



We the People

PROJECT Citizen

Citizen Lyceum



From the Massachusetts Center for Civic Education

MACCE Newsletter

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Project Citizen in an Alternative Setting

By Roger Desrosiers, President

In the Fall of 2020, Ed O’Connell, a member of the Melrose School Committee and longtime civic education supporter, brought to the Billerica House of Correction a program called **Project Citizen**. With support from the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office, he introduced a 12 week course where a group of 12 juveniles, (reduced eventually to 6 because of release, moves, etc) discussed a self-chosen problem and proposed a public policy that would help as they suggested “keep them from returning to prison”, thus reducing the recidivism rate. During this course, these young men learned how to research, write, and articulate a solution to an issue that they chose as they worked within the system to urge changes that would, in their case, not directly impact them, but would profoundly impact those who would follow them if adopted.

Mr. O’Connell has long had a vision for civic engagement through his work with middle school students in his hometown of Melrose, MA, his work at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate, and his efforts with adult groups. When he proposed this “project-based program” to a group of incarcerated youth, he asked if they would be willing to work together “to identify a public policy issue.” He said to them, “This program (**Project Citizen**) is based on the idea that our right to participate in governing ourselves as a democracy, in order to protect our rights as citizens and to promote our common welfare as a community, a state, and a nation, carries with it certain responsibilities. Among these are the need to develop the knowledge and skills to participate intelligently and the willingness to promote liberty and justice for all people; to make a difference in where we live... and to make a difference in how we live... (and to make) decisions that affect us, that impact our lives.”

These young men met for three months, for one hour each week. In following the process of **Project Citizen**, they first learned what public policy is and what it is not. Then, they spent a few weeks studying various problems that they might look into, which ones could be solved through public policy, which had the greatest significance and then developing consensus around a particular problem which they all could work around despite different points of view and with compromise. After each session, time was spent reflecting on what they had just done. Once the

problem was determined, gathering information about the problem began through print and social media, through community organizations, local and state offices, interviews with experts and community members and developing surveys. Once this information was gathered, discussing, analyzing, and prioritizing the information began. A discussion panel related to the information was assembled to test the information they had gathered.

Finally, they were ready to put their portfolio together and prepare for their presentation. The portfolio (display section) would describe the four parts of their work: the problem, the alternative solutions, the public policy they chose, and the action plan to put it into practice. Two weeks were spent on the portfolio. The remaining two weeks were spent on the presentation and the review of the portfolio and the document binder. The final meeting would be the presentation before the policymakers or decision-makers!

In his presentation, Antwone stated, “...the problem we chose to tackle is economic insecurity. The inspiration for our project is President Franklin Roosevelt’s proposal for a “Second Bill of Rights”. In his 1944 State of the Union address, FDR called on Congress to enact an “Economic Bill of Rights” that would... (cont. Page 2)

CALENDAR

Date	Event description, link
October 4, 2021	MACCE/FSU graduate level course for professional development
January 29, 2022	We the People High School State Competition @ EMK Institute
Spring 2022	We the People Middle School State Showcase
Summer 2022	Project Citizen Research Program - Cohort 3

Project Citizen facilitator Ed O’Connell (left) and Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian speak with program participants at the Middlesex Jail & House of Correction on Friday, November 6, 2020.



Project Citizen in an Alternative Setting (continued from page 1)

guarantee employment, housing, medical care, and education - among other basic human rights - to ensure equality in the pursuit of happiness... Our research also found that economic insecurity has a direct correlation to crime, and that lack of employment opportunities, decent, affordable house, access to quality educational opportunities and supports, and access to quality medical care...and with a recidivism rate between 20 and 60 percent, we clearly have a community problem that needs to be better addressed.”

Emilio looked at alternative solutions and noted “that most of the decades-old programs do not reach enough people; that the means of accessing needed programs and services are too complicated; and that the systematic management of these programs seems designed to deter people from applying and /or continuing to receive assistance and support... that more time and effort is spent screening people out and disqualifying people from assistance than is spent reaching people and helping people...Popular culture has vilified people in need...For too many people, the supposed systems of support seem like a trap for the unwary. It is no wonder, then that many people turn to illicit income-producing activities, or that other steal...or turn to violence...that “have-nots” decide that it’s okay to rob the “haves” or that people descend into the cycle of substance abuse and crime...(people) like us... have seen enough of it to know that it’s a system to be avoided at all costs.”

Yahia expressed the proposed public policy that the group of young offenders believe would help solve the problem of economic insecurity that was the root cause of recidivism for so many and for the crime rates in our state and nationwide. “We propose the creation of a comprehensive re-entry facility (they would call, Restoration Center) that will provide temporary housing,

meals, employment assistance, in-house education opportunities as well as guidance and support toward further educational advancement, healthcare assessment, in-house counseling services, and referrals for specialized medical care as needed” In addition, he went on to applaud the educational services already provided by Middlesex Sheriff Peter Koutoujian and recommended that this pilot program should be placed within Middlesex County. He ended his statement with, “Our lived experience...and our research has confirmed that we cannot honestly expect to break the cycle of crime and recidivism without taking real action to intervene and help re-set the course of people’s lives; people who have felt the sting, the pain, and the burden of economic insecurity...often seem designed not to rehabilitate and restore but to ensnare.”

Anthony then outlined the action plan by acknowledging the importance of Sheriff Koutoujian’s support and the support of the state legislators. He recognized that the previous Speaker of House had supported a “comprehensive re-entry program and services” He mentioned the need to convince several Chairs of various committees relative to the economic issues at hand. Without mentioning specific organizations, he mentioned seeking those advocated and supporting issues relating to economic insecurity and criminal justice reform. In addition, the need of media and a public relations campaign. And, finally, Anthony fully understanding the impact of **Project Citizen** stated, “We know this will be a long process, and we recognize that we ourselves may never benefit directly from our efforts, but we know, too, that effective citizenship isn’t always about the here and now.”

Congratulations to this amazing group of young adults for your efforts on behalf of trying to make our community, our state, our country a better place to live. Congratulations to you, Ed O’Connell, for your painstaking efforts to bring hope, energy, vitality, and empowerment to those who have the least positive outlook on life.

For more information on **Project Citizen**, please visit <https://www.masscivics.org/programs/project-citizen/>

Project Citizen Research Program (PCRP) is in Its Second Year

By Barry Bacon, Program Manager

The **Project Citizen Research Program**, a research grant from the U.S. Department of Education, has given the Center for Civic Education and its partners the opportunity to offer free professional development for middle and high school teachers new to the **Project Citizen** curriculum!

The first Cohort of teachers has successfully completed their training and use of the **Project Citizen** curriculum during the 2020-2021 school year. The second Cohort of teachers has already begun with professional development completed this summer and ongoing support for them during the upcoming academic year (2021-2022).

Some of the benefits of joining the PCRP:

- **Free summer professional development**
- **A free set of books for use with your students**
- **A modest stipend**

Cohort 3 (2022-2023) will begin during the summer of 2022. Stay in touch to learn about the how to get involved for the next academic year!

Actively Learn

We wanted to make you aware of the exciting opportunities to share civic education in your classrooms with the Center Civic Education programs found on **Actively Learn**.

We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution is available as an enhanced ebook edition for your 21st-century classroom. The enhanced ebook is perfect for blended learning, 1:1 classrooms, and differentiated instruction.

Actively Learn is available as age appropriate interactive ebooks for the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

By purchasing *We the People* on **Actively Learn**, you are purchasing a subscription to **Actively Learn Social Studies**, which gives you access to all three levels of *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution* for one low price: just \$9.00 per user, per year.

Order directly through **Actively Learn**.

KELLEY BROWN Honored in the American Lawyers Alliance Teacher of the Year Awards Ceremony

The American Lawyers Alliance (ALA) recently announced the four winners of their **Teacher of the Year** awards, who were honored in a virtual ceremony on August 11, 2021. This year's four awardees have all participated in the **We the People** program at the local or national level, or both.

Kelley Brown of Easthampton High School (MA), **Trish Everett** of Pine Crest High School (FL), and **Suzanne Kammerman** of Staples High School (CT), and **Albert Paulsson** of West Windsor-Plainsboro High School (NJ) received the 2021 Law-Related Teachers of the Year awards.

Upon receiving word about the award, Brown stated, "I am incredibly honored to receive this award on behalf of the exciting law-related programs I have been able to develop over the past year. Brown also said, "I am so thankful for the amazing volunteers and alums that have helped to build an incredibly successful **We the People** program at Easthampton High School that is preparing students to become leaders, citizens, and educators.

As a non-profit organization, we rely on the support of the organizations and individuals within our community and state to help us promote civic awareness in our schools. Your funds will help provide professional development resources, textbooks, learning opportunities and help us continue the work we do to promote civic education for all people.



MACCE President's Letter

We wish to inform you of our updated version of our website, masscivics.org ! With the help of our Program Manager, Barry Bacon and Summer Intern, Olivia Antonson, we have transformed our website with more current information about the **Center for Civic Education** resources but also providing civic education resources available in Massachusetts and throughout the nation. Take a look at the [Community Resource section for teachers](#) and see what we mean!

Our ***We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution*** programs starting at the

- **ELEMENTARY** levels offer three different resources that complement the DESE framework for the History and Social Sciences.
- Our **MIDDLE SCHOOL** *We the People* textbook reflects the **Grade 8 Civics** curriculum of the DESE framework.
- And, the **HIGH SCHOOL** *We the People* edition is ideal for any elective course including an AP American Government course.
- Please note that all three levels of the *We the People* texts are available online through **Actively Learn** (ebook).

Perhaps, the most desirous program for most school districts today is ***Project Citizen***. Why?

Simply because it is the most reliable, the most recognized program that supports **civics projects** in the nation as well as internationally. Since the 2018 requirement of an 8th grade and high school **civics project** for all students, ***Project Citizen*** fits perfectly within the guidelines for a class project which empowers students by engaging them with local, state, and national problems by allowing them to research, to study, to evaluate, to determine public policy and thus become exposed to the workings of government. ***Project Citizen*** began in 1993 and has transformed students' apathy and disengagement into active, involved, and aware citizens, not just for the moment, but for their future, but also the future of their communities and states as well.

Once again **MACCE** is offering an online three graduate credit course, [Understanding the Fundamental Principles, Values, and Institutions of American Government](#), through **Framingham State University** this Fall. For those who don't need graduate credit, we do provide **PDPs** for the course in the amount of 45 hours. Information is provided on the website.

We also provide adult learning through our ***Citizen Lyceum*** program. Our programs are designed to give essential understanding of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and other areas of our government. If you believe that your community would be interested in such an event, please contact us. We typically meet in public libraries, historical sites, museums, etc. and work with them as we work with several groups or organizations to serve their interests.

As we continue to improve our website, we will focus attention in gathering pictures, videos, testimonials and sharing them on the website. We are also hoping to connect with alumni of the ***We the People*** and ***Project Citizen*** with the hope that you will share some of your memories. Finally, we expect to begin writing a **biannual newsletter** keeping everyone informed about the work of **MACCE** and requesting that you submit your stories as well.

In other words, as we try to serve your needs, give us feedback on how we can better do our work. We will continue to update and revise the website, but your input will help us to better serve you! Thank you for your interest in our programs!

Best,

Roger Desrosiers, President of Massachusetts Center of Civic Education and
Massachusetts State Coordinator for ***We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution***
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