Santa Monica High School
Recognized as a California Democracy School
Preparing the next generation of engaged, informed citizens

Santa Monica High School has been formally accredited as a California Democracy School by the Los Angeles County Office of Education at a presentation held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley on April 30, 2016.

“Santa Monica High School has accomplished something rarely seen in American schools. They have fully integrated civic learning across a full grade span by incorporating into all freshman seminar classes. By doing so, civic learning is not seen as an ‘add-on’ or burden on the curriculum but a way to enhance the teaching to be rigorous, relevant, and engaging for students,” said Michelle M. Herczog, Ed.D., director of the California Democracy School Initiative and history/social science consultant for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. “And by doing so, they are preparing the next generation of citizens to be knowledgeable, respectful, and thoughtful as they contemplate and address the complex challenges of the 21st century.”

The California Democracy School Civic Learning Initiative, funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and directed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education in partnership with the Los Angeles County Education Foundation is designed to institutionalize high quality civic learning across ten high schools in Los Angeles County and two high schools in Orange County to provide all students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be informed, engaged citizens in the 21st century. The selected schools went through a rigorous and competitive application process.

Over the three years of the initiative, school teams consisting of classroom teachers, school site administrators, and parent organizations have participated in professional development to learn how to engage students in the five steps of a civic inquiry and investigation process: 1) Framing a civic inquiry around an issue that is relevant to students, 2) Conducting in-depth research on the multiple perspectives and solutions surrounding the issue, 3) Engaging in civil dialogue to reveal different points of view and perspectives, 4) Communicating a conclusion that is well-
researched and, 5) Taking informed action by reaching out to policymakers for effective, appropriate solutions.

“I am hugely proud of the impassioned and tireless work of our Civic Democracy Leadership team led by Martha Chacon and Jenna Gasparino,” Samohi Principal Eva Mayoral said. “This work, which has been incorporated into freshmen seminar classes, has inspired our freshmen with the power of their informed voices to make a difference in their world. The civic issues our students brought to the table, and the civic inquiry process they implemented to deepen and refine their understanding, and develop not just feasible, but strong compelling solutions, showed a level of sophistication that would rival any of the very best of college students.

The team consisted of teachers from history, science, English, foreign language and special education. “Congratulations to our freshmen, to our freshmen seminar teachers, and to our Civic Democracy Leadership Team of Ms. Chacon, Ms. Gasparino, Mr. Hobkirk, Ms. Kariya, Mr. Webb, Mr. Cierra, and Mr. Jimenez,” Mayoral said.

“When we as leaders, educators and community members think of powerful, engaging and relevant critical thinking, writing and speaking for all, this is exactly what we are envisioning,” Mayoral said. “When we think of equity, and the valuing and empowering of all voices and perspectives, it is kids like all those I saw presenting at the Civic Democracy Showcase that we dream of; where Black, Latino, White, Asian, Special Ed and General Ed, kids stood side-by-side, eager, articulate and confident, to present their issue and inspire a community-wide call to action. This work, is Santa Monica High School at its finest.”

This approach to civic learning supports the goals of the California Standards for English language arts, the college, career and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards, the partnership for 21st century learning, and the Guardian of Democracy from the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. “The future of our democracy depends on a citizenry that is well informed and has the capacity to be thoughtful, engaged critical thinkers and problem solvers. This initiative is empowering thousands of young people to do exactly that,” Herczog said.

For more information, visit www.lacoe.edu/californiademocracyschool.

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