CIVICS EDUCATION RETURNS TO ILLINOIS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

ELMHURST - On August 21, civics became law in the Land of Lincoln. A standalone civics semester will be required at all Illinois public high schools starting with the Class of 2020. The Citizen Advocacy Center (CAC) has been a tenacious advocate for bringing back civics to Illinois public schools and played a major role in the strong coalition effort that resulted in this successful outcome.

“Civic education is core to the work of CAC as community lawyers routinely answer basic information about the structure and function of government. In addition, CAC community lawyers have worked with schools for over two decades to help teachers convert classrooms and communities into civic labs,” explained CAC Executive Director Maryam Judar.

CAC’s advocacy efforts for civic education policy reform at the state level include: authoring and suggesting reform recommendations within the Illinois Civic Health Index 2010 that was published by the National Conference on Citizenship and in collaboration with the Robert R. McCormick Foundation; writing the “Advocacy and Policy” chapter within the Illinois Civic Blueprint that was published by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation; spearheading and advocating within the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition Public Policy Committee; spearheading the creation of the Civic Education Legislative Task Force which was charged with assessing Illinois civic education standards and making reform recommendations; and advocating for hands-on civic education as an appointee to the Task Force.

“On behalf of CAC, I would like to acknowledge the partners and collaborators who played a leading role in the effort to bring civics back to Illinois public high schools,” said Ms. Judar.

DuPage County Regional Superintendent Darlene Ruscitti has been a longtime advocate for civic education through supporting civic efforts throughout DuPage County, including the convening of two county-wide Civic Summits for high school students and advocating for the passage of the “Year of Civic Engagement” Resolution by the DuPage County Board.

Former Attorney General Jim Ryan who established the Center for Civic Leadership at Benedictine University, is a vocal advocate for civic education of youth, and was pivotal in the creation of Illinois’ Legislative Task Force on Civic Education charged with assessing the current state of civics in Illinois.
Shawn Healy, Civic Learning & Engagement Scholar at the McCormick Foundation and Chair of both the Task Force and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, is a champion for high quality civic education for all Illinois students, the promotion of the Democracy Schools program, and has been indefatigable in his efforts to strengthen civic education.

“There are many additional organizations and people who came together to bring civics back to Illinois. CAC is proud to have worked with many outstanding collaborators and to have played an instrumental role to change the civic landscape that will impact all youth,” said Ms. Judar.

“The commitment of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation was essential to the successful effort of returning civics to all public school students,” said Ms. Judar. “They have been a leader in promoting civic education for years through supporting organizations engaged in civic education. They have taken on a leadership role in advocating for legislative reform and in the implementation of their vision to hurdle financial obstacles through the establishment of a public-private partnership of foundation and corporations that will fund professional development to ensure that civics teachers receive adequate support to teach a high-quality, standalone semester of civics.”

The Citizen Advocacy Center is a nonprofit, nonpartisan community-based legal nonprofit dedicated to building democracy in the 21st century by strengthening the citizenry’s capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance. Visit www.CitizenAdvocacyCenter.org for more information.

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