

# NO EXCUSES

Eleven Schools and Districts That Make Preparing Students for Citizenship a Priority, and How Others Can Do It, Too



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Northport-East Northport Union Free School District, Northport, NY  
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Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology,  
Laurinburg, NC  
Terry Sanford High School, Fayetteville, NC



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A REPORT FROM THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS

WITH FUNDING SUPPORT FROM THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION  
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FOREWORD BY JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR

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**A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE** The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools uses the term “civic learning” to convey the necessary elements of effective civic education. These elements include classroom instruction in civics and government, history, economics, law, and geography; service-learning linked to classroom learning; experiential learning; learning through participation in models and simulations of democratic processes; guided classroom discussion of current issues and events; and meaningful student participation in school governance.

## FOREWORD

BY JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR

Our nation's public schools were founded for civic purposes — to help create citizens who had the knowledge, skills, and virtues to sustain and strengthen democracy within an ever more diverse population. The better educated our citizens are, the better equipped they will be to preserve the system of government we have. And we have to start with the education of our nation's young people. Knowledge about our government is not handed down through the gene pool. Every generation has to learn it, and we have some work to do.

Over the past half-century the civic purposes of our schools have been progressively sidelined. In the 1960s, the typical U.S. student was offered courses in government, democracy, and civics. She or he learned about citizenship in a democracy and the rights and responsibilities that come with it. Today, formal civics has all but vanished from the curriculum in favor of courses that transmit a body of facts about the U.S. government and its history.

Not surprisingly, we are failing to impart to today's students the information and skills they need to be responsible citizens. Only a little more than a third of Americans can name the three branches of government. Two-thirds of Americans know at least one of the judges on the Fox television show *American Idol*, but fewer than one in ten can identify the chief justice of the United States. In a 2006 study, only a quarter of 15- to 25-year-olds reported regular attentiveness to politics and political affairs.

Civic education is being marginalized in our country, and available curricula are lacking in teacher-friendly solutions to excite and engage students. Where civics is taught, it is consistently rated as one of students' least favorite subjects. The news is not all bad, however. In recent elections, young people participated in campaigns and at the polls in record numbers. Politicians and entertainers are learning how to excite young people about public affairs by speaking to them in their language and through their media.



I am so concerned over the state of civic learning in our nation that I've worked with educators and curriculum specialists to develop a 21st century civics program that is available free of charge to every school. "Our Courts" is a web-based education project designed to teach students civics and inspire them to be active participants in our democracy.

On the Our Courts website, [www.ourcourts.org](http://www.ourcourts.org), teachers and students will find interactive games and related material designed to inform them about our three branches of government, how they operate, and how citizens can most effectively be active, engaged civic participants. To ease the burdens placed on teachers, we're creating games and teaching materials that will provide quick and easy classroom activities to inspire and engage students, meet key learning goals and standards, and add more fun to teaching and learning civics.

Thankfully there are many schools and school districts across the nation that do recognize their historic civic mission and successfully fulfill that mission. This report is an exploration of how those schools and districts provide exceptional civic learning to their students despite curricular and assessment pressures and a growing emphasis on a few subjects at the expense of the vital task of preparing our youth for their roles as active and engaged citizens.

As co-chair of the National Advisory Committee of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, I commend the findings of this report to educators and policymakers alike, for practical examples of steps that any school and school district can take to meet their historic civic mission. I congratulate the schools and school districts examined for their commitment to providing the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong, informed, and engaged citizenship.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor  
Co-Chair, National Advisory Committee  
Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools  
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[www.ourcourts.org](http://www.ourcourts.org)

In 2008–2009, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS)—a consortium of organizations dedicated to preparing the next generation for citizenship—identified eleven schools and districts that had prioritized their civic mission and embedded civic learning into the core school experience of every student. These exemplar schools and districts showed that high-quality civic learning is not only possible, but replicable and scalable in schools and districts across the United States.

Despite the exemplar schools and districts’ diversity in geography and circumstances, they demonstrated five common elements necessary for a sustainable, systemic approach to civic learning:

1. A vision for the importance of civic learning and shared leadership to see it through;
2. A strategically designed curriculum that incorporated effective approaches to civic learning, including instruction in government, history, and law; guided discussions of current and controversial issues; simulations of democratic processes and procedures; service-learning or community service connected to the curriculum; student involvement in school governance; and extracurricular activities that encouraged civic skills and dispositions;
3. Hiring practices, performance reviews, and professional development that asserted and supported the importance of effective civic learning;
4. Opportunities to involve the community in the school and the school in the community;
5. A school climate that nurtured and modeled civic dispositions such as personal responsibility, student engagement in decision making, and mutual respect and tolerance.

These findings—intended for educators, policymakers, and advocates to use in helping their schools and districts meet their civic mission—suggest that institutionalizing civic learning is a matter of both policies and people.

POLICIES	PEOPLE
Money, time, and personnel are dedicated for civic learning.	An enthusiastic administrator, school board member, or teacher instigates making civic learning a priority.
Civic learning is included in the curriculum, even if it is not included on mandated standardized tests.	Creative, dedicated teachers—supported by their administration—make civic learning accessible and engaging.
Civic learning is included in assessments of faculty, students, and the school as a whole.	Teachers and administrators serve as role models of civically engaged citizens.
Faculty, staff, and school leaders with an inclination toward civic learning are recruited, hired, and rewarded.	Superintendents recognize the importance of the civic mission and exert positive influence.
Professional development in civic learning is provided to faculty.	Students engage in school and community-based opportunities to acquire and enhance civic competencies.

On the policy side, exemplar schools and districts established protocols and practices to ensure that civic learning was a visible, unequivocal priority, regardless of the makeup of the school's leadership or faculty.

At the same time, every school and district pointed to champions of civic education whose enthusiasm and dedication inspired others. These individuals often sparked or stoked the school's civic mission when those in other schools flagged.

Finally, these findings show that schools and districts do not need to follow a linear approach to institutionalizing civic learning. Whereas many education-reform efforts present a sequence of activities to achieve a desired end, CMS found that the elements essential to institutionalizing civic learning are interactive. Educators, policymakers, and advocates may find numerous starting points to advance a civic learning agenda and identify multiple, simultaneous opportunities to engage diverse stakeholders.

In total, these findings offer good news for the viability of the civic mission of schools and the health of our democracy—but only if schools and districts across the nation embrace them.

### 3 / THE LABORATORY OF SCHOOLS

#### **WHAT DOES QUALITY CIVIC LEARNING ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?**

Public schools were created in the United States with a primary purpose of preparing children to participate constructively as adult citizens in our democracy. In recent years, this historic, central function of the American public school has diminished.

Until the 1960s, three courses in civics and government were common in American high schools: civics, which explored the role of citizens especially at the local and state level; problems of democracy, which encouraged students to discuss current issues and events; and U.S. government, which focused on structures and function of government at the national level. Only the last is common today.

Moreover, in far too many schools, civic and government courses are taught in lecture format rather than through interactive approaches that have been shown to make the subjects more intellectually beneficial, interesting, and engaging to students.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of these factors, most American students have little opportunity to develop adequate civic knowledge or to learn the how and why of participatory citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, a growing body of research demonstrates that students' civic competencies and capacities can be improved with promising school and classroom practices that cultivate civic learning. These promising practices include discussing current events and social and political issues; studying government, history, and related social sciences; interacting with volunteer civic role models; participating in after-school activities; working on a service-learning project linked to

classroom curriculum; and engaging in simulations of democratic structures and processes.<sup>3</sup> Recent research also has determined that students who experienced interactive, discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based education) scored highest on 21st century competencies and skills, understanding economics, cooperating in groups, and paying attention to media—all vital to the professional and vocational workplace in America’s economic future.<sup>4</sup>

**WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATE AND SUSTAIN QUALITY CIVIC LEARNING IN OUR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS?**

Despite a disturbing trend against meaningful education for civics, some public schools and districts across the United States have instituted quality civic learning. In 2008–2009, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools examined eleven of these as exemplars of how schools and districts can successfully meet their civic mission.

NAME	TYPE	ENROLLMENT	TOWN	STATE
Albion Central School District	Rural	2,558	Albion	New York
Bell Gardens High School	Urban	3,339	East Los Angeles	California
César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy	Urban	1,135	Washington	District of Columbia
Community High School	Urban	2,161	West Chicago	Illinois
Forest Hills High School	Urban	3,777	Queens	New York
Greendale School District	Suburban	2,536	Greendale	Wisconsin
Maine West High School	Suburban	2,291	Des Plaines	Illinois
Northport-East Northport Union Free School District	Suburban	6,410	Northport	New York
Pinole Valley High School	Suburban	1,715	Pinole Valley	California
Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology	Rural	108	Laurinburg	North Carolina
Terry Sanford High School	Suburban	1442	Fayetteville	North Carolina

Campaign representatives interviewed administrators, faculty, students, and community members about the elements that created an overall, systemic approach to civic learning. Many elements echoed across institutions—a strategic vision for an engaging, interactive civic curriculum; resources dedicated to civic instruction and professional development; an authentic assessment scheme at the state or local level; a willingness to overcome the dead hand of tradition.

Nevertheless, no two exemplar schools and districts were identical in their approaches, nor did they assemble the elements in the same order. Furthermore, the exemplars were as diverse in character and origins as the students they serve. The schools and districts were located throughout the United States, included urban, suburban, and rural settings, and reached communities of varying social and economic status.

What united them was a vision and strategy for education that provided comprehensive civic learning opportunities for all students. They demonstrated that high-quality civic learning is at once possible, replicable, and scalable.

In the following pages, CMS reports on the elements that exemplar schools and districts used and that can be employed by any school, district, or alternative educational setting.

#### 4 / ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

### VISION AND LEADERSHIP: INNOVATIVE, SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS

#### EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS SHOWED

**A COMMITMENT TO CIVIC LEARNING ACROSS THE BOARD.** The superintendent, principal, teachers, students, community, and school board were united in a vision of the school as a laboratory of civic engagement. For instance, at Terry Sanford High School (NC), the principal described the school’s commitment to educating young people for democracy as a “unified belief system among the administration, faculty, and staff.”

Exemplar schools frequently articulated civic learning in their mission and vision statements. At Forest Hills High School (NY), the school motto was “Dedication, Perseverance, Social Consciousness.”

At Bell Gardens High School (CA), the administration collaborated with families to create a vision statement: “In partnership with parents, BGHS prepares our future citizens to be successful leaders and contribute to society.”

**A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE SCHOOL WOULD REACH ITS CIVIC GOALS.** Exemplar schools and districts did more than pay lip service to civic learning. They included civic learning goals in their expectations of students’ academic performance, behavior, and personal development. Moreover, they made those goals explicit and public.

Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC) displayed laminated copies of the school’s mission—“to prepare all students to be responsible, productive, and respectful members of society”—in all classrooms.

Bell Gardens High School (CA) broke down its civic vision and mission further into Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs), showing the steps students would achieve to fulfill the school’s civic mission. The principal and teachers displayed copies of the ESLRs on the wall or on their desks, and students referred casually and often to “esslers”—indicating that they knew the civic learning expected of them and understood they were held accountable.

**CREATIVE TEACHERS WHO SHOWED INITIATIVE AND FELT CONFIDENT THEY COULD TAKE RISKS.**

At schools where civic learning thrived, teachers enjoyed autonomy, responsibility, and leeway to introduce thought-provoking, appropriate civic topics in the classroom.

In some cases, motivated teachers flourished under an administration’s benign neglect. In more ideal situations, teachers expressed confidence in the administration’s trust and support.

At both Community High School and Maine West High School (IL), teachers credited their innovative civic learning programs—including service-learning and in-class discussions of controversial public issues—in part to their principals’ support and pride in the faculty’s creativity and commitment.

Teachers at Terry Sanford High School (NC) said the principal made having visitors to the school very easy. She also encouraged students and teachers to discuss controversial and political issues, acknowledging that informed, respectful dialogue is an important component of civic life.

“As long as they’re supporting learning, it’s not a problem,” said the social studies chair at Bell Gardens High School (CA), who encouraged teachers to let students develop an opinion on issues unfolding in the school, community, nationally, or internationally. “Those conversations are often some of the best times of the year.”

**AN ADMINISTRATION THAT DIDN’T SACRIFICE THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF CIVIC LEARNING FOR SHORT-TERM TESTING GOALS.** Every school was under pressure to meet testing goals, but exemplar schools remained firm in their commitment to civic learning as an integral part of their mission.

“Part of my job is to give teachers permission to go deeper on certain issues and not be constrained by the state tests,” said the assistant principal at Forest Hills High School (NY).

At Pinole Valley (CA), the service-learning coordinator called the principal a “change agent” who ensured that students had access to civic learning opportunities, regardless of other priorities.

**SUPERINTENDENTS WHO EXERTED POSITIVE INFLUENCE.** Far from being passive observers of civic learning, district administrators were instrumental in leveraging policies, resources, and political capital to create opportunities for students’ civic growth.

Teachers credited Albion’s (NY) robust civic learning in part to the district’s high expectations. The superintendent and assistant superintendent frequently interacted with community members and acted as contacts and champions of civic learning.

At Terry Sanford High School (NC), the superintendent mandated a student council, allocated \$500 a year for the school to train student leaders, and provided a support staff person dedicated to student councils in the district.

At Greendale High School (WI), the superintendent’s focus on creating and sustaining a school climate that engages students and fosters civic environment set the tone for civic learning as a priority for all schools in the district.

## **CURRICULUM**

### **PART OF WHAT MAKES THESE SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS EFFECTIVE ARE THEIR SITE-SPECIFIC APPROACHES.**

#### **EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS SHOWED**

**THERE’S NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH TO CIVIC LEARNING CURRICULUM.** Exemplar schools used combinations of all six promising approaches to civic learning and approached civics and citizenship from multiple angles.

The diversity of students’ responses at Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC) were typical. They defined civics as “the things required to become a citizen”; “an awareness of what’s going on in the country”; “understanding where the candidates stand on issues”; “a knowledge of rights”; “being a member of a community”; and “civil disobedience” along the models of Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Furthermore, the students identified relevance to the “real world” and “helping the community” as important parts of education.

Many students across the board identified their Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes as important conduits for civic learning; however, exemplar schools and districts demonstrated that civic learning was part of every student’s education, regardless of grade level or course schedule.

**A THOUGHTFUL, STRATEGIC DESIGN FOR CIVIC LEARNING.** Whether infused throughout the curriculum, spiraled, or threaded through a scope and sequence, civic learning had been intentionally built into students’ experience over all four years.

For instance, at Community High School (IL), the social studies department integrated knowledge from all four years of social studies to give students a context for what they were studying. The approach provided

more depth than a traditional class: it scaffolded essential themes and knowledge, sequenced content and skills, and included a variety of teaching methodologies.

At the César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC), all departments saw themselves equally as civic learning providers.

**HOME-GROWN CIVIC LEARNING PRACTICES AS WELL AS OUTSIDE PROGRAMS.** Exemplar schools often developed civic learning practices organically and supplemented their original work with resources from a national provider.

Without exception, exemplar schools used some combination of the six promising approaches to deepen students' understanding of an element in the curriculum, respond to students' inquiries, or connect academic learning with current events. Homegrown practices included documenting oral histories with veterans, visiting a soup kitchen and creating a database of what was needed to create nutritious meals, and holding mock elections. At Community High School (IL), seniors participated in a simulation of Congress that a social studies teacher created almost two decades ago.

Many exemplar schools also took advantage of the resources of civic learning providers, such as Facing History and Ourselves, the Constitutional Rights Foundation (Chicago and Los Angeles), the Center for Civic Education, and law firm-school partnership programs.

**IT WAS POSSIBLE BOTH TO MEET STANDARDS REQUIREMENTS AND DO INNOVATIVE THINGS.** Exemplar schools incorporated civic learning into lessons and classroom work they were doing anyway, often finding a critical thinking angle.

At Terry Stanford High School (NC), teachers reported feeling a lot of pressure from standardized test scores; however, as they gained more experience, teachers added civic learning curriculum and lessons beyond the requirements. They found one easy way to incorporate civics across more subjects was to give students civic-themed writing prompts.

Forest Hills High School (NY) complemented required history and social studies courses with practices specifically geared toward civic learning, such as law-related education.

Many schools supplemented required tests with assessments that better measured civic learning, including essays, presentations, projects, portfolios, and oral arguments.

**TEACHERS WHO WENT BEYOND DAY-TO-DAY INSTRUCTION.** Overall, civic learning required teachers to take initiative to do something creative or allow students to investigate a topic.

Many teachers welcomed the challenge. Even if they were not explicitly teaching civics, faculty at many exemplar schools said that current events provided a good jumping off point for class discussions, and sometimes civic learning projects. For instance, after a series of local shootings of crime subjects, Pinole

Valley High School (CA) students examined newspaper reports to discern editors' or reporters' biases. Teachers also recognized that civic learning demanded more of students. "We give them a little extra for their extra effort," said a teacher at Terry Sanford High School (NC). "Kids definitely respond to incentives."

**RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION AND COMMITMENT, INCLUDING STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SCHOOL'S CIVIC LEARNING.** Exemplar schools found ways to build in time, money, flexibility, and staff to make sure civic learning was a reliable part of the curriculum.

"We get a budget like every other school," said the principal at Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC), which applied for targeted funding from the Gates Foundation for computers. The technology allowed the school to make connections between 21st century skills and civic learning, both of which demand a combination of personal responsibility and teamwork.

Many schools also used team teaching models to cut down on substitutes, and they paired students' community work outside the school with departmental and faculty planning time.

Most significantly, schools such as the César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC) and Pinole Valley High School (CA) stressed the importance of a staff member devoted to supporting civic learning. At Chávez, the school had a dedicated position to ensure public policy is included at all levels of the school. At Pinole Valley and others, the district appointed and found funds for a service-learning coordinator.

At other schools, such as Community High School (IL), teacher pairs were responsible for the school's civic learning. In all cases, teachers reported that it was important for civic learning to be an explicit part of someone's job.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **TEACHERS NEED TIME AND RESOURCES TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING THEIR LEARNING BACK.**

#### **EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS SHOWED**

**AN EXPECTATION DURING THE HIRING PROCESS AND TEACHER EVALUATIONS THAT CIVIC LEARNING BE A PRIORITY.** Exemplar schools ensured civic learning by hiring mission-driven staff and training staff members consistently.

Several schools reported that the clarity and consistency of their mission attracted teachers who were dedicated to civic learning. The teachers with whom CMS met consistently related their subjects to public issues, making sure they were particular to the community and relevant to students' lives.

"We want people who will not just clock in and clock out but really engage the students," said the vice principal at Bell Gardens High School (CA).

At the Albion Central School District (NY) and others, expectations for civic learning were included in teacher evaluations, and the superintendent held staff accountable to the district’s mission, vision, and values.

**REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CIVIC LEARNING, ESPECIALLY FOR TEACHERS WORKING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM.** Teachers took advantage of civic learning programs and school-developed models to improve their civic content knowledge and instruction.

Forest Hills High School (NY) and other schools that worked with civic learning providers frequently took advantage of training opportunities, including for mock trial, moot court, law-related topics, and international comparative politics.

In addition, many exemplar schools and districts, including Albion Central School District (NY), offered summer institutes that focused on civic learning, especially for recent hires.

**PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING THAT ALLOWED FOR INNOVATION WITHIN THE REQUIRED FRAMEWORK.**

Teachers often reported that their best sources of learning were each other.

Because many exemplar schools used an interdisciplinary approach to civic learning, they frequently supported team teaching or course partnerships. At the César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC), for instance, the chemistry and music teachers offered a capstone course in forensics and public policy. At Terry Sanford High School (NC), the government and statistics classes partnered to bring in a guest speaker on election polling.

Beyond collaborating on classroom instruction, teachers shared knowledge either formally or informally. For instance, after collaborating with a consulting group, a core group of teachers at Chávez were trained to become teacher leaders, who in turn worked with other staff.

Other exemplar schools reported a similar model, although teachers reported they often sought advice and resources outside their assigned mentors. E-mail, discussion boards, conversations in the lunch room—and in one case, a regular pot luck dinner—provided additional, casual opportunities for teachers to discuss best practices and generate innovative ideas.

**STRUCTURES AND SUPPORT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.** Exemplar schools set aside time for ongoing democratic reflection and opportunities to make changes.

“Representatives from each curriculum team get together so everyone is clear on the role of each class in the sequence,” said the Humanities chair at Community High School (IL), which used a spiraling curriculum. “Ideally, everyone knows the big picture and what his or her part is.”

At the César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC), staff had structured discussions and planning sessions every Monday while students worked on out-of-school civic learning projects.

Every two weeks, the faculty at Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC) met, shared ideas for projects, and provided feedback using Critical Friends, a discussion model based on principles of democratic engagement.

Terry Sanford High School (NC) had a School Improvement Team, which consisted of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The group, which met monthly, was charged with thinking creatively about how to make substantial changes to the school.

**SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**  
**POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS ENSURED REGULAR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILIES.**

**EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS SHOWED**

**AN EXPECTATION OF MUTUAL BENEFIT—EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES WERE A RESOURCE FOR EACH OTHER.** While schools invited in speakers from the community or drew on public services, community members called the school requesting students’ involvement in a service or public project.

For instance, at Terry Sanford High School (NC), students were an integral part of a Fayetteville Beautiful initiative, which worked to clean and maintain the city.

In the Albion Central School District (NY), the Neighbors Program regularly convened community members, administrators, students, and teachers to identify ways they might work together. They also discussed calendar scheduling for concerts, athletics, and any other matter that might mutually affect them.

**PROTOCOLS SO EVERYONE’S VOICE IS HEARD.** Exemplar schools relied on standardized practices, rather than the goodwill of individuals, to make sure stakeholders were all part of the school’s program.

At the school-level, Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC) and others appointed a Principal’s Advisory Board. Members included faculty, parents, students, and representatives from surrounding universities and community colleges. In addition, the principal appointed a School Improvement Chairperson who acted as a voice of the school to the public.

In the classroom, exemplar schools made sure teachers communicated with parents about the civic topics being discussed and were adept at leading deliberations that allowed students to bring in perspectives from home.

The Albion Central School District (NY) credited part of the trust it enjoyed from the community to its practice of hiring staff who had roots in the area.

**A DEDICATED STAFF MEMBER TO CONNECT THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY.** Partnerships were most consistent when they were an explicit part of someone’s job.

The Albion Central School District (NY), César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC), and Pinole Valley High School (CA) included a paid staff member to serve as a community contact. Teachers especially stressed the importance of having someone act as a resource for their civic learning programs and a liaison to set up activities outside the school.

However, funding for the role was consistently precarious. Teachers were concerned that without a staff member on the task, civic learning opportunities would decline.

## **SCHOOL CLIMATE**

### **THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL EXPRESSED ITS CIVIC MISSION.**

#### **EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS SHOWED**

##### **A CLEAN, WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT WITH VISUAL REMINDERS OF THE SCHOOL’S CIVIC MISSION.**

Exemplar schools and districts displayed copies of the mission statement and decorated their hallways and classrooms with work that reflected students’ and teachers’ civic engagement.

Nearly every exemplar school CMS visited was noticeably clean and orderly. Students did not linger in the hallways between classes, and—as respondents at Greendale High School (WI) noted—staff and students treated each other with respect. Teachers and administration pointed out that Greendale was proud of its civic climate and ability to engage young people.

The civic mission at Forest Hills High School (NY) was prominently and creatively displayed. Academic subjects were hand-lettered above classroom doors—“Social Studies” was written in red on a blue background and adorned with white stars. Students’ photographs and drawings on international themes were so numerous that the walls appeared to be covered in a mural.

##### **TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATION WHO SERVED AS ROLE MODELS OF CIVICALLY ENGAGED CITIZENS.**

Principals and teachers at exemplar schools and districts interacted positively with students and were candid about their own civic engagement.

At numerous exemplar schools, the principals interacted regularly and informally with students, calling them by name in the hallway and visiting with them in the cafeteria and at sporting events. Students corroborated CMS’ impression that the principal’s commitment to the school and its mission helped create a positive environment

for civic learning. Bell Gardens High School (CA) students described the tone the principal set as “open-minded,” “caring,” “positive,” and “a doorway for opportunity.” Albion Central School District (NY) described the administration as more focused on rewarding success than catching deficiencies and failures.

Students at exemplar schools and districts were equally enthusiastic about most of their teachers. César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC) students consistently described their courses as challenging; however, they appeared to relish the challenge, and they observed that their teachers both modeled commitment and demanded theirs. “You have no choice but to know what’s going on around you,” said one student. “They get us involved in everyday life.”

At Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC), project-based learning gave teachers an opportunity to work one-on-one with students. The individual attention not only encouraged academic achievement but also gave teachers and students a chance to get to know each other. The students said their teachers were role models as citizens—because it had been mentioned in casual conversations, students knew their teachers did volunteer work, followed the news, sat for jury duty, and voted.

**STUDENTS WHO HAD THE SKILLS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONFIDENCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.** Students at exemplar schools and districts expressed a sense of responsibility and efficacy.

A CMS reviewer at Northport-East Northport Union Free School District (NY) described the district as “the kind of place where, whether you are speaking to a fifth grader, eighth grader, or senior in high school, you can ask the student what difference he or she personally has made within the school or community, and the response is immediate and confident.”

Pinole Valley High School (CA) students expressed pride and insight when they discussed their service-learning project assisting at a local elementary school. The experience prompted them to want to get more engaged in improving their high school so younger students would benefit.

**POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT A SET OF CIVIC NORMS AND VALUES.** Exemplar schools demonstrated a commitment to civic learning sufficiently deep and widespread that it would remain regardless of the particular individuals involved. Exemplar schools and districts provided continuous education in the mission to new staff.

According to teachers, students, and the principal at Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (NC), civic learning was possible because of the school’s explicitly civic climate. The principal called it “the relationship piece”; teachers described it as “everybody being on the same page”; and the students identified it as “interactive, supportive, consistent, demanding, and transparent.”

At every exemplar school, students testified that they could see and experience the benefit of civic learning. At the Albion Central School District (NY), students said they didn’t experience retribution for thinking outside

the box. Greendale High School (WI) students demonstrated that they could make changes at the school effectively by using the systems for deliberation and petition that had been set up.

Respondents at Terry Sanford High School (NC) described a school culture that struck a balance between freedom and responsibility, risk and comfort, and opportunities for leadership and firm boundaries. “The school’s culture and climate allows students to be free thinkers but teaches them how to do it in a safe way,” the principal said.

## 5 / CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Exemplar schools and districts offered inspiring and edifying examples of civic learning in action. None of the elements they demonstrated is impossible to achieve.

A vision for civic learning and the leadership to carry it through; a curriculum that incorporates promising civic learning practices and leads students through a scope and sequence that makes sense; professional development that nurtures teachers’ effective civic pedagogy; partnerships that bring the community into the schools and the students into the community; a climate that encourages civic dispositions—these are all controllable variables. Virtually any teacher and administrator could create them, regardless of the demographics, geography, or circumstances of the school or district.

If there is a secret to the success of these exemplar schools, it’s courage. Professionals at every level resisted the pressure to limit learning to standardized tests and to what had been done before. In small instances and large, members of exemplar schools and districts trusted their own ability, each other, and the community’s recognition that schools are the only institution that can reach almost the entirety of the next generation and prepare them to preserve and protect American democracy.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools calls on all educators and policymakers to summon their own courage to ensure all schools and districts meet their civic mission. These exemplar schools suggest steps for success—readers must supply the deliberate choice, firm commitment, and willful boldness to take them.

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## PROFILES OF EXEMPLAR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

### ALBION CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

24 EAST AVENUE | ALBION, NEW YORK 14411

The Albion Central School District, serving a rural, farming community in upstate New York, has deep roots. In the last 130 years, it has had only eight superintendents.

Albion's strong civic learning grows out of its sense of history and tradition of community engagement. "We see ourselves as a poor community," one administrator said, noting that half of the students were on free and reduced-price lunch. "But we know we can give back."

Albion built districtwide policies to nurture consistent and institutionalized civic learning, especially in the form of school-community partnerships. At the beginning of ninth grade, students completed a service-learning program to help them transition from middle school to high school. AP students were also required to do a service-learning project—once the test was complete, students applied what they learned in a one-month project that benefited the community. Non-AP students were required to do 30 hours of community service.

"Every opportunity to bring in community members is capitalized on," said a teacher. "It's about connections between the students and community."

Because it had many opportunities for students and staff to learn outside school walls, Albion enjoyed a positive relationship with its neighbors. Citizens, business leaders, public officials, administrators, students, and teachers regularly came together to identify ways the school and community could be mutually beneficial resources. School leaders also convened neighbors to discuss calendar scheduling for concerts, athletics, and any other matter that might affect them.

The community's involvement increased expectations that the school perform at a high level. For example, the Board of Education would not give a diploma without students completing all service-learning hours. The Board of Education also demanded school leaders fit with the core values of the school.

Along with high expectations came a sense of celebration and accomplishment. Students described the administration as more focused on rewarding success than catching deficiencies and failures. The Board of Education gave monthly awards for students who demonstrated the district's mission, vision, and values. Newsletters and the Penny Saver, a free community paper, published student and staff civic work.

In describing the school's civic learning success, teachers also stressed the importance of a school environment that felt safe to take risks and release control. They noted that quality civic learning was often organic. "It's not always the curriculum that's the most important thing," one teacher said. "Students need to know how to think. You can't Google why."

Finally, respondents asserted that civic learning need not take extra money or time. Moreover, the strong test scores that have come out of Albion refuted any claim that schools do not have room for civic learning on top of other requirements. Public education was about good citizenship, they said.

The trick to meeting the district's mission, respondents said, was to maintain a strong commitment to civic learning and a firm expectation for staff and students to do their jobs. With an emphasis on critical thinking and community engagement, Albion afforded students the time and resources to learn while discovering that one person *can* make a difference.

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ An algebra class visited a soup kitchen and created a database of what the kitchen needed to provide nutritious meals.
- ★ ESL students built vocabulary while collecting items for victims of a hurricane in Honduras.
- ★ A science class rebuilt a trail and then created pamphlets to promote it to the community.
- ★ During the 2008 presidential election, students researched and detailed candidates' views and positions and surveyed the community on their priorities. They then held a public debate discussing the top five issues of interest to voters in Albion. Finally, students organized a voting registration drive.
- ★ A safe school ambassador (anti-bullying) program trained students to identify potentially harmful behavior in school and mitigate incidences of violence. The program taught students character traits of good citizens and encouraged demonstrations of civic behavior.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ Teachers used Bloom's taxonomy of four quadrants to ensure that students were meeting expectations across many dimensions.
- ★ To assess service-learning projects, teachers used youth reflection, pre- and post-surveys, and anecdotes from students, community members, and parents. Teachers evaluated students' learning as well as the impact on the community.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ A three-year induction program for new teachers included a three-week summer institute where the district's civic mission was reinforced.
- ★ Administrators used students' test results and unit assessments to identify opportunities to increase teachers' civic knowledge and improve their instructional methods.
- ★ As teachers stayed on, benchmarks for tenure were tied to service-learning and civic learning.

Bell Gardens High School in East Los Angeles, an enormous campus with 3,400 students, might have been a place where civic learning could get lost. The school was set among low-income housing developments. The student body was transient—many new immigrants settled first in this part of East L.A. before improving their circumstances and moving on. In the neighborhood, gangs were a problem.

But Vice Principal Carlos Zaragoza described Bell Gardens as “a refuge.” Kids felt safe on campus. Test scores were going up. When families moved out of the neighborhood, many continued to send their kids to Bell Gardens. In addition, students from the L.A. Unified district were petitioning to switch over.

As with all good schools, Bell Gardens’s formula for success included a combination of factors. However, CMS found that leadership was key in creating a nurturing, professional environment in which civic learning was integrated, teachers were innovative, and students were prepared to become effective citizens.

To create and reinforce a structure that allowed for civic learning, Principal Victor Chavez worked closely with parents to make sure they were apprised of what was happening in the school and, when possible, made part of decision-making. The administration collaborated with parents to create a vision and mission statement that embraced the school’s civic purpose.

Chavez also worked with the district to make sure Bell Gardens had as many civic learning resources as possible; he established high expectations for teachers and then allowed a fair amount of autonomy in meeting them; and he interacted regularly and informally with students, visiting them in the lunchroom and showing up at sports events.

Students corroborated CMS’s impression that the principal’s commitment to the school and its mission helped create a positive environment for civic learning. Students described Bell Gardens as “open-minded,” “caring,” “positive,” and “a doorway for opportunity.”

For their part, teachers welcomed the administration’s technique of identifying leaders in the department and allowing them to be at the vanguard of civic learning. They also appreciated being part of team relationships and taking advantage of the additional resources offered by a civic learning provider such as the Constitutional Rights Foundation.

Chavez and his team appeared to be reaching both the school’s civic and academic goals: Bell Gardens recently underwent a rigorous two-year assessment and was rewarded with six years’ accreditation. Social studies teacher Al Cueva—who, along with the vice principal, was a graduate of Bell Gardens—said of the school’s success, “It definitely starts with our leadership.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Bell Gardens’s social studies curriculum included U.S. History, World History, AP Government, and AP Civics. Students could also fulfill their U.S. History credit through a social justice class, in which events, eras, and episodes were explored through the lens of laws and civil rights.
- ★ To provide additional resources to the social studies program, Bell Gardens used the Constitutional Rights Foundation’s materials extensively.
- ★ In addition, Bell Gardens invited teachers to propose their own civic-themed classes, including Chicano Studies and Women’s Studies electives.
- ★ As part of an exercise targeting seniors, Bell Gardens set up mock elections, including voting machines and ink dots. On Election Day Bell Gardens excused absences for students to be official poll watchers.
- ★ Bell Gardens linked the curriculum with the community by offering credit to seniors for a service project. Students were asked to research their communities, identify an issue, determine what the local government was doing about it, and engage in a project that either advocated or worked toward a reform.
- ★ To create engaging, interactive civic lessons many teachers used Smart Boards, in which students and teachers interacted digitally at the front of the room, alternating between PowerPoint slides, computer documents, and spontaneously-added notes. Students also answered questions by sending text messages to the Smart Board. Classes often conducted polls using cell phones, *American Idol* style.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ Students’ civic learning was usually assessed through portfolios and presentations.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ Professional development began with the hiring process. Bell Gardens looked for teachers who were going to bring something in addition to excellence in the classroom—for instance, a commitment to community service, an interest in public affairs, or an ability to connect meaningfully with students.
- ★ As part of the Quality Investment in Education Act, teachers were required to do 40 hours of professional development every year. To support them, Bell Gardens provided information about training opportunities, substitutes, and summer training (including for the Constitutional Rights Foundation).

### **CÉSAR CHÁVEZ PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL FOR PUBLIC POLICY INFUSED CURRICULUM**

709 12TH STREET SE | WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA 20003

At the César Chávez Public Charter School for Public Policy (Chávez), a charter school with 150 students in every grade, the White House is a few stops away on the Metro. Just beyond the park, Senate staffers hang

out in Pennsylvania Avenue's strip of coffee shops and restaurants. A few blocks over, in the city's historic Eastern Market, neighborhood residents shop alongside program officers in Washington, DC's, many think tanks and NGOs.

Despite César Chávez's location on Capital Hill, Julie Harris, who oversaw the school's public policy aspect, acknowledged that most students didn't come to Chávez because of its commitment to civic learning. They came because Chávez was small, safe, supportive, and had a rigorous college prep agenda. Chávez found ways consistently to marry civic learning with demanding academics.

For instance, in their junior year, students did an internship at a public policy organization, a requirement that achieved the dual purposes of civic learning and college prep. In addition to learning about an aspect of public service, students were intensively coached in résumé writing, job interview skills, professional dress, and other protocols appropriate for academic and professional success.

To make sure civic learning was infused throughout the school, Chávez integrated the *Civic Mission of Schools* six promising practices across all disciplines—when CMS asked to speak to staff involved in civic learning, Harris invited health, English, and senior thesis teachers.

In every class, students used in-class discussions and writing processes to discern their own opinions on civic topics and discuss them with others. Teachers were quick to point out that the school set up clear protocols to ensure everyone's voice was heard and respected. Teachers also frequently communicated with parents, assuring them that what was taught at home would have a place in the school. "Some kids learned they were more conservative than they thought," one teacher observed.

Throughout the year, Chávez brought in guest speakers on public policy issues, and teachers assigned texts with civic significance. For instance, an English class recently read the story of a young, South Asian woman sold into prostitution. The novel not only required students to work on inference skills, but allowed them to discuss immigration, history, international law, and foreign affairs.

All teachers participated in public policy capstone projects. For instance, the music and chemistry teachers teamed up to lead a forensics workshop, teaching students how the government used science in its policymaking.

In addition to the intentionality in incorporating civic learning at all levels, one of the most striking things about Chávez was how engaged students were. They consistently described their courses as challenging; however, they appeared to relish the challenge, and they observed that their teachers both modeled commitment and demanded theirs.

"They're playful yet stern," said one student. "They're ready to give us an education."

"You have no choice but to know what's going on around you," said another, regarding the focus on civic learning. "They get us involved in everyday life."

Most importantly, students noted that the focus on and practice in public policy gave them the tools and knowledge to participate in public life. One young woman’s project led her to testify at a public hearing. The process was transformative. “I learned how to research my issue, communicate with people in public office, and present myself effectively,” she said. “I learned that I have a voice, and I can make change.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ To introduce students to civic learning—and to cue them to its priority in the school—Chávez required a yearlong Health and Foundations of Public Policy class in the 9th grade. For each health topic, students discussed how the issue might be important in society, and whether government, business, or the public had a role to play in managing it. The course concluded with a two-week public policy internship.
- ★ In the 10th grade, students completed a Community Action Project on an aspect of public policy that interested them.
- ★ In the 11th grade, students did a fellowship at a nonprofit, business, think tank, or congressional office. Their range of interests was reflected in the variety of places they did fellowships.
- ★ In students’ senior year they completed a 20-page research paper on a public policy issue. They took a course dedicated to college-level writing and researching skills and then did an advocacy project to promote their position.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ Chávez provided its own in-house professional development. A core group of teachers was trained to become teacher leaders and mentors, who in turn worked with other staff.
- ★ Chávez put aside time during the school year for ongoing reflection and opportunities to make changes. On Monday afternoon, while students worked on out-of-school projects, staff came together and had structured planning discussions and work sessions.

### **COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL SPIRALING CURRICULUM WITH A REQUIRED LEGISLATIVE SEMESTER**

326 JOLIET STREET | WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60185

A few years ago the staff of Community High School, a diverse public school in a suburban district of Chicago, took a step back and asked what they wanted of their graduating seniors. Above all, the staff decided, they wanted their students to be good citizens.

Once they had identified their school’s civic mission, each department created a focus question that sought to investigate what it meant to be an effective citizen in a global community.

“We left the answer open ended,” explained Lisa Willuweit, the head of the Humanities Division. “Our job is to give students the skills, concepts, and knowledge to form their own answers.”

Community’s integrated, inquiry-based approach to civic learning provided students with numerous opportunities to engage in activities grounded in democratic principles and knowledge.

In the social studies department, teachers weaved together threads from all four years, making sure students understood the relationship between world geography and world history, for instance. The culminating experience was the American Government class for all seniors. Created by one of the school’s government teachers, the semester-long simulation of the legislative process was an opportunity to “get away from dry textbook learning,” said Willuweit. “We have students put themselves in the role of legislators.”

Using the House of Representatives as their model, students selected and researched current controversial public issues, crafted policies to address them, and deliberated them with each other.

To make sure the process stayed true to legislative procedure, the class invited local legislators to come to the committee hearings.

“We wanted their feedback on how realistic the process is and to help students learn how they can have a debate about abortion or immigration law using civil discourse,” said Willuweit. “Because we use parliamentary procedure, students are also learning how to communicate if they go to school board or town meetings.”

As local legislators observed, the process helped prepare students to engage in productive deliberations on public issues, even with people who disagreed with them.

In addition to the mandatory social studies curriculum, Community also offered an elective community leadership class. Following service-learning pedagogy, students learned how to understand problems and issues in the community and articulate a plan to help.

For example, leadership students galvanized classrooms, the Honor Society, Key Club, sports teams, and local community organizations to learn about and raise funds for the “We Go to Africa” project, which helped a generation of Angolans who did not go to school.

The effort not only underscored many of the things students were learning in the classroom, says Willuweit, but “changed the school culture to ‘we can make a difference.’”

“We love it because it’s all leading up to our focus question,” she said. “Our students are doing something locally, but it’s within the global community.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Social studies courses each had a guiding question that provided opportunities for in-depth study—rather than simple memorization of facts and dates—as well as a historical context for current issues.

9th grade World Geography: How do aspects of the global community interact with each other?

10th grade World History: How does history impact the global community?

11th grade American History: What does it mean to be an American?

12th grade American Government: What is an effective citizen?

- ★ Throughout the Legislative Semester, students researched, debated, and wrote about the issues. They prepared legislation, speeches, talking points, critiques, and rebuttals. Students used technology on a daily basis, posting messages and engaging in discussions with other students on blackboard.com and researching the Library of Congress's online databases.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ At the beginning of high school, freshmen were given a test that correlated to state standards—especially reading, writing, research, and presentation. At the end of their American Government class during senior year, students took the same test. The school used the data to see how student scores improved and to analyze in what areas students were excelling, meeting expectations, or needing to work more.
- ★ The University of Wisconsin at Madison performed a longitudinal study on whether the school's civic learning was having an impact. In 2011 researchers will release a study on whether Community High School students were more likely to vote, volunteer, be more involved political organizations, and continue to follow and discuss controversial public issues.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ To integrate civic learning without getting off-track from either the course focus question or the department goal, the school allocated time for teachers to meet in curriculum teams to articulate and calibrate their lessons.

### **FOREST HILLS HIGH SCHOOL INSPIRING AND ENGAGING STUDENTS**

67-01 110 STREET | QUEENS, NEW YORK 11375

Forest Hills High School (FHHS), a public high school with 3,600 students, sits at the end of a circular driveway in one of the leafy outer boroughs of New York City. Its brick façade, cupola, and columns evoke a bygone era. When CMS arrived, students were milling over the polished floors in the central vestibule, their voices echoing below the high ceilings. Then, slowly, they made their way through the metal detectors, a poignant reminder of the present moment.

Security was ubiquitous at FHHS, yet the hallways felt friendly and open. Subjects were hand-lettered above classroom doors—"Social Studies" was written in red on a blue background and adorned with white stars—and students' photographs and drawings were so numerous that the walls appeared to be covered in a mural.

The prominently displayed student work accurately suggested the school’s commitment to an inspired, engaged student body. Each class had fewer than 30 students, and FHHS used a staggered schedule—in which groups of students started and ended the day at different times—to promote a small-school atmosphere. At least half of the student body belonged to a small learning community. One staff member said, “Lots of kids see these as their homes.”

As a result of FHHS’s focus on individual learners, students reported feeling deeply connected to the work. Moreover, FHHS translated its culture of student engagement into meaningful, challenging opportunities for civic learning. “The focus in our government classes is much more on participation and community outreach than on traditional subjects like the separation of powers,” said Saul Gutnick, the principal and a former social studies teacher.

FHHS’s law-related education was particularly robust. Students from all five boroughs came to the school to participate in internships and a women-in-law program. It was also part of the New York State Bar mock trial program and the Justice Resource Center’s MENTOR: Law Firm/School Partnership program. Students—paired with lawyers from major law firms—visited a law firm and a federal court and took part in a moot court competition. The programs taught students about the law and the court system, while sharpening their critical thinking skills and ability to respond extemporaneously to questions.

Overall, students affirmed FHHS’s serious-yet-engaging approach to civic learning. Their comments included:

“I used to be idle at the dinner table. Now I’m challenging my dad’s thoughts.”

“I hated everything about politics before I came here. Now I watch the presidential debates and actually care what the candidates say.”

“I asked everyone I know if they were registered to vote.”

“I want to challenge the status quo and the disdain people my age have for government and elected office.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ FHHS hosted a We the People team, in which students examined the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and participated in a mock congressional hearing. Students formed a position on public policy issues, learned how to organize and present oral arguments persuasively, and used public speaking methodology within a legal context.
- ★ In both AP and regular government classes, all senior theses were position papers related to a controversial public issue.
- ★ In the government class’s Coin-Operated Congress, students picked a congressperson from the area and tracked his or her contributions and voting records to see if anything unusual emerged.
- ★ The Academy of Public Service invited selected students to participate in a three-year program that combined an academic study of public policy and civic engagement with real world community service activities. Students were blocked programmed for their social studies,

English, and elective classes. They used electives—including Facing History and Ourselves and Issues in Public Policy—to learn how they could become active and engaged citizens. They also completed a college-level research paper examining a quality of life problem, developing a field study to gather new information, and creating a solution to address it.

- ★ Students volunteered continuously outside the classroom, working with local parks, nursing homes, elementary schools, and many other groups. They also worked in local government internships, including at the New York Police Department and the Queens Borough Presidents' office.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ FHHS preferred performance-based assessments, such as moot court, mock trial, and We the People simulations. Students were graded not only on tests, but on rubrics that evaluated a student's understanding and academic performance skills.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ FHHS teachers attended international comparative politics workshops, such as Civic Mosaic and Civic Voices, and the Justice Resource Center's professional development sessions, including on mock trial, moot court, the death penalty, and the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.
- ★ FHHS offered visits to other schools and classrooms to observe civic learning, enabling teachers to learn new strategies for instruction.

### **GREENDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S LEADERSHIP AND ITS EFFECT ON CLIMATE**

5900 S. 51ST STREET | GREENDALE, WISCONSIN 53129

In 1999, Bill Hughes, the superintendent of the Greendale School District in suburban Milwaukee, attended a breakfast meeting addressing school climate. The topic was close to Hughes's heart. He'd written his EDD dissertation on school climate, and he understood the need for policy, practice, and infrastructure to support a set of norms and values.

At the breakfast, the speaker described the civic purpose of schools—to prepare young people not just for college and career, but citizenship. Something clicked. Hughes understood that a positive school climate was in *service* to the civic mission. This shift in thinking brought about a cascade of small but important changes in the district, all of which have contributed to consistent, systemic civic learning, grounded in a strong culture of student engagement and responsibility.

Initially, Hughes incorporated service-learning in the district's high school, middle school, three elementary schools, and four charter schools. He used an initial grant from AOL and support from the National Center for Citizenship to hire a professional development consultant, especially in service-learning, and to train teacher-leaders in the practice.

In a few years, those efforts expanded to include elements of character education, youth voice and engagement, moral leadership, and the *Civic Mission of Schools* report. Hughes offered training in those practices to one-third of his faculty, who in turn became teacher-leaders and supported their colleagues.

At the same time, he assembled an “eclectic team” of experienced administrators and up-and-coming principals and business managers. They regularly attended conferences and participated in civic learning projects; over time, they came to speak a common language of civic learning and became adept at putting the mission into operation.

The most important element in ensuring the schools were on track was the Board Report, Hughes said, in which each principal described what his or her school was doing to meet civic learning goals. The Board of Education, “terrifically civic-minded people” according to Hughes, looked as critically and seriously at the schools’ civic learning achievements as they did at academics. “The Board Report provides built-in accountability,” Hughes said.

To monitor the district’s overall health, every few years the faculty, students, and community participate in a survey on the civic climate. Hughes and his team use that data to initiate conversations about elements that weren’t working and to calibrate strategies and priorities.

One of the results is a district that CMS found to have a “civic vibe.” For instance, when a student with a severe speech impediment struggled to read the Pledge of Allegiance over the PA system during the morning announcement, his classmates listened quietly and then when he reached the end successfully, spontaneously applauded.

To be sure, Greendale is a relatively affluent, high-achieving district, and students’ academic performances exceed what the demographics would predict. Yet Greendale’s civic culture cannot be credited simply to good luck and positive circumstances. The superintendent has deliberately shaped it.

“I’m a frustrated social studies teacher who never got to teach it,” Hughes said. “Instead, I bring a community activist and development approach to my role as superintendent. I set the tone. I hire for it. I evaluate it. I reward it. I tell my staff, ‘We can teach you how, but you have to want to do it.’”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ School-based civic learning opportunities included Project Citizen, service-learning, and youth leadership through student council. Students have at least one meaningful service-learning experience in elementary school, middle school, and high school.
- ★ Teachers allowed students to select topics for discussion, shared their own perspectives, and invited students to share theirs. They opened the class to discussions about relevant contemporary and historical issues, and they balanced political viewpoints in class.
- ★ Outside of school, students participated in community partnerships through the Honors Society and the Make A Wish Foundation.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ★ Content-based professional development was paired with work on the school’s civic climate. Professional development providers were hired with the expectation that they would help teachers use engaging pedagogy in an open, collaborative environment.
- ★ The superintendent encouraged teachers to attend conferences. The first year they went as participants; in the second year they had to do a presentation, addressing “the why as well as the how.” Part of their professional development was teaching others.
- ★ Teachers who were meeting or exceeding their responsibilities—including significantly contributing to the school’s civic mission—could negotiate for more release time during the day to work with other teachers. Those doing the bare minimum did not earn professional hours.

### MAINE WEST HIGH SCHOOL RANGE OF CIVIC LEARNING OPTIONS

1755 SOUTH WOLF ROAD | DES PLAINES, ILLINOIS 60018

Maine West High School, a public school on a spacious campus in suburban Chicago, is known for excellence. In 2002 it was named an “Outstanding High School” by *U.S. News and World Report*, and CMS found its approach to civic learning holistic and positive. From required social studies classes, to service-learning curriculum, to supplementary programs, students consistently engaged with their communities and each other.

“Students at Maine West have a buffet of choices for civic involvement,” said Jennifer Conlon, a traveling teacher for the district who has taught government and law at Maine West. “They have many chances to make personal connections with elected officials and the community.”

Conlon observed that students expected to be civically engaged—civic learning was part of the tradition of the school and was reinforced by teachers’ passion. Both teachers and students reported that talking about current issues was both implicitly encouraged and explicitly part of the curriculum. Guided discussions were included in programs such as *Deliberating in a Democracy (DID)*, *Equal Justice Under Law (EJUL)*, *Youth Summit*, and *Facing History and Ourselves*.

In required courses—world culture, U.S. history or American studies, and government—students deliberated controversial public issues with each other, students from the larger Chicago metropolitan area, and students in Eastern Europe. In addition, they used a version of the structured academic controversy deliberation model in all their classrooms to support conversations about controversial issues.

To be involved in the political process at the grassroots level, Maine West students had the opportunity to participate in the Mikva Challenge, a Chicago-based civic engagement and leadership development program.

In *Issues to Action* students participated in the six steps of community organizing: analyzing community, choosing an issue, conducting issue research, analyzing power, action planning, and taking action. Projects included modifying school policies on sex education, launching peer mentoring programs, or petitioning for a stoplight at a dangerous intersection.

*Elections in Action* brought young people in contact with political candidates and campaigns. Students held candidate forums and then volunteered for a candidate at least 20 hours during the campaign season. Teachers organized reflection activities weekly at the school and used students' campaign experiences to inform and animate their classroom instruction.

Finally, in Students Educating for Equity in a Diverse Society (SEEDS), students engaged in service-learning to connect their academic learning to action. Students used the Pathfinders tool developed by the Maine West High School Library to select an issue and conduct research around three questions: What is the problem? What are the causes? What are the solutions?

After completing their research, students were required to identify an action plan to put their knowledge into a format that informed others. This step challenged students to think creatively and apply civic learning. Students then shared their projects at an open house, where they could learn about their classmates' issues as well.

The administration at both the school and district level was extremely supportive of the school's approaches to civic learning. The principal indicated great pride in the teachers' creativity in designing civic and service-learning programs. Teachers reported this support and freedom were essential to the success of their programs.

"People are excited about it," Conlon said. "Maine West has made civic learning a priority."

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Maine West required three years of social science, which integrated content, skills and civic responsibility. AP offerings included an upper level government and politics class.
- ★ SEEDS service-learning curriculum was offered each year in all sections of the freshman World Cultures class as the final project. Students chose from areas already studied in class.
- ★ In presidential election years, students traveled to swing states and early primary states. In addition, some students served as election judges in Chicago.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ Teachers were engaged in long-term professional development through the Teaching American History grants. They worked closely with university scholars and were committed to using interactive methods and inviting community members—such as World War II and Vietnam veterans—to help make history come alive.

- ★ Most of the social studies teachers have received extensive staff development through the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. In turn, those teachers have conducted schoolwide sessions on leading controversial public issues discussions.
- ★ Many of the science teachers have incorporated deliberation into their curriculum using questions from [deliberating.org](http://deliberating.org), such as “Should our democracy adopt a cap and trade system to limit greenhouse gas emissions?” or “Should our democracy permit the therapeutic cloning of human cells?”

## NORTHPORT-EAST NORTHPORT UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT DISTRICTWIDE COMMITMENT TO CIVIC LEARNING

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Northport-East Northport Union Free School District on Long Island is both what one might expect and completely opposite. A K–12 district of some 6,500 students, Northport-East Northport has little racial diversity and very low poverty rates. The graduation rate is 95 percent, and nearly 40 percent of teachers have advanced degrees. Northport-East Northport is the kind of district that does not need to take risks or challenge its own performance beyond academics—yet it has created an infrastructure for civic knowledge, skills, behaviors, and dispositions sustainable far beyond personalities or the quirks of leadership.

The key in Northport-East Northport appeared to be a districtwide commitment to serving as a laboratory of democratic freedom both for students and staff. For example, teachers designed and delivered courses like Argue and Debate, and middle school principal Joanne Kroon told her PTA that it was up to the student government to decide what parameters would be in place for an upcoming dance.

For over thirty years, Northport-East Northport has had an ombudsman responsible for ensuring students’ constitutional rights. For over twenty-five years, Northport High School has operated a drama course completely dedicated to performances at the district elementary schools on contemporary issues. There is no graduation requirement for community service; yet, a student-founded, student-run charity has raised over \$1 million for Lou Gehrig’s Disease in just five years.

From kindergarten through graduation, students experienced a comprehensive civic curriculum across all content areas. Early elementary curricular elements included an understanding of holidays across cultures and traditions and moved purposefully into community problem solving and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Fourth and fifth grade covered colonial history and government, including districtwide moot court simulations. The Home and Careers course for seventh graders developed a product line specifically to generate a donation to a student-selected charity. High school courses included a full complement of

law-related offerings, such as Constitutional Law, Criminal Justice, and a course on the Holocaust, all of which fulfilled social studies requirements. English classes were intentionally dialogue based, and science opportunities were experiential.

The curriculum was strongly supported by extra- and co-curricular opportunities. They included a K–12 civic and community service club, Amnesty International, Law Club, Environmental Action Team, and Students for 60,000, a student-led effort to serve the homeless.

According to students, there is a constant and consistent focus throughout the district on what can be done to make a difference in the community and across the world.

From the twelfth grader who said he learned from “teachers who obviously and blatantly want to make a difference,” to the ninth grader who observed, “you know when a teacher wants to teach something,” to the fourth grader who acknowledged that “the adults get you involved, then you get excited,” there was a clear theme of adult modeling and empowerment across the district.

Northport-East Northport has also strategically utilized community and national partners to support the civic mission of the district. It was the only district to participate as a First Amendment School (supported by ASCD and the First Amendment Center), and feeder schools were able to engage in vertical alignment and cross-district professional development to further enhance their efforts. Touro College Law Center, the New York State Bar Association, Huntington Town Council, and others were significant participants in curricular and extracurricular activities across the district.

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Simulations were a big part of elementary instruction, including projects involving personal finance and mock trials.
- ★ Current events were integrated across grade levels and content areas—topics students mentioned included steroid use, piracy, bullying, homophobia, and health care.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ Most learning was assessed directly in the course framework.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ Annual professional development (and graduate credit opportunities) sponsored by the districtwide Project P.A.T.C.H. (Participatory Awareness through Community Help) developed the capacity of over 200 teachers per summer in strands such as Character Education and Peer Leadership, International Law and Human Rights, and Public Policy and Civic Engagement.
- ★ Teachers created their own courses and enjoyed academic freedom within their instruction because the district was confident that instruction was outcome based and student performance would be enhanced.

Pinole Valley High School (PVHS), in a town commuting distance to San Francisco, draws from the Bay Area’s diverse racial and socioeconomic demographics. Its 1,700 students include those from affluent families who live “upslope” at the tops of the hills surrounding the school, and those from “downslope” families struggling to make ends meet. Thirty percent receive free and reduced-price lunch.

Most students seemed to mingle easily although both students and teachers reported that fights had been breaking out—some involving more than 30 students at a time. In PVHS’s quest to establish a culture of respect and civic engagement, service-learning emerged as one of the tactics.

The district’s service-learning adviser, Connie Pekedis, funded until 2009 by a California Learn and Serve America grant, was instrumental in helping teachers establish ties between the curriculum and the community. Furthermore, since service-learning was mandated in the district, teachers were increasingly embracing this aspect of experiential civic learning.

Service-learning projects have included a blood drive run by special education students—“I felt like I had a real job!” one student said—and an effort to pass legislation so school budgets wouldn’t be cut.

One particularly innovative service-learning project involved a Spanish class. As part of a schoolwide Character Counts initiative, the Spanish teacher said she’d throw a pizza party if the class brought in aluminum cans to be recycled. Students took the challenge and ran with it. They organized a recycling program in the school and enlisted parents to take cans to a grocery store for reimbursement. With the money they raised, they made microloans to small businesses in Latin America, learning at once entrepreneurship, geography, and Spanish vocabulary.

Pekedis said that service-learning initially met with some resistance—teachers were reluctant to take on another responsibility, and students balked particularly at the reflection element. However, in time both staff and students embraced the method. Many projects arose organically, and the district has been able to support teachers through templates, the coordinator, and professional development opportunities.

In a conversation with CMS, students expressed pride and insight when they discussed their service-learning project assisting at a local elementary school. The experience prompted them to want to get more engaged in their high school and seek to address some of the perceived inadequacies so younger students would benefit when they came to PVHS.

Teachers, too, expressed determination to turn things around. “We’ve seen the community get to a dangerous, violent level,” said one social studies teacher. “I’m glad we have something like service-learning to teach respect for oneself and others—things that have fallen through the cracks.”

Another teacher added, “We’ve seen the community fray across all incomes and demographics. If we can’t enlist kids’ help, then we’re all in trouble.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Students received civic learning instruction in 9th grade cultural geography, 10th grade world history, 11th grade U.S. history, and 12th grade government.
- ★ PVHS students had ample opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities with civic learning elements. Junior Statesmen of America, Junior Achievement, Club Interact, and the African-American Student Union all engaged students in the community and encouraged civic skills and dispositions. In addition, an elective Leadership Class included students who have been elected to representative positions in the schools.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ Students’ learning was assessed through presentations and portfolios.
- ★ The service-learning requirement appeared on students’ transcripts as pass/fail.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ A district coordinator worked one-on-one with teachers to incorporate service-learning and other experiential civic learning opportunities into what they were already doing in the classroom.

### **SCOTLAND HIGH SCHOOL OF MATH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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When the bell rang at Scotland High School of Math, Science and Technology (MST), everybody knew what to do. Teachers stood outside their classroom doors, greeting students as they came inside. Students went immediately to their computers and began the Bell Ringer—a writing prompt the teachers put on the board so everybody began the class “on time and on task.” Principal Mark Duckworth, whose office sat at the top of the stairs where this school-within-a-school began, strolled up and down the halls, checking in with staff and students. He knew all 297 students at the 10–12th grade high school, and many said hello as he went past.

MST’s focused, collaborative climate was not a happy accident, nor only the work of a charismatic principal and dedicated teachers—although MST had those. Instead, principles of civic learning were explicitly integrated throughout school.

Civic learning instruction was most evident in humanities classes, which were team taught by an English and social studies teacher. Students “looped” with the same teachers for two years; as a result, everyone in the classroom knew each other.

This measure of comfort was important because much of students' learning was self-directed and project-based. Every student had his or her own computer—PCs lined both walls of the classroom—and students completed regular benchmarks on the way to finishing multi-week projects.

For example, students and teachers spoke enthusiastically about putting Cinderella's stepmother on trial, a simulation that served as an introduction to the courts and legal procedures. As the English complement to the lesson, students read international versions of the Cinderella story and watched "Twelve Angry Men."

Other projects included recreating a town council hearing on zoning and designing a constitution for a colony on Mars.

Project-based learning gave teachers an opportunity to work one-on-one with students. The individual attention not only encouraged academic achievement but also gave teachers and students a chance to get to know each other. The students said their teachers were role models as citizens—because it had been mentioned in casual conversations, students knew their teachers did volunteer work, followed the news, sat for jury duty, and voted.

In addition, the project-based learning allowed for teamwork as well as personal responsibility—both characteristics of civic learning.

Teachers reported that informal staff development opportunities contributed to the school's collaborative climate. Their best sources of guidance were each other, they said. Experienced teachers were required to serve as mentors, and many staff reported they sought additional advice and resources outside their assigned mentors. The close working relationships teachers developed meant that when one staff member had to be absent, another teacher took a leadership role and the class could continue without a substitute.

Principal Duckworth reported that one of the most successful opportunities for professional collaboration was the once-a-month staff potluck, where everyone was required to bring a homemade dish and all were banned from speaking about work.

"What do you think they talk about?" Principal Duckworth said, grinning. "Work."

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Projects included civic content knowledge, including government, U.S. history, law, and democracy. For instance, one student demonstrated a module called "Go West, Young Man, Go West," guiding students through a research project about the American frontier.
- ★ Like other schools in North Carolina, MST required Civics and Economics. In this course, students received explicit instruction in civic topics and regularly discussed current events and controversial issues; practiced simulations; and interacted with community members who came into the classroom as guest speakers, audience members, and participants in mock trials.
- ★ Civic-oriented activities outside of school included Key Club, Anchor Club, a Chamber of Commerce Program, and Junior Leadership.

#### STUDENT ASSESSMENT

- ★ Both 10th and 11th grade social studies courses had state-mandated high-stakes tests.
- ★ In addition, civic learning was assessed through class test scores and participation grades. Students were invited to weigh in on when the dates of class tests should be, and they were welcome at any time to call for a review session or a workshop.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ★ Every two weeks the school faculty met, shared ideas for projects, and provided feedback using Critical Friends, a model based on principles of democratic engagement.
- ★ Since MST was a New Technology School, teachers were eligible to attend two state professional development meetings per year and had access to a project library.

### TERRY SANFORD HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

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Terry Sanford High School was ensconced in a civic culture. Its namesake was a governor and senator of North Carolina; it drew on the traditions of a nearby military base; and the surrounding city of Fayetteville, NC, was known for its political activism and civic engagement. “Terry Sanford is successful because of its community,” several teachers observed.

For instance, during every election season the Chamber of Commerce hosted a candidates’ forum. To prepare, students studied the issues and the candidates. The event itself was covered by the paper and filmed by the local cable channel.

Another popular school-community partnership was the Global Program, a symposium in which community members shared their expertise on an international issue such as the world economy or global health. Other community members then led small group discussions, relating the topics to the community. Importantly, students also used these functions to learn and practice social graces and etiquette.

Community members as well as alumni made financial contributions to the school. At the same time, they expected students to give back. “People frequently call and ask for help from the students,” said the adviser of the Key Club.

The school and community’s expectation of mutual support meant that many extracurriculars were devoted to community service. “Fayetteville Beautiful” sponsored park clean-ups. “Leadership Fayetteville” focused each month on a different public institution—one month students visited the nearby military base and spoke to soldiers; the next month they went to the sanitation department. Both students and teachers expressed an interest in turning the club into a yearlong, civic-oriented class that could reach more students.

Beyond structured opportunities for civic engagement, students were encouraged to take initiative. Project Create, a discretionary fund, allowed students to start a group, hold an event, or make good on an idea. For instance, students have developed associations around issues such as environmental welfare, recycling, and politics.

“If students express an interest,” said one teacher, “there’s an outlet for it.”

Teachers had opportunities to develop, too. They reported some of their biggest sources of growth came from family support, monthly staff meetings, e-mail exchanges with colleagues, or one-on-one collaboration with a master teacher or another staff member. The social studies department built in structured time for its ten faculty to share civic-related practices.

To keep the school on track in meeting its mission, Terry Sanford had a School Improvement Team, consisting of school and community representatives. The group, which met monthly, was charged with thinking creatively about how to make substantial changes to the school.

“The school draws from diverse families, and parents have a vast array of professions,” the principal observed. “What unites them is a sense of civic-mindedness. The community’s own involvement resonates.”

#### **SAMPLE CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES**

- ★ Civic instruction was included in courses such as Civics and Economics, AP government, AP and Honors US history, AP World History, and Global Studies. For their senior projects, students identified one of their skills and found a mentor outside the school to help them develop it into something worthwhile to the community.
- ★ Simulations of democratic processes and procedures included Princeton Model Congress, Mock Trial, mock elections, Youth Leadership Academy, and Model UN.
- ★ From time to time, classes came together to consider current events. For instance, the AP Government and AP Statistics classes invited a political polling organization to talk about the 2008 election results. Each class then explored the findings in their appropriate curriculum.

#### **STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

- ★ To assess civic learning, teachers frequently used essays and oral presentations. Rather than adhere to an objective standard, they focused on students’ relative progress—a student was graded based on his or her own improvement.

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- ★ The district mandated targeted staff development days and arranged for civic-minded speakers and museum visits. It provided a mentorship program in which a first-year teacher was paired with a third-year teacher for mentorship and support.
- ★ Within the school, one of the teachers’ most significant professional development exercises was a “Learning Walk.” Each teacher was required to sit in on a class of a colleague in another department, increasing interaction and allowing for more interdisciplinary collaboration.



For more information on the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and high quality civic learning,  
please visit [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org)

For research on effective civic learning and youth civic engagement,  
please visit the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)  
[www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)