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TWENTY-SIX

Where Do I Begin?
Is Everyone A Citizen?
Making Changes: A Guide To Advocacy

STUDENT ADVOCACY KIT
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PennCORD, the Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy, is an organization led by the Office of the First Lady of Pennsylvania, the Honorable Judge Marjorie O. Rendell; the Pennsylvania Bar Association; the National Constitution Center; and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. PennCORD's mission is to re-invigorate civic education in schools like yours across the Commonwealth. PennCORD will identify school needs; connect you, other students, and educators to resources; organize student, teacher, and partner meetings; and promote good citizenship in order to improve civic knowledge, increase public action, and support democratic deliberation. Twenty-six is an important step towards accomplishing the PennCORD mission.

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26% of the population of the United States is under the age of 18.
The 26th Amendment to the Constitution gives citizens 18 yrs. and older the right to vote.

TWENTY SIXTH AMENDMENT.

SECTION 1. THE RIGHT OF CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES, WHO ARE EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER, TO VOTE SHALL NOT BE DENIED OR ABRIDGED BY THE UNITED STATES OR BY ANY STATE ON ACCOUNT OF AGE. **SECTION 2.** THE CONGRESS SHALL HAVE POWER TO ENFORCE THIS ARTICLE BY APPROPRIATE LEGISLATION.

This is your Toolkit. It will help you realize how what you are already doing makes you an active citizen, and it will help you understand the concept of advocacy. It will also provide the tools for you to promote your ideas, issues, yourself and the good work that you do.

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Dear Student,

First of all, you should know a little about us. We are two college students working with PennCORD on their mission to revamp civic education in Pennsylvania. One of the most important parts of that mission is empowering you to use your voice. You may be frustrated by some of the issues facing your school and community like we were. Luckily, we learned that not only can changes be made, we also have the power to make them. Twenty-six gives us the voice we need to share our knowledge and ideas with you so that you too can become active. The first step to making changes is understanding what it means to be an active citizen.

No matter who you are or what you do, you are part of something bigger than yourself. It might be that you are part of a family, a team, a group of friends, your school, town, state, or country, but the point is, you are a citizen. People always think about citizenship as something that has to do with nationality, but it's much more than that. We are citizens of our schools, homes, neighborhoods, cities, states, and nations all at the same time. There are many ways that your activities can improve your community. Playing on the football team strengthens your community's spirit just like volunteering at the local food bank does. You already do it, and you probably have fun doing it.

While learning about your rights and responsibilities is part of being a citizen, active citizenship is a little bit more. Being an active citizen is when you take a stand and take action to support that stand. Just saying something is wrong is only half of the process; you then need to act to reverse that wrong. Voting or encouraging others to vote may be how you are involved in active citizenship, but it is not the only way. You can write letters, work in the media, join your student government, or use any of the tools of democracy to become an advocate. Advocacy is the keystone to being a good citizen. When we say "good citizen" too often it is associated with just being "good" and following rules, but this is not active citizenship. While following the rules is good, active citizens do not just follow the rules, they fight bad rules and then work to create new, better rules.

Good luck and stay active!

Sincerely,

Rachel and Andrew

The table below is your report card on your involvement in school and community activities. Many of you are already actively engaged in your home, school, and community while others seek to be engaged. Complete the table below. If you check “yes,” share an example (i.e. if you have a job, you are a taxpayer.) Include that information in the appropriate “how” column.

Activity	Yes _ No	How
A student citizen?		
Employee?		
Taxpayer?		
Volunteer?		
Community member?		
Political club member?		
Student government member?		
Member of a religious institution?		
Follower of news media?		
Athlete?		
Club member?		
Voter?		
Advocate?		

Need help defining a term? Go to the “Jargon Buster” section of the Appendix.

There are some rights that all citizens enjoy. As a student you have some restrictions placed upon you to make sure the school community is not disrupted. Here is a list of Constitutional rights that give you a voice.

Freedom of Speech

All students have the right to free speech. This speech has to be responsible. The Supreme Court ruled that students' speech cannot interfere with the educational process, use obscene language, or profane gestures. This means that you can and should share your thoughts, you just have the responsibility to make sure you are not hindering the mission of the school or hurting anyone in the process.

Freedom of the Press

You have a right to a school paper in which you can announce events, voice your opinions, and discuss the important issues facing your school and community. When doing this, you have the responsibility to make sure that the content of the article does not hurt anyone, promote drug or alcohol use, or endorse values other than the ones the school teaches.

Freedom of Expression

As a student you can hold demonstrations and make signs about a cause for which you are passionate. Students have the same basic rights as all Americans. You have the right to express yourself, voice your opinions, and advocate for change in your school. The school can only stop a demonstration if it disrupts the educational process. You also have responsibilities that come along with these rights. You are responsible for your actions in the school, and as a student you should try to find a balance between working for change and keeping the school community safe and happy. The school needs to be a place where everyone can learn; your role as a responsible active citizen will make that possible.

[Freedom of Expression: Read about... Tinker V. Des Moines Community School.](#)
[Freedom of Speech: Read about... Bethel School District V. Fraser.](#)
[Freedom of the Press: Read about... Hazelwood School District V. Kuhlmeier.](#)

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What Makes An Active Citizen?

Look at the checklist below and decide whether or not the actions listed are actions that an active citizen takes. There are no right or wrong answers. After you evaluate each of the actions on your own, compare and discuss your decisions with your peers.

An Active Citizen...

- Gets involved in school clubs
- Respects authority
- Helps take care of community members who cannot take care of themselves
- Organizes a protest
- Attends a protest
- Complains
- Breaks up a fight
- Follows all of the rules
- Has a job
- Regularly attends religious services
- Questions authority
- Gets good grades
- Plays on a sports team
- Helps teach younger community members
- Helps take care of younger community members
- If eligible, votes
- Encourages others to vote
- Is a member of a political party

In 2004, only 42% of 18-24 year old citizens voted while 70% of citizens 45 and older voted.
You can find this and all other activities at www.pennCORD.org

'If We Clean It, They Will Come'

June 10, 2004 By Tom Waring. Reprinted with permission
Northeast Times : Philadelphia, PA.

Endrit Faslliaj thinks there's a simple reason why some Philadelphians litter at Department of Recreation sites. "They're lazy," he said. Faslliaj is a junior at Northeast High School. He's part of teacher Donna Sharer's first-period U.S. history class, which participated this school year in the Student Voices Project, an initiative of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. Last fall, the students surveyed classmates and conducted exit polling during the November election to gauge views about recreation centers in the Northeast. As part of the effort, students spoke to recreation center staffers about available programs. In December, the students won a Best Issues Project award at a civics fair at Penn. In January, Recreation Commissioner Victor Richard visited Northeast to view a PowerPoint presentation created by students. The commissioner was impressed with the work. As the final part of the project, students recently completed work on 500-plus posters that encourage citizens to keep recreation centers clean. The theme of the posters is, If we clean it, they will come. The posters are written in English, Spanish, Russian, Albanian, Chinese, Indian, Serbian and Portuguese.

On Friday morning, Sharer and her students visited the Jardel Recreation Center to tour the facility and hang the posters. The students believe the posters are necessary. Angel Alicea, who lives in Olney, mentioned that his local recreation center needs some upkeep. "A lot of the AstroTurf on the basketball courts is really ruined," he said. Alicea worked with classmates Drew Gulak and Biljana Todic to design the posters. Todic was the artist. The students wanted to convey their message in a comical way. For instance, there's a drawing of a monkey playing on the bars. The posters include a before and after look at a recreation center. The before poster features graffiti and a bum hanging in the park. The after poster portrays a spotless rec center.

Sharer, the teacher, thinks the students learned a lot about recreation issues this year. As part of their class work, they researched the recent history of recreation funding in the city. The recreation department, they learned, has not always fared well in budget battles. "It's always the first to be cut," Sharer said. The teacher was glad her students had the opportunity to meet with recreation department officials during their trip to Jardel. Deputy Commissioner Carlton Williams lauded the students for setting an example for the community by creating the posters. Williams said the recreation department tries to maintain its centers at night by keeping them well lit and gated. That doesn't always work, he noted, pointing to beer bottles and trash at Jardel. Overall, though, Jardel is immaculate. The center recently underwent a massive overhaul. "We wish every facility looked like Jardel," Williams said.

Jardel is classified as a "Class A" facility because it has such amenities as a gymnasium, swimming pool and tennis courts. Class B, C and D facilities might lack some of those features but are expected to look good. "They're all supposed to be maintained Class A," Williams said. The deputy commissioner encouraged the students to apply for seasonal maintenance attendant jobs at recreation centers this summer. A more permanent way of maintaining a facility, in the view of Williams, is to have a center's advisory council work with the local police district to monitor late-night activity. Williams took the students on a tour of Jardel's office space and rooms dedicated to a nursery school, senior citizens activities, weightlifting equipment and arts and crafts. Outside, they saw floor hockey rinks, basketball backboards (with no rims), children's play equipment and even some Northeast truants playing a game of tackle football. Williams and Joe Stephney, a district caretaker for the recreation department, credited Tony Verrecchio with doing a good job maintaining Jardel. At one time, three maintenance men were assigned to Jardel. Today, Verrecchio is the staff. It's particularly tough to maintain a facility when the maintenance man is sick or on vacation.

Stephney said people who frequent a recreation center need to play a role in maintaining it, and he thanked the Northeast students for helping spread the word. "We need the community's help," he said. ••

How have your thoughts on active citizenship changed?

1. Why do you think the community saw the Northeast High School students as active citizens?
2. What actions did the students take that made them active citizens?
3. What distinguished these students from the others in their community who just complained about the poor facility?
4. What steps did the students take to get things done?
5. Do you think you would know how to be an active citizen? What tools would you like to know more about?

It is true that these students are active citizens. They took on this project in many ways and used lots of different tools to reach their goal. They...

conducted surveys
created an advertising campaign
met with city officials and
contacted the media...

all in order to get the attention the cause needed. The most important part of the program was they did not just meet and talk, they took action. These students cleaned up the facility, got other stakeholders more involved in the center's upkeep, and in doing so used many of the tools of democracy. They were also taught how to use each of these activities at school. Unfortunately, many students are not taught how to work for change. The toolkit will give you the information you need to become a more active citizen.

Talking Point: Service-learning is a good way to get students involved in the community.

What Does Your Community Need?

Below is a list of possible issues that your community may be facing. Choose five issues that you think are the most important for your community to solve. Then rank the issues in the order in which you are most interested.

Issue:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| After-School Activities for Young Students | School Buses |
| After-School Activities for Pre-Teens and Teenagers | Community Revitalization |
| Pollution | Student School Board Representation |
| Teacher Biases | Approaches to Science Education |
| Standardized Tests | Grades |
| State Tests | Fundraising |
| Open Space | Networking |
| Homelessness | College Admissions |
| Gangs | *Title IX |
| Nutrition | Voter Registration |
| Graffiti | Community Centers |
| Police Relations | Student Media |
| Censorship | Community Hunger |
| Sex Education | Cultural Diversity Awareness |
| Recycling | Other: _____ |
| School Sports | _____ |
| Volunteerism | _____ |
| Child Care | |

Five most important issues facing community

Ranking of most important issues based on your interest

(*Title IX is a federal law that requires that male and female students receive fair and equal treatment in all arenas of public schooling: recruitment, admissions, educational programs and activities, course offerings and access, counseling, financial aid, employment assistance, facilities and housing, health and insurance benefits, marital and parental status, scholarships, sexual harassment, and athletics.)

Talking Point: Civic Learning extends beyond the classroom to involvement in the school and the community.

How Do You Begin To Address The Issue?

Community Problem Solving Framework

Step 1

Research issues in your community about which you may be interested in working. Your community could be your classroom, school, family, or neighborhood. An example might be that there are not enough after-school activities offered to high school students. Write some of the local issues you are interested in below. You could use some of the issues you identified on the previous page, or brainstorm different ones.

Step 2

Identify the issue on which you would like to focus and begin to plan for action. Rewrite the issue on which you chose to focus.

Step 3

Identify possible stakeholders such as

- Other students
- Other student organizations
- Teachers
- School Administrators
- Other school staff (aides, secretaries, etc.)
- School board members
- Parents
- Community residents
- Local politicians
- Other _____
- Other _____

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Petitioning

“Congress shall make no law respecting ... the right of the people ... to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Tips for developing an effective petition

Decide on an issue.

Decide who to send your petition to and then write them a letter in support of your issue. Make sure to write different letters for different audiences. Possible audiences are your:

Teacher	Community Leader or	Senator
Principal	Organization	President
State Representative	Representative in Congress	

In your letter, clearly explain the issue and offer brief support for your side. Be sure to include what you want to change.

Now that you have written a letter and reviewed it several times, begin to gather signatures. When gathering signatures, be sure not to disrupt the school environment. Attend school functions including concerts, board meetings, or any event where interested people may be. Be sure to explain to your signers the intent of your letter and to whom it will be sent. Try to make sure that these people are really interested in the issue.

Try to get as many signatures as possible. The point of using a petition rather than an individual letter is that it shows the receiver how many people are interested in the topic. The more names the better when it comes to petitions.

Pros	Cons
Petitions give many people one collective voice.	People often use petitions as a way to inflate an issue.
Petitions are quick and easy to make.	Other tools are more effective and have more meaning.
Petitions give you the opportunity to spread the word on the issue and educate while gathering signatures.	Petitions do not allow your audience to think critically about or take their own position on the issue because you only show one side of the issue.
Petitions show how many people are affected by the issue.	Petitions are often abused by one person trying to make a point. People will sign even if they do not really care about the issue.
Petitions give a sense of accomplishment to the people who sign.	In many ways, petitioning is just talking and not taking any action.

To find out who represents you in the Pennsylvania Legislature, go to www.legis.state.pa.us.

Tips for Writing an Effective Proposal

The first step in introducing an idea to your school administration is to write a proposal. Your proposal should include three main parts:

1. **The Need:** Tell the administrator who you are, who you represent, what you want to do, and why you want to do it.
2. **The Plan for Action:** Let them know how you are going to achieve your goal, what you are going to do, what adult support you have, and where you are going to get the money to get your plan started. Also include a timeline for the steps required to achieve your goal.
3. **The Next Step:** Tell your administrator why he or she should let you carry out your plan and when you want him or her to meet with you.

The Need:

The senior class officers, on behalf of the entire senior class, want to add a winter ball called the Snow Ball. We are proposing this additional dance to have fun in a safe environment and raise funds for our class.

The Plan for Action:

We will put together the following committees:

- Decorations
- Budget and Ticket Sales
- Safety (i.e. Chaperones)
- Clean-up
- Refreshments

We have the support of Mrs. Smith, the senior class advisor, and Mr. Brown, Jeff Brown's dad. By November 15, we will have identified chaperones, printed tickets, and set up a budget. Seed money to start our project will come from the senior class fund. All money will be deposited in the senior class fund to defray the cost of our prom.

Get Their Support:

Our events have been very successful and we have been very responsible.

Our officers meet at 7:30 am every other Tuesday. Our next meeting is Tuesday, September 10th. Please plan to join us for this meeting to discuss our proposal.

Thank you,
Senior Class Officers (signed)

Tips for an Effective Student Organization

1. Stay organized by starting every meeting with an agenda that informs every member what will be discussed and who will be discussing it, keep a calendar of events, and have a constitution to formalize all procedures. Also, establish goals at the beginning of the year and track your progress.
2. Ask for feedback on previous events and possible future ones. Use the feedback.
3. Prepare a clearly written proposal when introducing an idea to your school or school district administration. For more information on writing a proposal, go back to the previous page.
4. Set up a meeting with representatives from every student organization and team, a club council, where students can talk about the issues each of their organizations is facing. This will give you an opportunity to gain feedback from the students you might not normally hear from.
5. Consider connecting to the state and national student government organizations. These connections give students a great way to get new ideas and share some of their own. Find out more about the Pennsylvania association on www.pasc.net and the National association on www.nasc.us/s_nasc/index/asp.
6. Work to make sure your Student Council elections are not popularity contests. Some ways to do this include:
 - a: Require student politicians to have a petition signed by a number of students and teachers who support their candidacy. Remind the candidates that this is a requirement for real politicians.
 - b: Make the student campaigns important and serious.
 - _ Have student candidates give speeches about the issues facing their school.
 - _ Allow the student body to publicly question the candidates about the issues. Some schools do this on the school's television system. If this is not an option, hold a meeting after school that is open to the student body.
 - _ Arrange a meeting with all student candidates, advisors, administrators, and parents to explain the responsibilities associated with student government.
7. Plan successful fundraising events. Many student organizations rely on the sale of candy and baked goods for fundraising. Here are some other fundraisers that schools find bring in a lot of money:
 - a: Talent shows and Battle of the Bands: Charge \$5 admissions and offer some prizes. Lots of students will come out to see their friends and family perform.
 - b: Magazine sales: These fundraisers can bring in thousands of dollars.
 - c: Dances: Very inexpensive to hold and fun for everyone who attends.
 - d: Special sporting events: A powder puff football game or a faculty vs. students basketball game are both good ways to make money.
 - e: Community Fundraising: Ask local merchants for their support in return for advertising space at special events.

Tips for becoming involved with the school board

The government authority that has the greatest effect on your day-to-day lives is probably your local school board. The school board makes decisions that include:

What books you read...

What food you eat...

Who teaches you...

How you are taught...

What you are required to know...

What you wear...

Your schedule for nearly all of your activities.

Across the state and the country there is a movement to put students on school boards. Even if your school district does not have students on the school board, you can still have a huge impact on the actions of your board. Here is how:

If your school allows student school board members:

Contact whoever runs the program at your school and tell them you are interested. You may be able to serve on the board, or to assist another student school board member. Either way, it is a great way to use your voice.

If you are on the board, use your position. Although you may not be able to vote, you can use your position to persuade other school board members to see things your way.

Take a few minutes at every student council meeting to ask for feedback from your fellow students. Also remind them about upcoming school board meetings and the topics that will be covered.

If your school does not have student board members:

Attend school board meetings anyway. Most schools have some time during meetings for comments from the community. You have a stake in the decisions the board makes; so say something. You can talk about whatever issues you and your peers are being affected by, such as the lack of a student board member. Make sure you have done your research on the topic so that it is obvious that you know what you are talking about.

Encourage others to come to the meeting. The more people who are there in support of what you are saying, the better.

Ask for time to meet with board members. Become a lobbyist for the student body. Get the attention of student friendly board members and show them all of the research done on the benefits of student board members. A great tool for this is called **The Power of an Untapped Resource: Exploring Youth Representation on Your Board or Committee** by the Association of Alaska School Boards. You can find this document at www.aasb.org/bookstore/aasbpub.html.

School Newspaper

Student newspapers can be written as part of a journalism class, published as part of a club, or published independently by students. Students often say school newspapers do not do anything. This may or may not be the case at your school, but there certainly are ways to help make your school newspaper better. The newspaper is a great way for students to have a voice in their school and use that voice to make change.

Get involved:

Volunteer to write / Volunteer to edit / Volunteer to distribute your school's paper

Start off writing about the issues in which your peers are already interested. Once you have people hooked, move on to some of the issues you think are important and your peers would care about if they had more information.

Get others involved:

Get your friends involved. You might explain how participation on the school newspaper is a great addition to a college application, a place to have fun, and an opportunity to share your views.

Move beyond your friends and get teachers and the administration involved. Sit down and talk to the teachers and administration about the issues that make students afraid to have a voice. Clarify what they think is appropriate and what they think will be censored. Try to find teachers who are willing to help create, or recreate, your school's paper.

Get to work: Newspapers work only if there are deadlines. Set deadlines to make sure that every article is in with enough time to edit and have administrative approval, if necessary. You might need to put in a lot of time at first, but as more students read the school newspaper, more will want to write.

Get funding: Most schools have fairly tight budgets and are not willing to put too much money into a student newspaper. This does not mean you cannot have a paper. Contact local businesses and ask them for funding. In return, offer them advertising space.

A school newspaper has always been important because of the voice it offers the students. You can and should use the paper to talk about the issues facing your school's community. The paper can also be a place where students talk to each other and find ways to understand each other better.

Think about ways that you can get feedback from your fellow students. Some ways might be a bulletin board in the hall or an internet message board.

Local Media

While **Twenty-six** has given you the tools to improve your school's newspaper and has shown you why you should, there is another media outlet in which you can voice your opinion. Most likely your community has a local newspaper; some are published every day and others, once a week. Either way, you can have your voice included in the process. If there is a specific issue you are concerned with, here is what you can do:

Write a **letter to the editor** letting your community know how students feel, and what you and other students are doing to improve the community.

Become a columnist. Many local newspapers have teen sections where teens are invited to talk about the issues they face. If your local newspaper has one of these sections, contact it and begin writing. If there is not a teen section, you can still talk to the paper about writing articles for the opinion pages or you can advocate with the publisher and editors to include a teen section in their paper. Show them what it would look like based on the local newspapers and explain that you feel that students are an important part of the community that is underrepresented in their publications.

You might be wondering why you should work with the local media when students have school newspapers. The reason is simple: the audience. Local newspapers usually have a different and larger audience than school newspapers. Writing for the local newspaper not only gives the larger community a chance to read what you think, it also gives them a chance to know what you are doing.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Connect your letter to recent topics written in the paper whenever possible. If you comment on a specific story, make sure you mention the headline and the date on which it appeared.

Be sure that your letter is ...

Short / To the point (Typically a letter is 200 words or less.)

Follow the guidelines for submitting a letter. Most papers print their guidelines once a week and each paper has different standards.

Always remember to sign your letter.

Morning Announcements

Now that you have defined your issues and learned how to take action, you can use the morning announcements as a way to inform other students about their school community. Morning announcements allow your peers to find out:

What student organizations are doing
If anything fun or different is going on in the school
What activities are planned

Unfortunately, these tools are often ignored by the student body. People just don't listen, which makes the tool ineffective. Luckily, there are some easy ways to make students want to listen to morning announcements:

Make it fun! Try having on-air skits or commercials; who says the information has to be boring?

Use student voices whenever possible. Students will be more likely to listen to their peers than administrators.

Get lots of people involved. The more people who work on the announcements, the more representative of the school the announcements will be. This also means someone is more likely to hear or see their friend and, therefore, be more willing to listen.

If students in your school do not do the morning announcements but want to, think about using some of the tools you have already learned, like petitioning and proposal writing, to make changes.

Notes_

Appendix

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Advocacy	Support for a cause
Advocate	A person who publicly campaigns for a cause
CCMS	Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools – A national campaign, comprised of coalitions from 18 states, as well as national organizations, who want to improve civic learning for students nationwide
Civic learning	All the ways students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for good citizenship, both in and out of the classroom; especially the six promising approaches
Civic Mission of Schools	The idea that educating youth to be active citizens is the historic mission of public schools
Civic Engagement	Voluntary involvement in activities that help to shape a particular community – home, school, town, state, nation
CMS Report	A study published in 2003 that identified six “promising approaches” to civic education; it is the theoretical foundation of the campaign
Democratic Deliberation	Talking about an idea/issue from a particular point of view with someone who might have a different point of view
Jargon	Specialized or technical language of a group
NCLB	No Child Left Behind – A Federal law that requires schools to demonstrate that their students are making progress, especially in the areas of reading and math
PASC	Pennsylvania Association of Student Councils – An organization of about 500 high school and 300 middle school student councils from across PA
PDE	Pennsylvania Department of Education – State government agency that oversees education in PA
PennCORD	Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy – A group of individuals and organizations who want to improve civic learning opportunities for PA students in grades K-12
PSBA	Pennsylvania School Boards Association – An organization of school boards from across PA
PSPA	Pennsylvania School Press Association – An organization for student print media, including newspapers, literary journals, and websites

Answer the survey below to identify what your school has and what your school needs in order to serve as a model for promoting active citizenship?

Instruction in government, history, law, and democracy

- Does your school offer a range of these subjects? Yes _ No
- Do your classes emphasize citizens' duties and responsibilities? Yes _ No
- Do your classes include active discussion and debate? Yes _ No
- Are you required to read materials outside of textbooks? Yes _ No
- Do your classes incorporate role-plays, mock trials, etc.? Yes _ No
- Does your school invite guest speakers? Yes _ No
- Are you ever asked to write letters to papers or policy makers about issues? Yes _ No

Discussion of current events & issues in the classroom

- Do your classes encourage moderated, respectful discussions? Yes _ No
- Are students taught to distinguish between fact, opinion, and values? Yes _ No
- Are you allowed to discuss controversial issues? Yes _ No
- Do your classes expose students to a variety of view points? Yes _ No
- Does your school use high quality news media? Yes _ No

Community service opportunities linked to classroom instruction

- Is community service used to promote specific civic outcomes? Yes _ No
- Are students able to do meaningful work on serious public issues? Yes _ No
- Do you get to see positive results in a reasonable period of time? Yes _ No
- Does your school let students choose and design projects and strategies? Yes _ No
- Does your school link service with academic lessons and assignments? Yes _ No
- Does your school provide opportunities for reflection? Yes _ No
- Does your school allow students to address the causes of community problems through political means? Yes _ No
- Does your school address negative attitudes about community service? Yes _ No
- Does your school include service learning in more than one class? Yes _ No

Opportunities for student involvement in extra-curricular activities

- Does your school have opportunities to participate in student government? Yes _ No
- Does your school have opportunities to participate in student journalism? Yes _ No
- Does your school reinforce and reward participation skills? Yes _ No
- Does your school emphasize fair play and teamwork over competition? Yes _ No
- Does your school hold students accountable for school work when participating in extracurricular activities? Yes _ No

Opportunities for students to participate in school governance

- Does your school ensure that all students are treated equally and that all views are respected? Yes _ No
- Does your school have discussions about school policies and school problems? Yes _ No
- Does your school have class or school meetings? Yes _ No
- Does your school have a school constitution? Yes _ No
- Are students represented on administrative committees and school board? Yes _ No

Simulations of democratic processes

- Does your school have activities that teach democratic processes, such as voting, mock trials, legislative deliberation, diplomacy? Yes _ No

Use these points to start conversations with students who could be more involved.

Research shows that many young people are not active citizens.

Students cannot be expected to acquire citizenship skills through osmosis – we must be given opportunities to learn and practice these skills.

Public schools were founded to educate citizens and have an obligation to fulfill this mission.

Educating citizens does not stop at imparting knowledge; students' skills and civic attitudes must also be developed.

Civic learning extends beyond the classroom to involvement in the school and the community.

Students can gain valuable citizenship skills by participating in school governance.

Using and interpreting media is an important citizenship skill that schools can foster by supporting student journalism.

Students develop positive attitudes about teamwork, responsibility, and self-discipline by participating in extracurricular activities.

Service-learning is a good way to get students involved in the community; we should be a part of the planning process and work on projects that are meaningful to us.

Classes that engage students in discussion of current events keep us informed; it is also important to give us the chance to discuss controversial issues and settle our differences through democratic processes.

Student voices are the missing link in school reform.

When we get the chance to practice making responsible decisions as a group, we take another step toward entering adulthood in a democratic society.

Statistics On Students' Civic Knowledge, Skills, And Dispositions

Nearly three-fourths of high school students either do not know how they feel about the First Amendment or admit they take it for granted.

75% erroneously think flag burning is illegal.

Half believe the government can censor the Internet.

More than a third think the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. (Source: Future of the First Amendment: How America's High School Students Think About Their Freedoms, 2005, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation)

Between 1988 and 1998, the proportion of fourth-graders who reported taking Social Studies daily fell from 49% to 39%.

Nearly 1/3 of high school seniors were found to lack a basic understanding of how American government works.

75% of students scored at "basic" or "below basic" on the 1998 NAEP Civics Assessment.

American students ranked tenth out of 28 countries in their knowledge and understanding of principles of democracy. (Source: The Civic Mission of Schools Report, 2003, CIRCLE)

In 2000, 42% of 18-24 year old citizens voted while 70% of citizens 25 and older voted. (Source: Youth Voter Turnout Has Declined by Any Measure, September 2002, CIRCLE)

Only 50% of young Americans (15-25) said they trust the government to do what is right.

Just 26% of young Americans have participated in community service in the past year – and volunteering drops off quickly after high school. While 40% of 15-17 year olds have volunteered in the last year, only about half of those ages 18-25 did so. (Source: National Youth Survey, 2004, CIRCLE)

Recommended Websites To Help You Continue Your Active Citizenship

www.pennCORD.org
Connect to PennCORD's online community resources

www.constitutioncenter.org
National Constitution Center

www.atthetable.org
At the Table: Youth voices in decision making

www.youthactivism.com
Youth Activism Project

www.aypf.org
American Youth Policy Forum

www.allianceforjustice.org/student/co_motion/index.html
Co/Motion: Guide to Youth-led Social Change

www.nlc.org/home/
National League of Cities

www.youthactionnet.org
Youth Action Net

www.youthnoise.com
Youth Noise

www.pps.org/tcb/
Teens as Community Builders

www.freechild.org
The Free Child Project

www.yesweb.org
YES Campaign

www.youthventure.org
Youth Venture

www.idealists.org
Idealist

www.commatters.org
Community Matters

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