



DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS:

A conversation with elected officials and schools

North Carolina Civic Education Consortium

The North Carolina Civic Education

Consortium, a program of the School of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill, is a non-partisan, statewide partnership. Founded in 1997 with the support of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the Consortium strives to prepare North Carolina's young people for active citizenship, while inspiring public service and engagement throughout the state.

Major Consortium initiatives include small grants for collaborative youth civic education programs; a website with civic education resources; and outreach and training for schools, local governments, and communities.

Mission

We work with schools, governments, and community organizations to prepare North Carolina's young people to be active, responsible citizens.



On April 18, 2006, the NC Civic Education Consortium hosted *Developing Responsible Citizens: A conversation with elected officials and schools*, a forum to bring together elected officials and educators to discuss collaborative approaches to preparing our state's young people to be active, responsible citizens.

The forum, which was funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, provided an opportunity for participants to learn about four successful programs that bridge the gap between schools and state and local governments; these programs are highlighted throughout this report.

Promising Approaches to School-Based Civic Education

The *Civic Mission of Schools* report, published by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and Carnegie Corporation of New York, provided a framework for the *Developing Responsible Citizens* forum. The main tenet of this 2003 consensus report is that citizenship is not an inherent characteristic: Individuals must learn how to participate in democratic life. School-based civic education is one of the most effective methods of increasing young people’s informed engagement, and the report cites six promising approaches:

- **Civics content:** Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy to increase civic knowledge
- **Current events:** Incorporate discussions of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives

- **Service-learning:** Provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing service linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction
- **Extracurricular activities:** Offer activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities
- **Student voice:** Encourage student participation in school governance
- **Simulations:** Encourage student participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures

Kids Voting North Carolina

Kids Voting North Carolina promotes voter participation by educating youth about the importance of being informed citizens and the responsibility to sustain democracy through voting. The program provides an opportunity for students to accompany parents or other adults to official polling sites to “vote” on real candidates and ballot issues.

Kids Voting curricula provide lessons and activities aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in social studies, mathematics, and language arts for grades K–12. Programs and activities are available throughout North Carolina; to find out if there is a Kids Voting program in your school district, visit www.kidsvotingnc.org.



DAINTRY O'BRIEN, executive director of Kids Voting North Carolina, explains how Kids Voting curricula teach civic responsibility.

Role of Elected Officials in Supporting the Civic Mission of Schools

While these six promising approaches are focused on school-based civic education, *The Civic Mission of Schools* report emphasizes that all stakeholders in civic engagement have an important role in supporting our schools' civic mission. State and local elected officials are uniquely poised to enhance the promising approaches outlined in the report.

Small group discussions at the forum allowed elected officials and educators to discuss a variety of opportunities for partnership, and numerous strategies were developed during these discussions. Proposed strategies from all small groups were posted so that participants could vote on the top five. The following strategies were selected as the most promising for elected officials to adopt in supporting the civic mission of schools:

- **Provide teachers professional development opportunities on local government content.** Before teachers can provide instruction on local issues, they must first understand the role of local government. Public officials can host or support teacher training sessions ranging from a one-day workshop on the basics of state and local government to a week-long neighborhood college exposing teachers to many facets of the community.
- **Organize issue forums that bring together elected officials and local community members.** Officials can encourage students and parents to become civically engaged by hosting forums on local issues, listening to their concerns, and answering their questions.

America's Legislators Back to School Program

Sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, the **America's Legislators Back to School Program** gives elected officials the opportunity to teach young people what it is like to be a state legislator. Students learn about the processes and pressures of holding public office—as well as the debate, negotiation, and compromise that are the very fabric of representative democracy.

The National Conference of State Legislatures provides legislators with training, resources and materials, promotion strategies, and organizational support for the bipartisan program. Online lesson plans for teachers are also available. To learn more about the America's Legislators Back to School program and to find contact information for the North Carolina coordinators, visit www.ncsl.org/public/backsch.htm.



KARL KURTZ, *director of state services at the National Conference of State Legislatures, shares information on the resources available to legislators through the America's Legislators Back to School program.*



- **Prepare current and former public officials for the classroom.** Public officials are excellent teaching resources for civics content, local government simulations, and discussion of local issues; however, they need tools to make their classroom time meaningful. One such tool might be a manual that includes grade-appropriate lessons and activities, talking points, and suggestions for reaching out to students and parents.
- **Expose students to local and state legislative simulations.** Simulations help make government real for students. Elected officials can ensure that simulations are accurate and effective by developing and disseminating materials for simulations on local issues.
- **Improve and expand high school voter registration activities.** Officials can increase the number of potential voters by supporting voter registration activities at the high school level. Outreach efforts to local high schools may include participating in classroom simulations of voter registration and voting, as well as encouraging schools to include voter registration forms in graduation packets or mailings.

CityWorks

Developed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, **CityWorks** is a standards-based local government curriculum designed to fit into any high school civics or government class. Through the program's interactive lessons, students become citizens and political leaders of the fictional city of Central Heights. As they explore public policy issues, they learn about issues of state and local government and practice critical-thinking skills.

While focusing on local government content, the CityWorks curriculum provides an opportunity for problem-based learning as students are guided through a service-learning project addressing a local issue that they have previously studied. More information on the CityWorks curriculum can be found at www.crf-usa.org/cityworks/cityworks.htm.



TODD CLARK, executive director of the Constitutional Rights Foundation, explains how CityWorks' simulations increase students' knowledge of local government.

In addition to the strategies developed at the forum,

there are a number of other ways that elected officials can support the civic mission of schools. Officials can participate in or provide resources for classroom discussions of current events and local government simulations. They can enhance service-learning by providing volunteer opportunities in their offices and by marketing local government as a resource for graduation project opportunities. Elected officials can increase the number of extracurricular activities available in their city, county, or state by offering local government internships for students. Finally, they can provide venues for student voice, such as youth councils or candidates' forums.

Schools, governments, and community organizations all play a vital role in preparing our state's youth for active, responsible citizenship. By working together, we can achieve this worthwhile goal.



Project Citizen

We the People: Project Citizen, co-sponsored by the Center for Civic Education and the National Conference of State Legislatures, is a portfolio-based curriculum that leads middle-school students through the process of solving a community problem. Students work cooperatively to identify and research a local public policy problem. They evaluate alternative solutions, develop their own policy solution, and create a political action plan to enlist local or state

authorities to adopt their proposed policy. Students showcase the results of their work with group displays and individual portfolios.

Project Citizen is funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress and is administered by a network of state and congressional district coordinators. To learn more about Project Citizen and to contact the North Carolina coordinator, visit www.civiced.org/project_citizen.php.



APRIL GRYBOSKY, a teacher at Riverwood Middle School in Johnston County, describes how Project Citizen was an engaging and informative experience for her students.

What you can do to strengthen youth civic engagement

- As the primary influence on good citizenship, parents can talk to their children about politics and volunteerism.
- Government-sponsored advisory and youth councils give young people a voice and develop future leaders.
- Current events discussions in the classroom help make civics come alive.
- Community organizations can bridge the civics gap by offering engaging civics programs to all youth.

What you can do to support the Consortium

Become a partner:

Learn more about what the NC Civic Education Consortium is doing across the state through e-mail updates or become involved in Consortium activities by visiting our website at www.civics.org.

Become a contributor:

The Consortium needs your assistance to help ensure that North Carolina's youth are prepared to become active, responsible citizens. Please consider making a gift that will help us continue our important work across the state. To learn more about supporting our innovative and effective programs, call 919.962.8273 or visit www.civics.org.



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