

# The Math Movement · Our Vision

Many economic measures of racial inequality have not improved since the 1960s, such as ratios of average earnings and wealth (Aliprantis, Carroll, and Young (2023)). A key driver of such economic outcomes is education. In the United States today, K-12 education remains separate and unequal. In our state, Ohio, Black and white students attend school in separate buildings (Aliprantis and Jayaram (2023)). And those separate schools do not perform equally. Half of K-12 Black students in Ohio attend a school whose average test score would be ranked in the bottom 5 percent for white students (Aliprantis and Jayaram (2023)).

Our response to this ugliness is to create something beautiful – a community where we nurture kids’ creativity and love of learning, we celebrate each other’s individuality, and we support one another when confronted with obstacles like violence, poverty, and racism. At The Math Movement, we want to live in a world where everyone has the ability to develop their potential to add something beautiful to the world. And we believe that the world is what we make of it – that a group of people working together can change the separate and unequal opportunity in our society. We see a path to this future through a major effort to support our public schools, where concerned citizens build community to expand educational opportunity.

By educational opportunity, we do not mean that we want to place information into our students’ minds. Instead, we want to invite students to use their minds to discover beauty in the world, with math being a primary example. We want kids to explore and find new directions rather than following directions. If we can get kids excited about learning and foster their creativity, we know this will lead to their developing freedom of thought and flexibility of mind.

It is remarkable that these habits of mind we cultivate for solving mathematical problems can be focused on solving social problems. When flexibility of mind is combined with empathy and commitment to a community, we are able to approach social problems from new angles and find new solutions. And we see problems when we look at our society. We see a world where kids have little agency and where they are often exposed to violence and trauma. We see a world where many try to elevate themselves by pushing others down. In our country, we see people continuing to receive different opportunities based on the arbitrary designation of race. And within ourselves, we find the bad habits of mind that have helped to create these problems.

Faced with these problems, we work together to develop the positive habits of flexibility of mind and empathy, and to direct them toward service to our community. We run summer camps to create places where students can let go of motivation based on fear and the need for status, and to instead develop motivation based on self-expression, beauty, possibility, empathy, and service to others. It is extremely empowering for our students – and for us as adults – to be part of a community where we support each other in developing, and where we simply appreciate, the beauty inside each individual. As our community grows, we hope it can serve as an example for changing the way we treat kids, the way we treat each other, and the racial inequality we have come to accept in our country.

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\*By Dionissi Aliprantis, Sept. 20, 2023. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent views of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland or the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.