of America's children?