

February 12, 2020

An Open Letter to the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Mathematics:

The undersigned are current and former employees of the National Museum of Mathematics, in New York City. We write to make you aware of several ongoing issues that concern us deeply and that we expect will be of equally great concern to the Board. The examples of mismanagement, discriminatory conduct and a toxic workplace culture that we raise below are in our view directly attributable to poor leadership at the Executive Director level.

With respect to our educational mission, race and class discrimination are embedded in the Museum's practices. School group visits take place regularly throughout the school year. They consist of time with the exhibits, a pizza lunch, and a classroom session. Since 2015, all groups from underprivileged (Title 1) schools, who visit MoMath on scholarship, have received diminished services in the form of truncated 30-minute classroom sessions, instead of the 45-minute sessions provided for schools that pay the Museum directly. (K through 3rd grade lessons are all 30 minutes, which is age appropriate.) The Title 1 sessions are packed in back-to-back so that, between cleaning up and transferring students in and out, the actual lessons are closer to 20-25 minutes long. Shortening these sessions, the Museum says, allows it to serve a greater number of students, but that cannot explain why students from wealthier schools are treated more favorably. Our grade 4+ lessons have been carefully crafted to work at the 45 minutes length. Half-length versions do not give most students time to solve the problems, leaving many of them believing that they cannot succeed in math. This dramatically undermines our goals. We cannot remain silent while the Museum chooses to offer sub par services for the least fortunate students who are vastly more likely to be people of color.

This is not an isolated example. It reflects a pattern of devaluing people of color and those who are not wealthy donors, which is apparent even in the Museum's public communications. In January 2020, MoMath marketed a Prisoner's Dilemma event for Martin Luther King Day with a trivializing reference to Dr. King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. The MoMath Twitter account received an important message from math educator Sam Shah lambasting this insensitive use of Dr. King's brave legacy of civil disobedience. Sam's post was retweeted and commented on by many from the math community, but MoMath never responded.

While many among the math education community, and perhaps among the Board, worry that criticizing the Museum might tarnish the public perception of mathematics, we believe that a truthful, ethical and constructive approach will make the Museum and our community stronger.

Unfortunately, the Museum actively discourages any form of negative feedback, and the staff has virtually no autonomy. This repressive culture has been described on social media and in the many letters you have received from former employees about mismanagement, abuse of hours, and general lack of respect for staff. In fact, the Museum's formal Employee Policies Document warns staff members against contacting the Board. Staff members who have advocated for improvements in the Museum's operations have seen obstacles set up in their paths and have been pressured out or fired. The rapid turnover of MoMath staff, which has an average tenure of less than a year and a half, is evidence of this. Joe Quinn, former Chief of Mathematics for MoMath, was fired shortly after expressing his opposition to the discriminatory provision of education services to Title 1 schools. We believe this to be unlawful retaliation against him.

The issues discussed here are symptoms that, even if addressed individually, would not resolve the underlying poor character of Cindy Lawrence as a leader. Whereas she exerts maximal effort to control staff and uphold artificial appearances, another leader could succeed by simply allowing the brilliant and motivated people, who are attracted to our mission, to do what they are good at.

The Museum needs a leader who genuinely values math education for all, who treats people with respect, and who has demonstrated a sincere commitment to diversity and inclusion. We hope that you share our vision for a National Museum of Mathematics that lives up to its name.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph A Quinn  
Chief of Mathematics, 5/2018 - 12/2019



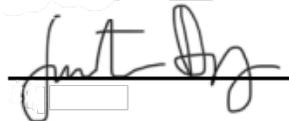
February 18, 2020

Dr. Nick Rauh  
Chief of Mathematics, 6/2015 - 8/2017



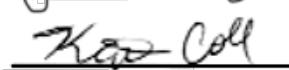
18 February 2020

Samantha Duong  
Interpreter & Asst. Manager, 4/2018 - present



February 24, 2020

Katrina Colletti  
Interpreter, 9/2017 - 4/2018



2/26/20

Jeffrey Shih  
Interpreter, 3/2015 - 7/2019

Jeffrey Shih

2/29/2020