



April 25, 2019

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker
Governor of the State of Illinois
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

RE: Support HB 2265

Dear Governor Pritzker:

We are writing in support of House Bill (HB) 2265, legislation to require a semester of civics in Illinois middle schools.

The need for expanded civic learning opportunities in the early grades is profound. Illinoisans, and middle school students specifically, are ill-prepared for informed and effective civic engagement in our democracy. According to the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Civics, only 23% of 8th graders demonstrate proficiency in civic knowledge and skills, with a stark civic achievement gap along racial and ethnic lines. And the Council of Chief State School Officers finds that 44% of school districts have reduced time for social studies since the enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2001.

High-quality civic learning opportunities in Illinois middle schools for ALL students can help reverse this trajectory, building civic knowledge and skills. The more knowledgeable and confident a person is in their own civic competencies and skills, the more likely they will vote regularly, participate in a range of civic engagement activities, and believe that government is a source for good. By requiring a semester of civics in middle school infused with proven civic learning practices, HB 2265 will build students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, leading to lifelong, informed, and effective engagement in our democracy.

With the 2015 high school civics requirement fully implemented, Illinois is well-positioned to strengthen civic learning in the middle grades. Since October 2015, the McCormick Foundation and partner organizations have provided more than 1,300 hours of professional development to 10,000-plus teachers statewide. These professional development opportunities have improved teachers' competence in key instructional strategies, and a Spring 2018 survey shows strong civic outcomes among students as a result of course exposure, including enhanced knowledge and skills. Students are also more likely to report engagement in a range of civic behaviors like volunteering and discussing current events.

Following the successful implementation of the high school course, the McCormick Foundation proposes a three-year, privately-funded \$3 million plan (\$1 million annually) to support middle school teachers, schools, and districts to incorporate a civics course in grades 6, 7, or 8. Ongoing teacher professional development opportunities, both in person and online, are central to McCormick's proposed effort. They will be offered in partnership with civic education nonprofits and institutional partners, including universities and regional offices of education. McCormick pledges \$400,000 to this effort each year and is working to raise the balance through local philanthropic partners.

The problems that plague our state and nation are generational in nature. By investing in the civic development of our youth, we will empower them to resolve these issues, building a better Illinois and a healthier democracy. Please vote "yes" on HB 2265 and sign it into law.



Sincerely,

David D. Hiller
President and CEO
Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Michael Alter
President
Alter Group

Charles K. Bobrinsky
Civic Leader

Rev. Dr. Byron T. Brazier
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