Bellflower High School Civic Initiative Program

Presented to Bellflower Unified School District Board of Education - October 9, 2014
California Democracy School Civic Learning Initiative:

- Three-year pilot program funded by the Steven D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

- Directed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education in partnership with the Los Angeles County Education Foundation

- BHS applied in March 2013 and was accepted in May 2013. Twelve schools in LA County were accepted (out of 40)

- Goal is to institutionalize high quality civic learning at these chosen schools to help prepare all students for college, career and civic life.

- Upon successful completion, we will become a Flagship Civic Democracy School for California, eventually training other schools
Inspired by the C3 Framework, the initiative provides BHS with 3 years of professional development and resources to help us guide students through a civic inquiry and investigative approach to learning, consisting of:

1. Framing an inquiry about a public problem or issue

2. Investigating and researching information regarding the issue

3. Engaging in civil dialogue about the various perspectives and points of view

4. Communicating their conclusions

5. Taking informed civic action on their findings
This approach to civic learning accomplishes several things:

- It builds a strong knowledge base of how our government operates
- It builds important **critical thinking** and **collaborative skills** to civically engage in society
- It creates dispositions and attitudes for young people to want to engage in our democratic way of life.

This approach is intentionally integrated with the goals and objectives of:

- The *California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History / Social Studies*
- The Six Proven Practices of the *Guardian of Democracy -Civic Mission of Schools* initiative
Connection and Integration with Common Core Anchor Standards:

**Anchor standards for reading 6-12:**
- Make logical inferences from text
- Cite specific textual evidence to support conclusions
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content of the text
- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats
- Determine the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence
- Read and comprehend complex informational texts independently
- Integrate information from diverse sources – primary and secondary – into a coherent understanding of an idea or event

**Anchor standards for writing 6-12:**
- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics using valid reasoning and evidence
- Use technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others
- Conduct short and sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject matter under investigation
- Gather relevant information from multiple print & digital sources, assess credibility and accuracy, and integrate information
Integration with Six Proven Practices that Enhance the Civic Mission of Schools

1. **Classroom Instruction**
   - Provide formal instruction in government, history, law and democracy.

2. **Discussion of Current Events & Controversial Issues**
   - Incorporate these into the classroom – especially issues important to young people

3. **Service Learning**
   - Design and implement programs that provide students the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service linked to formal curriculum & classroom instruction

4. **Extracurricular Activities**
   - Offer outside opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools and communities

5. **Student Participation in School Governance**
   - Give students more chances to participate and manage their own classrooms to foster civic skills and attitudes

6. **Simulations of Democratic Processes**
   - Evidence suggests that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation & diplomacy in schools lead to heightened political efficacy
OUR BHS CIVIC INITIATIVE TEAM

• **Team Leaders:**
  - **Arlene Whitney** – Assistant Principal: Curriculum & Guidance
  - **Sue Nicoletti** – Teacher: 12th Grade AP Government, American Government

• **Teacher Team Members:**
  - **Babak Aminitehrani** – 12th Grade American Government, 9th Grade Geography
  - **Todd Davenport** – 7th Grade Core World History
  - **Deborah Guzman** – 11th Grade AP US History, 12th Grade Economics
  - **Alison Kawashima** – 8th Grade US History, 8th Grade Honors US History
  - **Alyse Smith** – 11th Grade US History, 10th Grade World History
How do we get the students engaged in the civil dialogue required for investigation?

- We’ve received focused training on the following techniques:
  - SAC (Structured Academic Controversy)
  - Socratic Seminars
  - PID (Public Issue Discussions)
  - Soapbox Speeches
  - Class discussions
  - Philosophical Chairs
  - Effective civic inquiry & investigation
Sample topics that prompt civil dialogue:

- Should college athletes be financially compensated?
- What are the repercussions - economic and social - of legalizing marijuana in CA?
- Should the US limit outsourcing of jobs?
- Was the New Deal a success?
- How is federalism influencing our society today?
- Did Thomas Jefferson overstep his power with the Louisiana Purchase?
- Should the US use voter identification laws?
- Should the death penalty be abolished?
- Should Native Americans receive reparations?
- Was the US justified in using the 2nd atomic bomb on Nagasaki?
Our Successes Year One

- **Civics Fair – June 2014**

  - Students exhibited civic investigation projects
  - Over 1,500 students attended
  - Fair was open all 6 periods
  - Questionnaires were provided for full student engagement
  - Positive feedback
  - Addition of choral department to add music from the civil rights era
Civics Fair (cont)
Poster Board Framework

1. Main topic / Subject
   - We are researching about ______ because we want to know more about ____________.

2. The Civics Inquiry Process: INVESTIGATION
   - Inquiry Process #1
     - Inquiry Question #1: Frame your question so that it cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no".
     - Evidence For Inquiry Process: Photos, articles, research that depicts the reason or evidence for your civic investigation.
     - Investigation
       - Data retrieval: Websites, surveys, interviews, book excerpts. Where did you find your information?
     - Civil Dialogue
       - Class activity to expand knowledge and discussions.
     - Conclusions: What you discovered about your topic – reflections.
   - Inquiry Process #2
     - Inquiry Question #2: Frame another question more in depth than #1.
     - Investigation
       - Data retrieval: evidence to support your argument.
     - Civil Dialogue
       - Class discussions, PIDs, Socratic seminars, fishbowls.
     - Conclusions: What you discovered about your subject – even more depth than before.

3. Taking Informed Action
   - What can be done to address the problem identified in questions #1 and #2?
   - What can our local government do? Local organizations?
   - What can YOU do to help communicate awareness or develop a solution to this issue – OUTSIDE of our classroom?
Civics Fair (cont)

>El Salvadoran Consulate<
Our Successes Year One (cont)

• **Inaugural Young Legislators Program**
  - Coordinated through 58th District Assemblymember Cristina Garcia’s office
  - 23 high schools competed for 30 openings (12th grade only)
  - 9 high schools were accepted - **BHS received 10 of the 30 openings!!**
  - BHS graduated 9 students from the program in July 2014
  - BHS student Sam Guerra became Speaker of the House
  - BHS student Michael Jetsupphasuk wrote environmental legislation
  - Culminated in a visit to Sacramento to state assembly floor to mock debate a bill
Our Successes Year One (cont)

- **Civic Inquiry Lab (Room 900)**
  - Administration supported our efforts by dedicating a classroom for our civic inquiry discussions.
Our Successes Year One (cont)

- Use of “sentence frame” cards to aid students in civil dialogue about controversial topics

Expressing an opinion:
I think.....
I believe.....
It seems to me that.....
In my opinion.....

Paraphrasing what someone said:
So you are saying that.....
In other words, you think.....
What I hear you saying is.....

Acknowledging ideas of others:
I agree with _____ that.....
My idea builds upon _____'s idea.
I agree with _____ because.....

Individual Reporting:
I discovered from _____ that.....
I found out from ____ that.....
_____ pointed out to me that.....
_____ shared with me that.....

Disagreeing:
I don't agree with you because.....
I came to a different conclusion.
I have a different opinion.
I have a different perspective.
Our Successes Year One (cont)

- **Institutionalization**: Built lesson plans to expose all Social Science grade levels (7-12) to some form of civic inquiry and civil dialogue

- **Technology**: Utilized availability of Chrome Carts for in-class research on projects and inquiries
Sacramento Showcase

August 2014 BHS was invited to a meeting of the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning

Notable Attendees:

- **Tom Torlakson** - CA State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- **Tani Cantil-Sakauye** - California State Supreme Court Chief Justice
- **Darrell Steinberg** - California Senate Leader on Civic Education
- **Dr. Michelle M. Herczog** - Power of Democracy Steering Committee and Task Force member, History-Social Science Consultant III at Los Angeles County Office of Education, and President of the National Council for the Social Studies

Three BHS students attended, along with BHS Principal Mike Lundgren and Civic Initiative Team Member Todd Davenport

Civic Inquiry projects were on display and BHS was highlighted as an example of successful implementation of civic learning
Our Successes Year One (cont)

- **Student Pollworker Program**

  - Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder / County Clerk
  - 60 BHS students participated in the June 2014 elections
  - Students were able to work as clerks at various polling places throughout Bellflower area
  - Received commendation from county for student performances
Our Successes & Plans - Year 2

• **Student Pollworker Program**
  - 60 BHS students are already signed up for the November 2014 General Election

• **Torlakson / Tuck Debate (LACOE – Sept. 17)**
  - 30 BHS students attended a debate between 2 candidates for State Superintendent of Public Education
  - Tom Torlakson vs Marshall Tuck
  - BHS student Cristen Jackson-Thompson’s question about AP testing was featured as a debate point
  - Students were featured on California Channel’s coverage of the debate
Our Successes & Plans - Year 2 (cont)

- **Department Training:** Conducted 2 PLC meetings last month for entire Social Science department on Socratic Seminar implementation.

- **Individual Training:** Sending 2 additional Social Science teachers (Angie Betance and Amber McKinney-Ortega) to Civic Inquiry / Investigation Symposium at LACOE (with additional grant money received from Bechtel Foundation).

- **YLP:** Already had Young Legislators Program representative speak to all seniors about this year’s program – deadline for applications October 30.

- **MyVote:** Received materials to conduct school-wide student mock elections on October 28th.
Our Successes & Plans - Year 2 (cont)

• Bring aboard entire history department in both middle and high school

• Create common lessons using all strategies for every grade level

• Conduct another, much larger, Civics Fair in June

• Require all seniors to conduct a civic investigation as part of their course requirement

• Filming our successful classroom strategies and making available to all staff

• Allow others to observe while we conduct various class discussion techniques

• Organize a town hall meeting with Lucille Roybal-Allard, our US House Representative (40th congressional district) possibly year 3
Future Plans Year 3 (2015 - 2016)

- Bring aboard the other disciplines
- Lead professional development for entire staff – with possibilities for in-service days
- Involve community members and organizations (year 2 and 3)
- Develop a Student Civic Action Committee
The mission of the Bellflower Unified School District is to provide the pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to:

- **Become lifelong active learners**

- **Demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society**

- **Become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens**

- **Perform successfully in their chosen field and in society**