

"We've Only Just Begun."

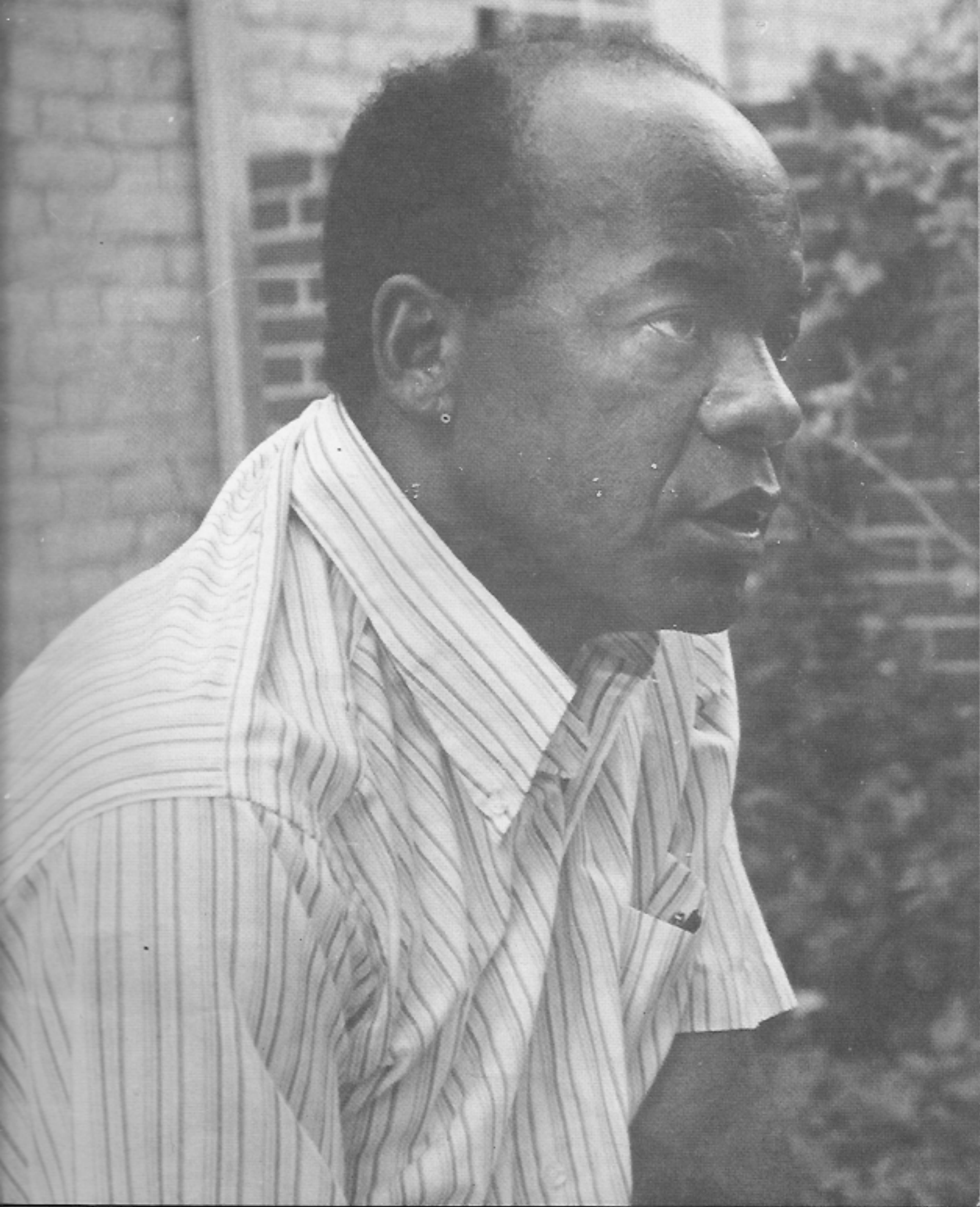


JULIUS W. HOBSON, SR. MIDDLE SCHOOL

DEDICATION WEEK

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JULIUS W. HOBSON, 1922-1977



The Story of the Julius W. Hobson, Sr. Middle School

by John Hanrahan

JULIUS HOBSON didn't have much faith in established leaders. As a man whose life was dedicated to fighting against injustices, Hobson often said that if anything socially useful was to be accomplished it was up to the people to do it. Leaders might eventually do the right thing, but only if people at the grassroots level pushed them along, sometimes quietly and sometimes through hell-raising as the occasion warranted.

As Hobson himself put it, in order to "get the mule's attention" people sometimes have to hit "him with a two-by-four." But he added, "after you get the mule's attention you have to have something to tell him worthwhile—and in order to tell him that you've got to do a little homework."

It was Hobson's faith in the ability of people to work together to achieve worthy goals that makes it so appropriate that the Julius W. Hobson Sr. Middle School program has been named in his honor. Working quietly but fervently beginning in 1976, a group of Capitol Hill-area parents, students, educators and community representatives "did their homework" and coaxed, politicked and nudged District of Columbia school administration officials into granting them their own middle school program. In August 1981, School Superintendent Floretta McKenzie approved the community's request to name the program for the black activist who more than any other person was responsible for bringing justice into the school system and into so many other aspects of District life during the 1960s and 1970s.

This, briefly, is the story of Julius Hobson and the middle school that has been named in his honor.

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JULIUS HOBSON was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1922. His father operated a cleaning plant and a drug store; his mother was a

teacher and principal at a large elementary school. "Having come up around that," Hobson said, "I was familiar with education and had heard talk about education at the dinner table and everywhere else." Hobson's early leanings were obviously to education, rather than to business. He said his father wouldn't let him work in the drugstore "because I used to give his candy to kids."

Hobson attended Industrial High School, then went on to Tuskegee Institute where he received his undergraduate degree. He later served in World War II as an artillery spotter, flying some three dozen missions, for which he was awarded three bronze stars and a number of other medals. After the war, he went to New York City and briefly attended Columbia University before coming to Washington for graduate work in economics at Howard University.

Much of Hobson's later socialist political philosophy was shaped by Marxist and radical economics and political science professors under whom he studied at Howard. Upon leaving Howard, Hobson was hired as a junior professional, specializing in economic theory, in the Library of Congress' Legislative Reference Service. After six years in that job, he was hired by the Social Security Administration as a statistician.

In the 1950s, Hobson began to get involved in community issues. His activism, he said, "was just decided for me at birth. I didn't make any conscious decision that I was going to involve myself in this. Being born black in the United States, I got angry with the system." At the time his community activism began, Hobson was married to his first wife, Carol, and they had two children, Jean and Julius, Jr. Naturally one of his immediate concerns was his children's education—and he didn't like what he saw.

"There was busing going on," Hobson recalled. "In fact, I had to bus my little boy around a white school that was one block down the street, across to Brookland School in North-

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cast. And I just got involved in the PTA and went from the PTA to the civic associations, and the NAACP. . . ." Hobson then went on to head the D.C. Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality and in that post achieved "my proudest accomplishment in this city," namely changing racist hiring practices by downtown retail outlets. By his own count, CORE between 1960 and 1964 set up more than 80 picket lines at 120 establishments, including major department stores, supermarkets, automobile dealers and shoe stores. The demonstrations resulted in the hiring of some 5,000 black clerks by 1964. As Hobson observed, "When I started out with picket lines in 1960, a black clerk was as rare as a white crow" but a decade later they were "all over the place."

Hobson also led the effort that in 1962 caused D.C. Transit to hire its first black bus drivers, and organized a mass demonstration that led to local legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in rental housing. His confrontation-style politics sometimes resulted in his arrest. In 1964, he staged a lie-in in a white ward of the Washington Hospital Center to dramatize the institution's racial segregation of patients. He was arrested and jailed, but his action forced desegregation of the hospital. The same year, his arrest during a sit-in at Benjamin Franklin School spotlighted racial segregation in the city's private business schools, and led to their integration. In the 1960s and early 1970s, he was also involved in issues as diverse as a war on rats in inner-city areas, a drive to stop police harassment of black people and the fight against major freeway projects. He was also a vocal critic of the Vietnam War and was a featured speaker at many anti-war rallies.



During this hectic period, Hobson kept education issues at the top of his agenda. In 1965, he filed a lawsuit to end discriminatory and inequitable policies in the D.C. public school system. At the time, Hobson found that the per-pupil expenditure was \$411 higher in more affluent, predominantly white areas of the city than in lower-income, predominantly black areas of the city; that a rigid "track system" in the schools segregated children along racial and economic lines, rather than according to ability; that all-black or predominantly black schools were overcrowded, with some on double shifts, while predominantly white schools were underutilized; that teachers were segregated according to race in the various schools. In 1967, Hobson, heavily in debt because of the costs of the lawsuit, won a stunning victory when U.S. Appeals Court Judge J. Skelly Wright ordered the school system to abolish the track system, to integrate school faculties, to provide transportation for children in overcrowded schools to go to underutilized schools, and to equalize expenditures among schools.

In 1968, Hobson won a seat on the newly-created elected Board of Education. In 1971, as one of the founders of the D.C. Statehood Party, Hobson ran for the District's non-voting delegate post in Congress and was defeated by Walter Fauntroy. Had he won, Hobson said he would have used the post to lobby Congress for D.C. Statehood. The D.C. Constitutional Convention held this year would never have been possible without Hobson's pioneering work in the statehood movement.

In 1971, Hobson learned that he had multiple myeloma, an incurable cancer of the spine, and he had just six months to live. Confined to a wheelchair, and aided by his wife, Tina, Hobson almost miraculously fought off death and continued to work for the issues that had always

been important to him. In 1972, he was the vice presidential candidate on the People's Party ticket headed by Dr. Benjamin Spock; in 1974 he was elected to the City Council on the Statehood Party ticket and stayed on the job until his death on March 23, 1977. As *D.C. Gazette* editor Sam Smith wrote, "Julius Hobson changed the face of modern Washington as much as any single person" and "was a man as important to Washington in his way as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were to the nation."

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Julius W. Hobson Sr. Middle School traces its origins to a meeting in the spring of 1976 when parents from the Edmonds-Peabody Elementary School PTA met to discuss the continuation of their children's education beyond the sixth grade and their concern about the quality of existing junior high schools. In 1977, School Board member John Warren established a Ward 6 Task Force composed of parents, students, teachers and community people from five clusters of schools to study alternatives to junior high schools.

Representatives of Cluster 3, which included Edmonds-Peabody, Maury, Kingsman and Lovejoy Elementary Schools, held some 20 meetings in late 1977 and early 1978 and from this developed a report for the Board of Education and then-Superintendent Vincent Reed recommending establishment of a middle school. In return, Cluster 3 offered to have Edmonds closed as an elementary school. The Board agreed in June 1978 to close Edmonds after completion of a middle school feasibility study by the community and the school administration. In 1978-1979, a pilot middle school program was established at Edmonds and the Edmonds-Peabody PTA set up a Middle School Task Force chaired by Robert Borth. After many more meetings from September 1978 to March 1979, the task force submitted its report. In the spring of 1979, the school administration gave the go-ahead to close Edmonds in July 1979, and to locate a prototype Region IV Middle School in one portion of Watkins Elementary School for the 1979-1980 school year. In that first year at Watkins, the middle school enrollment was approximately 100 students in grades five through seven, compared to 259 in grades five through eight in the 1981-1982 school year.



The task force's work was far from glamorous. It involved many tedious meetings and much painstaking, hard work. On one occasion, the person in whose house a meeting was being held had grown weary after a long evening and said he was sending everyone home so he could go to bed. Another member argued that the point they had been haggling over was too important to be left undecided, and finally convinced the host and other task force members to continue the meeting. This being done, the member who argued for continuing the meeting promptly fell asleep—but the others carried on and settled the disputed issue. It was this spirit of pulling together that brought the task force to its eventual goal.

In May 1981, the Board of Education approved a resolution formally creating what was then called the Region D Middle School. A year earlier, task force members had agreed to ask the school system to name the middle school program in Hobson's honor. It wasn't until August 1981 that newly-installed Superintendent Floretta McKenzie approved the name for the middle school.

Throughout the country, many educators and school districts view middle schools as a superior alternative method of education for pre-adolescent and early adolescent students, those approximately 10 to 14 years old. Middle school programs are felt to be better designed to meet individual needs at a crucial period in children's lives when they are undergoing physical, mental and emotional changes. Many educators feel that junior high schools generally do not meet the special needs of this age group, and often thrust children into impersonal, rigid and



competitive social and educational situations which they are not yet emotionally mature enough to handle. Middle schools try to meet these special needs of this age group through flexible, individualized instruction; through the use of teams of specially trained teachers who work closely with each other, with counselors, with librarians and with other specialists to assess continually each student's progress, with changes made as needed; through emphasis on learning independently by using resources and study and research techniques; through diverse "exploratory courses"—i.e., the arts, language,

gymnastics; through specially designed health and physical education programs; and through continued development of basic communication and computational skills. The key interrelated facets of the curriculum are the analytical (mathematics, science, social studies, language), personal dynamics (health, physical and personal growth, social dynamics) and self-expression (exploratory) courses.

Veola M. Jackson, principal at Hobson and Peabody, said Julius Hobson's name perfectly embodies the ideals and goals of the middle school. "Julius Hobson did so much for students, for the D.C. public schools and for education in this city, and yet his achievements have not been recognized since his death," she said. And, noted Loraine Bennett, former Edmonds-Peabody PTA president, it's not just a building named after Hobson (because the middle school continues to occupy the third and fourth floor of Watkins), but rather "a living, breathing program that centers on the needs of kids."

Yewande Oshin, a seventh grader, said she felt it was appropriate that the school be named for Julius Hobson because "he was a leader like Martin Luther King." Eighth grader Mark Thorne agreed, saying one of Julius Hobson's goals was "to improve the public school system, especially for minorities."

Oshin, Thorne and many other middle school students, from fourth to eighth grade—all of whom are too young to remember Hobson's activist days—said that until recently none of them knew who Julius Hobson was. In preparation for the middle school dedication, though, students thoroughly researched his background, wrote a script and prepared slides for a presentation on his life. Thorne said one of his favorite stories about Julius Hobson concerned "the time he said he had collected rats and that he was going to drop them all in Georgetown where the rich white people lived unless the city did something to clean up rats in the ghetto." Many years after that campaign, which resulted in the city instituting a rat extermination program in Northeast D.C., Hobson acknowledged that his threat was mainly a bluff—he never had more than 10 rats, but the important thing is that Georgetown residents and city officials believed that he really intended to unleash a rat army in the District's most fashionable area.

Hobson students contacted at random say they like their school. Almost all said they enjoyed the exploratory courses—and wished they could have them more often. Crystal Vaughn, a sixth-grader, was typical. She said she liked being able “to pick the class you want from the exploratory courses” which include general art, creative writing, photography, gymnastics, dance, drama, French, instrumental music and choral group. She is taking French.

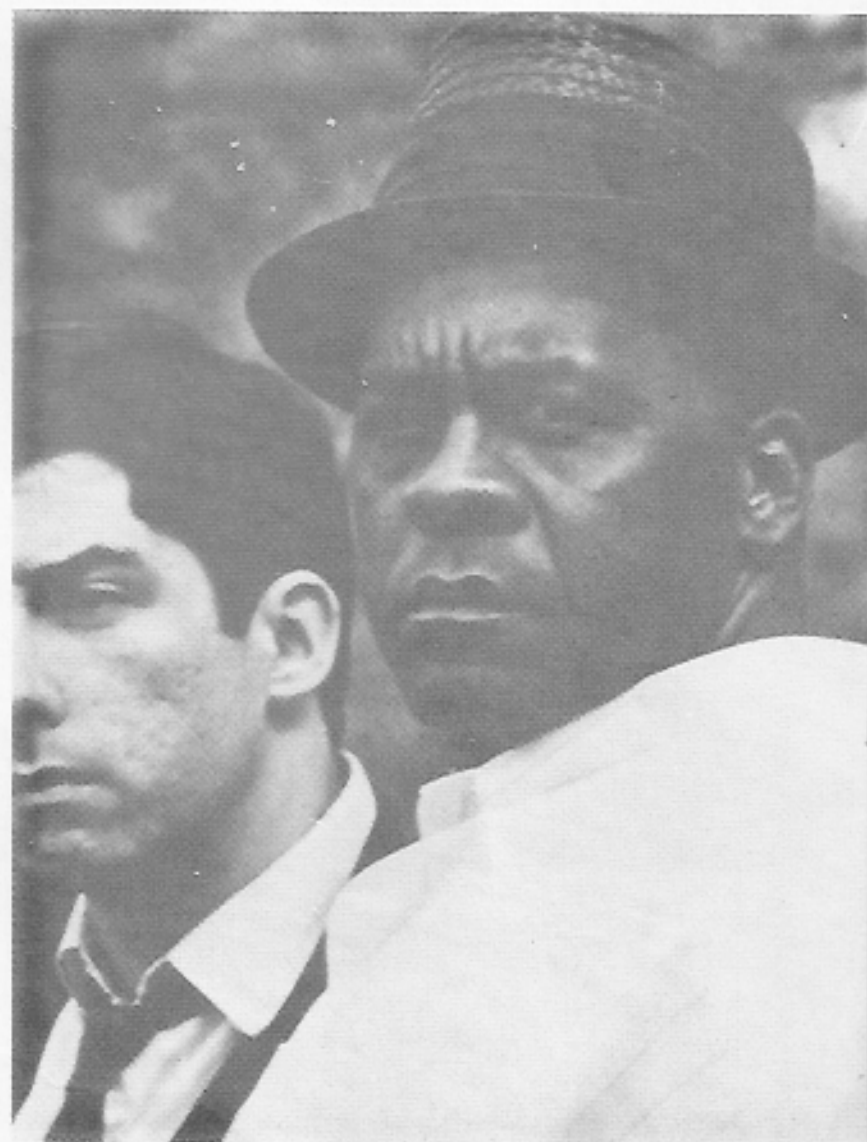
Students said that the middle school has a good learning atmosphere, free of problems of fighting and drug abuse which many of their friends at junior high schools complain of. The Hobson students’ major complaints seem to concern things their school does not have—some mentioned a desire for a gymnasium, while many wished the school had its own building.

The lack of a separate building for the middle school is also a main concern of Principal Veola Jackson and teachers such as Andrea J. Irby, both of whom have been with the middle school program from its inception. “The school system allows us a maximum of 400 students in the middle school, but we can’t handle that because of our lack of space,” said Jackson. “We’ve got 259 students now, and there is no place to put anyone else.” She was hopeful that the school system would be able to come up with a permanent home for the Hobson program. In its present quarters, she said, the program has generally been neglected by the school system in everything from appropriate staffing, to a two-year delay in approval of the exploratory courses, to the lack of a science laboratory and of furniture large enough for pre-adolescents and adolescents to sit comfortably in.

Despite the lack of a building and the other problems, Jackson said, the school works “because of the joint community-parent-student-staff effort. It shows that you can do things and make them work in spite of the system.” As an example, Irby noted that community people—not school system employees—come in and help teach the exploratory courses. And, said Jackson, the Peabody-Hobson PTA, through its 1981 Capitol Hill Classic 10-kilometer race, raised more than \$8,000 to purchase science books for all grade levels at Hobson and Peabody.

Parents, too, feel the program has worked. As one mother put it, the Hobson program has provided her daughter and son with a readiness for high school that she doubts they could receive at a junior high school. “It’s a very stabilizing experience,” she said. “The exploratory courses, the close relationship between the staff and the kids, the counseling that is such a critical piece in a middle school, the challenge, the philosophy of Mrs. Jackson and the staff, have all been fantastic for my children,” she said.

Julius Hobson once said, after he knew he hadn’t long to live, that he would like to be remembered as someone who “helped to improve the quality of education in the District of Columbia.” Julius Hobson, of course, did just that, and his legacy lives on in the middle school program named in his honor.



**RESOLUTION, AS SUBMITTED
TO THE D.C. CITY COUNCIL**

- Whereas, Julius W. Hobson, Sr., in 1969 recognized and so stated, "We must lay the foundation for a superior education system on a framework of justice and equal opportunity for all children" and;
- Whereas, Julius W. Hobson, Sr. was well-recognized and revered by all strata of the community for his tireless efforts to guarantee equality, justice and peace and for all students quality education in the District of Columbia, regardless of race, creed, sex, handicap or national origin, and;
- Whereas, Parents, educators, children and friends of Julius W. Hobson, Sr., being inspired by these noble and splendid actions by Mr. Hobson, committed themselves to building a living memorial in his honor, and;
- Whereas, The Julius W. Hobson Sr. Middle School Program was so designed to instill in new generations the ideals, the values, the courage of living and the usefulness of life exemplified by this great human being, and;
- Whereas, The parents, educators, children and friends of the Middle School Program as they celebrate the sixtieth birthday of Julius W. Hobson, Sr., have agreed to pay special tribute to Mr. Hobson,
- Therefore, Be it resolved that on this day, May 27, 1982, the Julius W. Hobson Sr. Middle School Program be dedicated as a living memorial to the life, actions and spirit of Julius W. Hobson, Sr.