A Guide To Organizing A
Regional Summit on Civic Education
“It [Government] must not be a distant thing, someone else's business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine” -Eleanor Roosevelt.

What do we teach youth about their responsibilities to society? Secondary schools in the United States were originally created for the purpose of creating good citizens. As such, our system of education shoulders the noble burden of educating youth about society and their relation to it. Educating youth about the responsibilities of citizenship and helping youth to understand the value of living in a democratic society are enticing and necessary endeavors. Yet, while we live in a diverse, industrial, and technologically complex age that has brought Americans numerous political and cultural benefits, civic engagement has noticeably decreased.

The decrease in civic engagement is well documented. There has been a sixteen point drop in total 18-24 year old voter turnout from 1972 to 2004.\(^1\) Moreover, the current trend shows voting expectations dropping annually, to a point where a 48% turnout is considered high. Additionally, there has been a slow but steady decline of public participation in civic groups such as local PTAs, labor unions, the Red Cross, and the League of Women Voters. Ironically, at the same time that more people are obtaining more education and graduating from high school and college as never before, civic participation at every educational level has declined.

Not only have voter turnout and membership in civic organizations declined, but the sheer ignorance among the general public regarding a working knowledge of government, the processes by which governmental decisions are made, and the identity of public officials is disheartening. According to a recent poll taken by the American Bar Association, just over half of the American population can identify the three branches of government; less than half can correctly identify the meaning of the concept of separation of powers; and more than one-third could not correctly identify the principle of checks and balances. In a democracy where governance is supposed to be of the people, by the people, and for the people, civic education is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

Reviving the dedication and passion for the civic participation that drove previous generations is essential in addressing civic apathy – and educational institutions play a key role in preparing young people to be active, informed, and engaged citizens. Civic engagement is a learned skill just like reading, math, science, and art, and, as such, civic skills must be practiced regularly in order for youth to develop proficiency, confidence, and a greater understanding of how to harness their civic power.

In an effort to increase youth civic education and engagement at the local level, a coalition of concerned citizens formed the DuPage Civic Committee. The DuPage Civic Committee sought to organize a Civic Summit at the local level wherein students would be recognized for engaging


in current civic activities. Moreover, the Civic Summit sought to provide an opportunity to examine the current status of civic education and begin to take action to dismantle the barriers that stymie youth civic participation. While study after study laments apathy and the lack of civic engagement, the Civic Summit was viewed as an avenue to empower and build the capacity of local communities to begin an ambitious, long-term effort to reverse the decline in civic engagement.

The Civic Summit was a landmark event in that it was the first countywide conference focused on addressing civic engagement and education in the United States. The results of the conference were outstanding. The purpose of this organizing manual is to share with others the means by which to implement equally successful and dynamic regional conferences, as well as to serve as a general guide that can be applied to any organizing effort.

Good luck, and all the best in your civic endeavors!

**The DuPage Civic Committee**

Honorable Robert Anderson, DuPage County 18th Judicial Circuit Court  
Dr. Tom Bookler, Assistant Superintendent, DuPage Regional Office of Education  
Mr. Carl Brownell, Social Study Department Chair, Hinsdale Central High School, District 86  
Mr. John Bruesch, Social Study Teacher, Downers Grove South High School, District 99  
Ms. Mary Ellen Daneels, Social Studies/ Civic Teacher, Community High School, District 94  
Ms. Cynthia Johnson, Community Development Specialists, College of DuPage  
Mrs. Jan Kay, President, Wheaton League of Women Voters  
Ms. Toni Manzo, Senior Account Executive, Chicago Tribune News in Education  
Mrs. Jeanne McNamara, Vice Chair, DuPage County Election Commission  
Mrs. Charlotte Mushow, Secretary, DuPage County Election Commission  
Ms. Terry Pastika, Executive Director/ Community Lawyer, Citizen Advocacy Center  
Dr. Darlene Ruscitti, DuPage Regional Superintendent of Schools  
Ms. Nancy Salvato, District Coordinator, Center for Civic Education  
Ms. Joan Salvato, Basics Project  
Ms. Lisa Willuweit, Community High School, District 94
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I. Development of a Steering Committee

The development of a steering committee is the first organizing step in launching a Civic Summit. When considering the formation of a steering committee, special attention should be given to people who have the capacity to contribute a diverse array of expertise and resources. In terms of time commitment, committee members should be expected to meet roughly fifteen times for approximately two hours over the course of the planning stage, including an additional fifteen hours outside of full steering committee meetings. A steering committee that totals between ten and fifteen people is ideal for creative collaboration and task division.

The primary issues of concern for the steering committee to address are:
- Setting a mission statement
- Setting goals
- Identifying the target audience
- Setting the conference structure, duration, and timing

The DuPage Civic Committee was a dynamic group with a rich array of expertise. The DuPage Civic Committee included representatives from various high schools, prominent civic organizations, public bodies, the judiciary, a community college, and the media. In total, fifteen people worked collaboratively to make the Civic Summit a success.

A. Identifying a Mission Statement

Setting a mission statement is essential to identifying the overall purpose for holding the Civic Summit. A mission statement is a short, action-oriented phrase that identifies the fundamental reason for organizing the event. A mission statement also provides a concrete framework for how the steering committee will direct all other planning related to the event.

The mission statement created by the DuPage Civic Committee was: “To build enhanced collaborative community partnerships for sustained civic education and engagement.” The DuPage Civic Committee identified the words “collaborative community partnerships” as necessary to convey the concept that, while the conference was primarily being organized through school districts, the responsibility of imparting civic literacy to youth crosses public and private institutional boundaries. Moreover, the DuPage Civic Committee also placed special emphasis on the words “sustained” to indicate that the Civic Summit was a starting point for launching a long-term collaboration among teachers, students, administrators, public officials, civic leaders, and community leaders to improve youth civic engagement in communities throughout the county.

B. Identifying Goals

The identification of goals and objectives is the next important criteria. The identification of goals and objectives creates a roadmap for how the mission will be fulfilled and provides an overall framework for what is going to be achieved. Goals identify the efforts to be taken by the steering committee as it works towards its mission. Once the steering committee identifies broad
goals, various subcommittees should work towards establishing and implementing objectives. Objectives are specific and quantitative statements for how each goal is going to be achieved.

The DuPage Civic Committee discussed the importance of making the Civic Summit both a student-focused and a collaborative event. As such, it was important for the DuPage Civic Committee to structure broad goals that targeted students, educators, civic leaders, community leaders, and the general public. The DuPage Civic Committee’s goals and objectives included the following:

- **Goal:** To highlight current opportunities for student engagement and integrate students into every phase of the Civic Summit. Objectives: Hold a student contest in which high school and middle school students in all districts are invited to participate; Recruit at least 10 student groups to highlight current civic projects in schools today; Have at least two students as members of each district delegation that attends the Civic Summit; and Have at least one student as a member of one panel discussion;

- **Goal:** Provide an opportunity for local communities to generate the means to increase civic engagement. Objectives: Allow at least thirty minutes for delegations to plan community action plans; Facilitate at least three panel discussions about civic engagement; Recruit at least twelve civic organizations to display information;

- **Goal:** Provide an opportunity for the general public to become civically engaged. Objectives: Recruit at least twelve civic organizations to display information; Have at least 100 people who are not members of the delegations attend the Friday night kick-off event; and Have at least one member of each delegation be a community or civic leader;

- **Goal:** Meet Civic Summit costs by raising in-kind donations, individual contributions, or grant monies. Objectives: Raise $7,000 in grant monies; $5,000 in individual contributions; and $2,000 worth in-kind donations.

C. **Identifying the Target Audience(s)**

The identification of the target audience is essential to the success of the Civic Summit. Identification of the target audience will direct outreach efforts and the development of key messaging. The steering committee should evaluate the following to define the Civic Summit: What is the purpose of the Civic Summit? Who are the primary beneficiaries of the Civic Summit? Who are people in the community that are essential to facilitating civic education?

Because the mission statement of the DuPage County Civic Summit focused largely on building community partnerships, the DuPage Civic Committee identified four major audiences as essential to target: youth, educators, public officials, and the general public. While targeting four different groups was an ambitious goal, each group was an important component in building a community response to improving civic engagement among youth. Once each target group was identified, the committee, via subcommittees, took action to recruit participation from each group.
D. Contemplate Conference Structure, Duration, and Timing

Organizing a county-wide event is a large undertaking. As such, the steering committee should give special consideration to the structure, duration, and time of year in which to hold the Civic Summit. Specifically, the steering committee should consider the desirability and need of the following:

- Keynote speakers – How many?
- Panel Discussions – How many and how long?
- Breakout sessions – Goal and duration?
- Student contest – What kind, who can participate, what are the prizes?
- Gallery walk – Who to be included: students and civic/ community organizations?
- Event timing: One half day during the week or on the weekend
- Event timing: One full day on week day or week end
- Event timing: Two half days on week days or week end
- Event timing: Potential scheduling conflict such as community, academic, and athletic events.

Because the target audience for the DuPage County Civic Summit was expansive, the DuPage Civic Committee chose to have a multi-faceted conference that spanned a day and a half, beginning after business hours on a Friday evening. The following is a summary of the Civic Summit conference structure, duration, and timing.

The DuPage County Civic Summit started on Friday evening, November 4th and ended Saturday afternoon, November 5th.

Friday Event Activities: The primary focus was students and the general public. Evening activities included:

- Showcasing student displays that highlighted the efforts, products, curriculum, and instruction of civic education and engagement at the various schools throughout the county;
- Honoring student contest winners and recognizing all contest entries;
- Showcasing various organizations servicing DuPage County that have civic resources and opportunities available to schools and the general public; and
- Kicking off the Civic Summit with the assistance of DuPage County public officials, the Chairman and CEO of the McCormick Tribune Foundation, and our keynote Speaker.

Saturday Event Activities: Primary focus was delegations from local school districts that met for six hours. Participation in workshop activities was by invitation only. Workshop components consisted of:

- Two keynote speakers: one keynote speaker motivated the delegations for the day’s activities and a second keynote speaker summarized the Civic Summit and encouraged delegations to draft challenging action plans;
- Three panel discussions: Each panel focused on a various issue related to the importance of civic education and its presence in schools today; and
o A Breakout Period: The breakout period allowed the delegations time to engage in action planning. Delegations were asked to craft goals dictating how each group was going to work in their individual communities to improve civic engagement over the next year.

II. Subcommittee Organizing Priorities

After the steering committee has formed and established the mission statement, goals, target audience, and the general components of the event, subcommittees should be formed to determine the appropriate tasks and objectives relevant to each committee. At a minimum, the steering committee should organize the following subcommittees:

- Budget and Fundraising Committee
- District Delegation Recruitment Committee
- Facility and Food Committee
- Keynote/ Speaker Committee
- Student Participation Committee
- Publicity Committee

Each subcommittee should be responsible for setting internal goals that can be shared with the full steering committee and determine the basic steps to achieve each goal.

A. Budget & Fundraising Committee

A preliminary budget should be drafted as soon as possible. Major budget considerations should include:

- Project expenses. The subcommittee should approximate expenditures for every line item and consider the possibility of donated supplies and in-kind donations. At a minimum, the subcommittee should consider the following costs:

  - Speaker(s) honorarium
  - Speaker travel costs
  - Website development
  - Location rental
  - Chairs/ Tables rental
  - Sound system rental
  - Custodial
  - Food
  - Printing/copying
  - Postage
  - Advertising
  - Decorations
  - Security

- Project revenue. The subcommittee should identify possible revenue sources to cover all costs of the Civic Summit and establish target goals for each category. At a minimum, the subcommittee should include:

  - Monetary and In-Kind Donations
  - Regional Office Funds
  - Grants from private, public foundations, and family foundations. Many counties have a community foundation for which grant applications may be submitted. In addition,
many private foundations have a discretionary grant fund that may be accessible for special projects.

- Sponsorship opportunities. Consider utilizing a program guide where various organizations, business, and individuals can place ads or congratulatory comments. Conduct outreach to civic organizations, chamber of commerce organizations, prominent businesses, and community leaders to place ads in the sponsorship booklet.

The DuPage Civic Committee was fortunate to have the generous support of the Regional Office of Education and the Chairman of the DuPage County Board. The Civic Summit was held in a county building auditorium for no cost and the County Board Chairman donated a public reception. In addition, the McCormick Tribune Foundation granted the Regional Office $10,000 and hosted a reception for educators and public officials one month prior to the event.

The DuPage Civic Committee created a logo that was used specifically for the Civic Summit and conducted significant outreach to obtain sponsors for the Civic Summit. Several levels of sponsorship were identified to provide diverse opportunities for involvement. These ranges included: $250 “Patriot Club,” $500 “Founders Club,” $750 “Framers Club” $1,000 “Presidential Circle”

The overall cost of the DuPage County Civic Summit totaled $20,000, of which $10,000 was paid for with a grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation, while another $10,000 was donated by individuals, businesses, and civic organizations.

B. District Delegation Committee

Determining how to best ensure a diverse delegation from each district was a difficult decision. Due largely to the resources within the Regional Office of Education, the DuPage Civic Committee conducted the initial outreach through district superintendents and asked not only for their participation in the Civic Summit, but for their assistance in creating the delegations. Additionally, while the DuPage Civic Committee recognized that civic education should start as early as possible, the DuPage Civic Committee choose to limit attendance for the workshop component of the Civic Summit to high school districts and the County community college. The target goal was to have 100% participation from high school districts and the participation of the community college.

Initial outreach by the Regional Superintendent to the district superintendents involved informing them of the conference and asking for their support and participation. Having their involvement in creating a diverse delegation that included students, educators, policy makers, and community leaders was essential to highlighting the concept that civic education is a community issue. Recognizing that a substantial task was being placed on superintendents, the DuPage Civic Committee also conducted a second round of outreach to Social Study Chairs, School Boards, public officials at every level of government, and government administrators. After several informal outreach and communication efforts, correspondence was sent to the superintendents identifying expectations. The expectations included the following:
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- Recruiting a delegation to participate in the workshop component of the Civic Summit that included administrators, public officials from various public bodies, students, educators, civic and community leaders;
- Publicizing the student contest sponsored by the Civic Summit; and
- Recruiting student participation for displaying current civic engagement projects

In total, the Civic Summit had representation from every high school district in DuPage County except for one. Delegations that attended the Civic Summit had anywhere from seven to fifteen people and were extremely diverse in composition.

C. Facility and Food Committee.

Identifying a facility that meets the needs of the event and the consideration of what kind of food to provide are both essential event components. In regards to the facility, the subcommittee should consider the following:

- Estimate the physical needs, i.e. display area, breakout rooms, reception area, audio visual needs;
- Estimate attendance goals for each part of the Civic Summit;
- Consider possible public space that can be donated, such as county buildings, municipal buildings, etc;
- Consider the visibility of location; and
- Consider the availability of public transportation and adequate parking.

When considering food and beverages, evaluate:

- The need for a full meal versus a reception;
- The timing of day of the Civic Summit;
- Beverages; and
- Possibility to have food donated or whether the committee wants to charge participants for food.

The DuPage Civic Committee was able to provide a reception for the general public that was donated by the County Board Chairman. The DuPage Civic Committee was also able to provide a continental breakfast, box lunches, and beverages throughout the workshop day at no cost to the participants.

D. Speaker/Panel Committee

The consideration of who is going to speak at a major public event is often complex. However, selecting dynamic, knowledgeable, and interesting speakers who can effectively and entertainingly discuss the primary issues is essential. Issues to consider when choosing panel topics and speaker(s) are:

- What is the mission and goal of the conference and what panel(s)/speaker(s) can best address the mission and goals?;
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- What atmosphere is desired? Is there a preference for a working dialog or a presentation?
- Is there an opportunity for students to participate as a speaker or on a panel?
- How many keynote speakers and panelists are desired?
- Will the speaker(s) require an honorarium?
- Who is the target audience?
- Determine who is going to conduct initial contact, follow-up, and confirmation of speakers. Speakers should be sent an information packet one month before the event that details the audience, the preferred subject matter, and transportation plans. (Is a volunteer necessary to coordinate travel?)
- Confirm name and title spelling of speaker(s);
- Consider possibility of speaker(s) facilitating a “VIP” session to fundraise for the event;
- Consider a “thank you” gift; and
- Delegate a person to do “thank you” mailing

The DuPage Civic Committee had several dynamic speakers throughout the Civic Summit who generously spoke for no cost. At the evening reception, the County Chairman and the President and CEO of the McCormick Tribune Foundation gave general comments. The Honorable Joan Humphrey Lefkow provided a keynote address. On the workshop day, the DuPage Civic Committee had two well-known keynote speakers: Dawn Clark Netsch and Former Attorney General Jim Ryan. The workshop also included three panel discussions with one moderator and four panelists. All speakers were outstanding and able to contribute a significant amount of insight to various issues of concern. The Regional Superintendent was the Master of the Ceremony for both events. The DuPage Civic Committee was very fortunate in that all speakers, moderators, and panelists donated their time.

E. Student Participation Committee

Students are essential members and participants in any community. As such, the DuPage Civic Committee spent a considerable amount of time determining how to best involve students into the Civic Summit to highlight their importance. The DuPage Civic Committee chose a multi-faceted approach to integrate students into the Civic Summit by facilitating a student contest, organizing a gallery walk specifically for students to display current civic engagement projects, and having students participate in and on panel discussions. Students were also active members of district delegations.

1. The Student Contest

The DuPage Civic Committee felt that a student contest was an important element. The purpose of the student contest was to generate awareness regarding civic issues and to provide an opportunity for students to creatively address what civic engagement means to them.

The contest can be structured around a central theme that is developed through essays or the production of art and multi media. The subcommittee should also determine those who are eligible to participate in the contest, what the judging criteria is to be, who is to judge the entries, what is to happen to the winning projects, and what the prizes will be.
Outreach for the project should begin, at a minimum, three months before the date of submission. The subcommittee must also consider whether all project entries are going to be displayed at the Civic Summit and how the awardees are to be notified and recognized. Recruitment for participation in the student contest should be to Social Studies Department Chairs, Superintendents, and parent teacher organizations.

The DuPage Civic Committee decided to have a student contest wherein middle and high schools students in public schools were invited to submit art entries, websites, or public service announcements that focused on why civic engagement is important. Twenty students submitted entries and four individuals were recruited to judge the projects based on predetermined criteria. The middle school winner created a democracy collage and the high school winner created a 30-second public service announcement regarding the importance of voting. First place winners received a $500 college saving bond and second place winners received a $250 college savings bond. All students who submitted an entry received a gift certificate to a book store. Winners had their projects on display at the Civic Summit reception that was open to the public and were recognized before the audience. In addition, the McCormick Tribune Foundation displayed the winning student entries at the Tribune Freedom Museum in Chicago.

2. Student Gallery Walk

At the Friday evening public reception, the students who had developed civic projects were given the opportunity to showcase their efforts and answer questions. These projects were displayed in a specific area as a gallery where people could assemble informally before the evening program began. The target number for such student recognition was between ten and fifteen groups of students or student organizations.

As with the student contest, outreach to generate interest in the gallery walk started several months prior to the event. To introduce the gallery walk concept, the DuPage Civic Committee found it most effective to send correspondence directly to social study teachers who then circulated the information through the student body. The DuPage Civic Committee had fourteen student organizations in attendance. Each school had several student representatives who were available to talk with Summit attendees. Student displays included mock election programs, mock legislative sessions, and several civic service learning programs.

3. Student Panelist and Delegation Attendees

Student participation in the workshop was an important element in making the conference a success. Ultimately, the goal of the Civic Summit was to increase youth civic education and engagement. It therefore made sense to ensure students were part of substantive discussions. The DuPage Civic Committee specifically recruited students to participate in a panel discussion on civic education in DuPage County. In addition, district delegation organizers recruited students to be members of the delegation. Every delegation had, at a minimum, two students who participated by asking questions of panelists or assisting in the drafting of delegation action plans.
F. **Community Participation Committee**

The Civic Summit’s mission was to create enhanced community partnerships. As such, community participation was an important element. In addition to having general members of the community become involved in the Civic Summit by being delegates, the DuPage Civic Committee opened the kick-off event and reception Friday night to the general public. The DuPage Civic Committee’s goals were to have at least a dozen organizations involved in civic issues to display community information and at least 100 people who were not part of the district delegations attendance. The DuPage Civic Committee met both objectives: more than fifteen civic organizations displayed information and more than 200 people attended the Friday night reception.

G. **Publicity Committee**

Having an effective publicity outreach plan is crucial to generating awareness about the Civic Summit. In order to generate maximum visibility, the publicity committee should consider doing the following:

- Public service announcements;
- Press releases;
- Rotating letters to the editor;
- Posting Civic Summit information on community calendars;
- Booking appearances on broadcast and cable television stations;
- Creating a web-based presence;
- Sending announcement postcards to public officials and prominent community leaders;
- Ordering banners to hang on buildings, underpasses, and at the Civic Summit location.

The DuPage Civic Committee was fortunate to have a significant amount of public support, which translated into significant press coverage. A state representative invited the Regional Superintendent to appear on a cable access show which ran numerous times in the months leading up to the Civic Summit. Jim Ryan, a keynote speaker at the Civic Summit, authored an editorial that appeared in a regional newspaper. The Regional Office posted Civic Summit information on their website. All members of the steering committee circulated information on websites and in schools. Finally, the DuPage Civic Committee was able to have the Civic Summit activities taped for television broadcast.

III. **Ensuring Delegation Success**

An enormous amount of positive energy and feedback resulted from the Civic Summit. And, while the mission was achieved, the Civic Summit was merely a starting point for a long-term effort to systemically improve youth civic education and engagement. To ensure that the good will and hard work of the delegations would continue to have a positive impact, the DuPage Civic Committee took several actions to ensure that delegates will be successful in working towards the completion of their action plans. These included distributing evaluations, providing educational resources, and offering hands-on assistance.
A. Evaluations

The last component of the event was an evaluation. Delegations on Saturday were asked to evaluate all elements of the workshop and indicate if they were willing to become involved in the planning of future Civic Summits. The evaluation was a key tool for the DuPage Civic Committee in determining whether or not the mission was achieved and how to improve future Civic Summits. For example, feedback regarding the delegation breakout session to organize an action was very positive. Delegations reported that they appreciated the opportunity to come together as a group to address youth engagement and liked working in an environment where resources were immediately available to assist in the planning. In addition to providing outstanding feedback in terms of speaker suggestions, panel topics, and different times during which to hold another Civic Summit, fourteen new people indicated an interest in becoming part of the DuPage Civic Committee.

A. Educational Resources

Providing delegations with the means to be successful is important. To that end, a resource list of more than fifty organizations that are engaged in various aspects of civic education and engagement was compiled and made available on the Regional Office’s website. In addition, professional DVDs of the Civic Summit workshop were created to use as a classroom educational tool. The two key note addresses as well as the three panels, Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship, Status of Civic Education, and Emerging Trends in Civic Education were included on the DVD.

B. Hands-on Assistance

A primary focus of the Civic Summit was to provide an opportunity for the delegations to take all the information they had received and create an action plan for the specific steps they intend to take over the next year. Some delegations focused on identifying a current activity and working to expand or deepen the program or project. Other delegations created new civic opportunities such as voter registration projects and hoped to mandate district civic education. At the end of the Civic Summit, participants were energized and motivated to take action.

Some district delegations have the capacity, tools, and resources to implement their plans while other delegations need help. To ensure that the momentum continues to advance, and that all districts achieve their goals, hands-on support services will be provided by the Citizen Advocacy Center. Community lawyers from the Citizen Advocacy Center will maintain contact with the delegations to provide the necessary resources. Support services can include helping delegations stick to a timeline, assistance in outlining how to organize an event, or providing professional development.

IV. Conclusion

Civic participation is an essential element to a healthy democracy. The First Annual DuPage County Regional Summit on Civic Education was an important step in reviving community commitment to engaging youth in the principles of democracy. The Civic Summit provided a
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unique opportunity for local communities to discuss the current status of civic education and how to take action to reverse current trends. We look forward to continuing to systemically address youth civic education and engagement and building democracy at the local level through helping youth understand what it means to be “a good citizen” not just in theory, but in practice as well.

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The mission of the DuPage Regional Office of Education is to collaboratively build and sustain a high quality county educational community for all youth. To contact the DuPage Regional Office of Education, please visit www.dupage.k12.il.us, email Dr. Darlene J. Ruscitti at druscitti@dupage.k12.il.us, or call (630) 407-5800.
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V. Appendix

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