

SEGUE: Budzban, Area Math Games Leagues Headed to National Flagway Competition

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This week on Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's premier radio show that discusses the lives and work of the people on campus, College of Arts and Sciences Dean Greg Budzban interviews Maisha Moses, executive director at the Young People's Project (YPP).

The conversation between Budzban and Moses will air at 9 a.m. this Sunday, May 5, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and siue.edu/wsie.

Moses earned a bachelor's in psychology from Harvard University and a master's in mathematics from SIU Carbondale.

Founded in 1996, YPP uses math literacy work to help develop the abilities of elementary through high school students—regardless of ethnicity, gender or class—to succeed in school and in life, and in doing so involves them in efforts to eliminate institutional obstacles to their success.

"I like to say that the Young People's Project was started by children," Moses says. "All of the students were present or current participants in the Algebra Project, which just so happens to have been founded by my dad, Bob Moses.

"He was concerned and still is very concerned in math literacy as a civil right and a floor for full participation as a citizen in the 21st century."

Moses worked to "gamify" mathematics, so students could learn through an activity similar to sports.

In addition to his championing of mathematics literacy, Bob Moses is also an historically significant civil rights activist. He played a pivotal role in the 1964 Freedom Summer project and voting rights struggles in Mississippi.

The students who initially organized the YPP hoped to take principles and skills gained through the Algebra Project, and take it into the realm of after-school activities.

Budzban and Moses will be working together at the YPP's National Flagway Tournament on May 4 in Washington, D.C. at the National Math Festival.

"The Flagway game is based on the Möbius function," Moses says. "We created a game and series of activities that enables students to use basic mathematics to learn the Möbius function through a structured process."

To play Flagway, students decode a sequence of numbers into a combination of colors, then run or walk to their color combination along a corresponding color-coded pathway on the Flagway structure.

“It is quite a spectacle,” Moses says. “They bring the same kind of energy, hard work, focus and dedication that you see young people bringing to basketball or baseball.”

“For me, it’s exciting how engaged the parents get, and they get just as animated as other audience members who witness sporting events.

“I’ve had the privilege of being at the last two National Math Festivals, and we have two teams from Alton headed to the tournament later this week,” Budzban says. “Through the course of playing this game, they learn many things that standard peers in their classmates have yet to see. I think other school districts will catch on to see what we are doing.”

Ten teams from across the United States will be participating in the competition, which will take place during this weekend’s National Math Festival.

“The festival is sponsored by elite organizations like Intel, Google and Microsoft,” Budzban says. “I find it extremely significant that the Young People’s Project has become a part of that celebration of mathematics.”

To hear the entire conversation, tune in to Segue this Sunday, May 5, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and siue.edu/wsie.

