

**Defending Professor Jo Boaler and her work**  
**By Kim Bomar and Sara Woodham**  
**Outgoing Co-chairs of PASS, Parent Advocates for Students of Color**



As parent advocates for educational equity in our local school district, we have been dismayed by the ugly turn in the campaign to derail the new California Mathematics Framework -- from opposition to the Framework itself, to damaging misinformation-based personal attacks on Dr. Jo Boaler, a professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education. While we are very familiar with the intensity of the "math wars" that have plagued California education policy for years, we feel the egregious nature of these attacks requires us to speak out.

Our experience with Dr. Boaler assures us that she is a math educator with firm belief that children of all backgrounds are capable of engaging in advanced levels of math. As African American parents with children in peninsula schools since 2007, we are well aware of simmering, and full-bore "math wars", the effect of which, even if not the intent, is to maintain an unacceptable gap. High achieving students improve their selective college prospects by outperforming their peers, middle of the road students struggle for conceptual understanding favoring 'study for the test' expediency, and under-resourced, historically under-represented students disproportionately are left far behind. Dr. Boaler has focused her career on improving math opportunities for those who disengage from math early in their school lives, recognizing the disturbing overlap with under-resourced and HUR students. Any suggestion that Jo Boaler is part of this problem instead of a person committed to finding a solution is appalling to those of us who have seen her tireless advocacy for proficiency in math for students of color over nearly two decades.

This objective of the Framework committee is to update California's math framework, making it more inclusive and relevant to a diverse base of students with ever more diverse career paths, and creating more accessible and relevant problem-solving opportunities. This aligns with Dr. Boaler's expertise, and is heading in the right direction. There are obviously different schools of thought on how to update math curriculum and pedagogy for today's students. As observers of what should be constructively healthy, informed, scholarly debate of the Framework, some of the critique of the committee work has focused unseemingly on Dr. Boaler in particularly rancorous and personal terms. Nonetheless, due process procedures of the committee have provided ample opportunities for constructive public feedback.

False or uninformed claims that Dr. Boaler is enriching herself at the expense of Black and Brown children are equally baffling. Her detractors are grossly misinterpreting the payment terms of one consulting agreement to intentionally slander her character, and taint her academic credibility. This is not ok. For nearly a decade, the curriculum for a Bay Area STEM program for children of African heritage (which we both support) has relied heavily on her Stanford University website: [youcubed.org](http://youcubed.org), for free math resources. We have seen the positive impact on our own children and others in the program, by approaching math collaboratively. Although we believe other educators, especially people of color, should be sought out, and well-compensated for their expertise, we do not object to her being well-compensated for hers.

The worst elements of this fiasco, cast as it was in social media, are accusations that Dr. Boaler "weaponized" the police against a fellow professor. This was not the case, as could have been readily established with direct communications. As a lamentable sign of our times, the need to tweet prevailed,

resulting in alarming threats to Dr. Boaler and her family, and an unavoidable distraction from critical work. Only one-third of California students are graduating proficient in math, continuing with the status quo does not make sense.

Dr. Boaler is one of five experts chosen by the California Department of Education to write up the policy decisions of the 20-person committee of educators charged under state law with updating and improving the Framework. Though just one of many participants in the Framework renewal process, she has been targeted by opponents of the proposed new Framework. California’s students deserve better than the failing marks they have—let’s allow the CDE to continue its work and try to improve math education for all California students, preparing an effective and diverse workforce for the future.

