

#teens4citizenship: A Hartford Public School and Hartford Public Library Collaborative

10/28/15 By Judy Wyman Kelly *(This article first appeared in the Hartford Public Schools, October, 2015 newsletter, Spotlight on Excellence.)*

“Teens4Citizenship” went from idea to reality this past spring when The American Place Hartford Public Library’s department for immigrants partnered with Law & Government Academy, Academy of Nursing and Health Sciences, and Academy of Engineering and Green Technology to launch a citizenship elective for immigrant teens. Last week, in recognition of the important role these three academies played in supporting the new initiative, Hartford Public Library presented certificates of appreciation signed by HPS Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez and HPL Chief Executive Officer Matt Poland.



Figure 1 From left to right: Vice Principal James Harris, Academy of Law & Government; Principal Melony Brady-Shanley, Academy of Nursing and Health Sciences; Principal Michael Maziarz, Academy of Engineering and Green Technology

Many of the immigrant teens elected to take an after-school, for-credit, weekly class taught by Academy of Nursing and Health Sciences social studies teacher, Ms. Anna Krajewska. The student mix ended up being interdisciplinary and multi-national with students from all three academies and the countries of Columbia, The Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Thailand, Nepal, Ghana, Peru, and Burma. From January to May, students convened to prepare for the citizenship interview and exam of 100 questions by familiarizing themselves with all the requirements and also strengthening their understanding of U.S. civics and history. The students also tutored immigrant adult learners and visited the Hartford U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Office.



Figure 2 Ms. Anna Krajewska, Academy of Nursing and Health Sciences, teacher of social studies and citizenship elective

Krajewska, herself a naturalized citizen from Poland, “found teaching the course very rewarding because I got to see students compare the government of their native country to that of the United States. The experience broadened their understanding of the whole world while preparing them to be active citizens of the United States.” Krajewska also praised the program’s emphasis on the timely introduction to citizenship, “Engaging teens in their

own citizenship application early is important because it allows them to learn more about the whole process and potentially support family members in their quest later on.”



Figure 3 Bridget Allison, Law & Government Academy, teacher of social studies and adviser for citizenship capstone students

Those teens unable to participate in the after-school elective chose to integrate citizenship into their senior capstone seminar project. Under the guidance of Law & Government social studies teacher Bridget Allison, a half dozen or so students conducted research on citizenship and U.S. civics and history, as well as tutored immigrants in their home community and at the Hartford Library. Reflecting on the students' experiences Allison said, "The project really allowed our immigrant students to learn what they will need to know to become citizens and to help their communities by teaching them how to

become citizens. All students took the program really seriously and felt privileged to bring it back to their home communities. Also, they learned how difficult it was to be a teacher!"

Citizenship activities align well with the larger educational mission at all three academies. LGA Assistant Principal James Harris found the initiative to be "a natural partnership that supported the students' aspirations, improved their opportunities, and reinforced the value that each and every one of our students brings to the school, city, state, and national community." AEGT Principal Michael Maziarz said, "With such a diverse population at AEGT including a significant ELL population, the citizenship program was a perfect partnership for our students and their families . . . We work diligently on a daily basis to provide our students with as many opportunities as possible to be successful in high school, in college, and beyond."

Now that these teen students are prepared, as soon as they turned 18 and have lived in the US as a permanent resident for five years, they will be eligible and ready to apply for citizenship! And, of course, they will be able to help their families achieve citizenship as well.

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