

Principal Leadership

HIGH SCHOOL EDITION

SEPTEMBER 2004

Making Civics Real

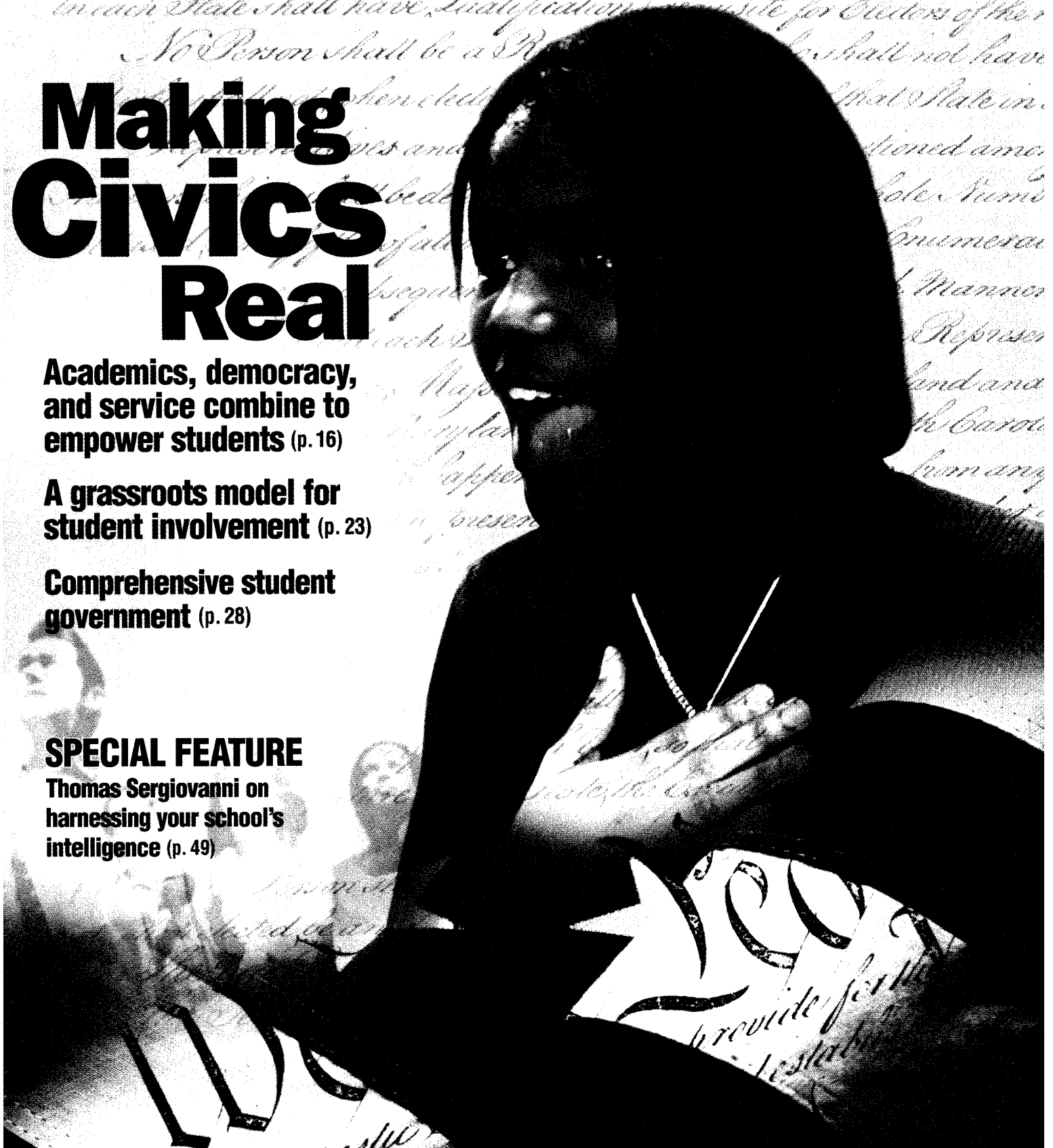
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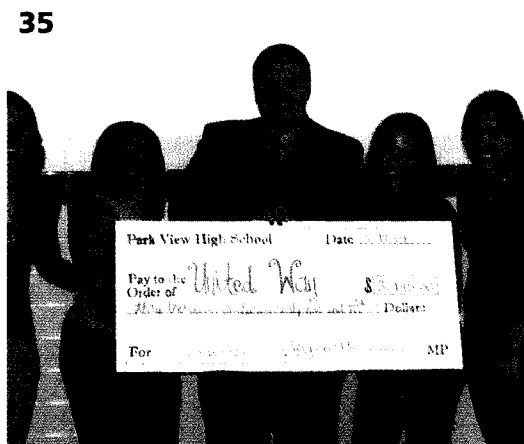
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Principal Leadership

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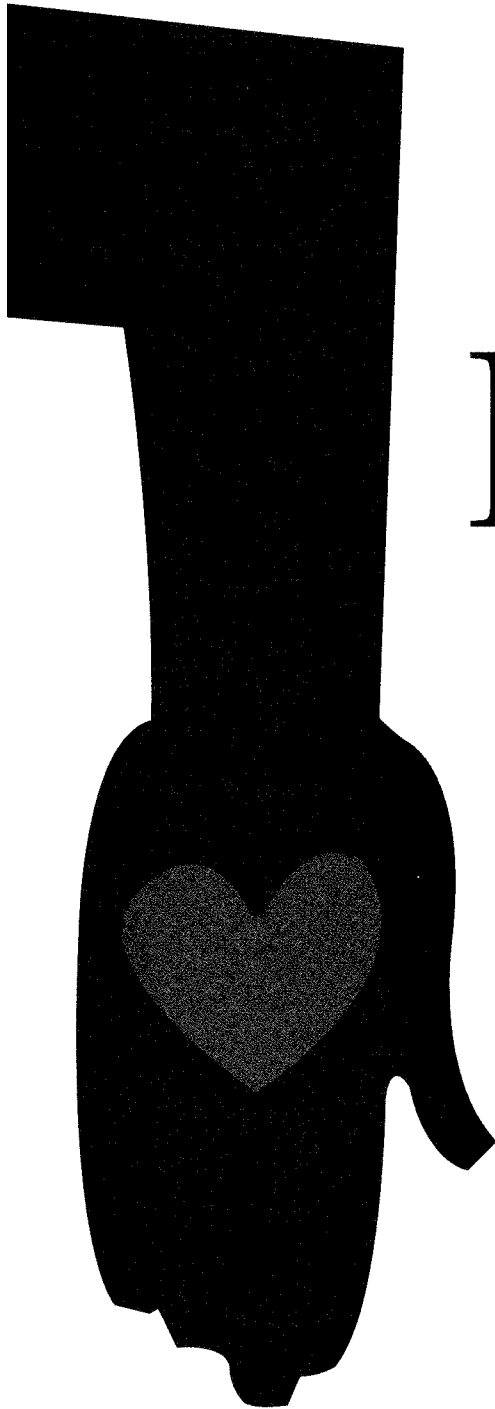
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LEARNING TO GIVE

BY KATHRYN A. AGARD

If you look back in history, you will find the core mission of public education in America was to create places of civic virtue for our children and for our society. As education undergoes the rigors of re-examination and the need for reinvention, it is crucial to remember that the key role of public schools is to preserve democracy and, that as battered as we might be, our mission is central to the future of this country.

—Paul D. Houston, Executive Director,
American Association of School Administrators.

PREVIEW

More than 700 teacher-created units incorporate the head and heart aspects of civics.

Lesson plans combine academic knowledge and service to meet state requirements.

Students learn how to analyze, discuss, and debate to prepare for responsible citizenship.

Students must understand the *head* as well as the *heart* part of volunteering and service—why they should be a part of their community, why they should act for the common good, and how participating in their community dovetails with participation in the democratic process. There are many creative ways to implement the principles of high-quality civic education, and one is exemplified by Learning to Give (LTG), a K–12 program of the Council of Michigan Foundations that provides a curriculum for service-learning and philanthropy that was crafted by classroom teachers.

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[Figure 1]

Civic-Engagement Lesson Sampler

Sorted by grade level, the following sampler of Learning to Give lessons teaches students about a variety of concepts including citizenship, citizen responsibility, community, diversity, tolerance, and the importance of voluntary action for the common good. Each unit is aligned with Michigan state standards and contains national standard key concepts.

From the Learning to Give home page at www.learningtogive.org, select, teaching materials, the grade level, and the unit title.

GRADES 6–8

Unit Name: Giving of Treasure, Heart, and Mind

Purpose: As students are engaged in indirect service or advocacy projects, they need a guiding structure for intelligently and wisely giving of treasure. Students will be guided through the process of identifying a community need and researching organizations addressing that need. Based on presentations of available organizations, students will decide how scarce funds should be spent.

Unit Name: Rights and Responsibilities

Purpose: To examine the origin and types of rights guaranteed to us by the Bill of Rights, as well as the responsibilities we have to protect those rights for our personal well-being and the common welfare. Finally, the focus will be upon understanding and valuing those rights by promoting the common welfare as an involved citizen.

Unit Name: School Environment— Diversity, Let's Deal With It

Purpose: Learners will develop their own values and perspectives through exploring their attitudes and perceptions of diversity within their class setting and community. They will use the historical Selma to Montgomery March, reading in primary textual account to develop historical perspective as well as current fictional accounts of diversity within a community. The learners will recognize and describe key participants in the historical setting and identify the elements of philanthropy as demonstrated by those individuals. Learners will conduct a School Climate Survey to address the issues of diversity within their school.

Unit Name: We Are One World

Purpose: To raise awareness of stereotypes, forms of bias and discrimination faced by peers and others every day. The denial of basic rights to people all over the world will also be addressed with students learning about life in other countries.

GRADES 9–12

Unit Name: Concepts of Leadership

Purpose: To enable students to identify the elements of decision making that leaders have used throughout history and the challenges and rewards that they encountered as they committed themselves to taking private action for the common good.

Unit Name: Philanthropy—Essential to a Democratic Society

Purpose: Students discuss the difference between duties and responsibilities of citizenship and evaluate whether there is a place in society for volunteers to carry out their responsibilities. The role of nonprofits is then discussed, especially their role in relation to various minorities in society. Students research support for philanthropy in national and state documents.

Unit Name: The Sensitive Side of Philanthropy

Purpose: To introduce the theme of philanthropy into the literary novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Not only is philanthropy an underlying theme in this work, but promoting sensitivity along with philanthropy provides the students with a contrast for discussing prejudice and racism as major themes within the novel.

Unit Name: Your Place in the Community

Purpose: Learners will become responsible citizens who make informed judgments and work to advance the common good. They will prepare for a volunteer experience in the nonprofit sector, developing responsible citizenship by giving of their time and talent. This unit prepares learners for their role in the community through exploring aspects of all their communities, conducting needs assessments, planning, and participating in a volunteer activity while engaging in ongoing reflection.

By incorporating service learning as a teaching method and adding a “deep democracy” component that introduces students to the theory and practice of volunteer citizen engagement, students become volunteers, donors, and civic activists. Content from history, geography, government, and economics—as well as such citizenship skills as discussion and debate—is used to meet local and state core curriculum requirements. In short, LTG teaches students to use higher-level thinking skills in the context of creating and maintaining a civil society. More than 700 K–12 lessons that demonstrate the critical importance of voluntary action for the common good in a democratic society have been created by practicing classroom teachers and are available to educators at no cost at www.learningtogive.org.

In addition to strong links to social studies and English language arts academic standards, the lessons also integrate the four strands of philanthropy education: defining philan-

thropy, philanthropy and civil society, philanthropy and the individual, and volunteering and service.

At the middle and high school levels, *philanthropy* is defined as “giving, serving, and private citizen action intended for the common good.” Younger students learn that philanthropy is “giving time, talent, and treasure, and taking action for the common good.” Pilot-school teachers who use the curriculum say that it provides a “civic face” for academic service-learning and character education as well as a common language and



Debate, Discuss, Reflect

Learning to Give’s Web-based quotation search engine connects you with the contemporary and historic wit and wisdom of 1,200 quotations and is an excellent springboard for student classroom discussions and teacher presentations. Select by subject or key words such as *core democratic values, vision, knowledge, education, and stewardship*—in this case, *citizenship and advocacy*.

Citizenship comes first today in our crowded world... No man can enjoy the privileges of education and thereafter with a clear conscience break his contract with society. To respect that contract is to be mature, to strengthen it is to be a good citizen, to do more than your share under it is noble.

—Isaiah Bowman

The most important office...that of private citizen.

—Louis D. Brandeis

In the long-run, every Government is the exact symbol of its People, with their wisdom and unwisdom; we have to say, Like People like Government.

—Thomas Carlyle

I realized that public affairs were also my affairs. I became active in politics because I saw the possibility, if we all sat back and did nothing, of a world in which there would no longer be any stages for actors to act on.

—Helen Gahagan Douglas

That government is best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves.

—Thomas Jefferson

A generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit the community is a generation that is not learning what it means to be citizens in a democracy.

—Elizabeth Hollander

Democracy is the most demanding of all forms of government in terms of the energy, imagination, and public spirit required of the individual.

—George Marshall

The worth of the state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it.

—John Stuart Mill

Citizenship consists in the service of the country.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he should be able and willing to pull his weight.

—Theodore Roosevelt

BY INCORPORATING SERVICE LEARNING AS A TEACHING METHOD AND ADDING A “DEEP DEMOCRACY” COMPONENT THAT INTRODUCES STUDENTS TO THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF VOLUNTEER CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, STUDENTS BECOME VOLUNTEERS, DONORS, AND CIVIC ACTIVISTS.

context for understanding the value of doing for others and working toward the common good. Karen Peabody, Onekama (MI) Consolidated Schools' service-learning coordinator, says that the curriculum “contributes additional meaning to service-learning. Academic service-learning doesn't always address the common good and the ‘Why me?’ concepts. Philanthropy provides the ‘who I am’ in the picture, while academic service-learning identifies the needs.”

Tools for Civic Learning

LTG lesson units provide opportunities to address these needs. The Web-based lesson search engine can select lessons that cover the themes of philanthropy and civil society and volunteering and service. A search on the keywords of *citizenship and civic engagement*, *citizenship and civic responsibility*, *civic responsibility and virtue*, *civil society*, *common good*, and *community* will give access to a group of lessons that offer a framework for student awareness and discussion. (See figure 1 for a sampler of lessons plans for grades 6–8 and 9–12.)

Black River Public School, a 500-student public charter school for grades 4–12 in Holland, MI, is an LTG

pilot school that passionately believes in creating and fostering student links to civic and community engagement. Greg Dykhouse, the academic dean, explained how his school creates situations where this rewarding process can occur: “When we opened in 1996, we identified right away that we wanted community service to be part of the curriculum. Community service is required of all students. The knowledge that one learns in school is important, but learning how to participate in community is just as important. We are collectively shaping the future and determining the quality of life in the community in which we live.

Black River introduces students to nonprofit groups and businesses and what they do for a community. What better way to prepare students for life and contribution in their community, than by participating in some of these activities? They are helping to shape their community.”

Barbara Dillbeck, curriculum director for LTG and a former classroom teacher, said, “Starting at the earliest grades, students need to begin to understand their place in society and their obligation to contribute to the common good. They should be empowered to help with real-world decision making and problem solving beginning in the elementary schools, not just in high school and college, so that citizen participation including activism and advocacy become a part of their habits.” Peabody adds, “I've observed that there's a progression that happens for kids as they go from grade to grade. In fact, the Onekama Middle School became involved as a pilot school because students going from elementary school into middle school wanted to know when they were going to do their Learning to Give lessons.”

It is noteworthy that a study done by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Keeter, Zujin, & Jenkins, 2002) indicates that youth ages 16–26 became active because “someone else put us together” or because they were recruited by a group. Being “asked” versus “not asked” made a great difference in student participation in volunteering (31% vs. 21%) or working on a community problem (36% vs. 19%). Creating informed, engaged, citizens who are knowledgeable voters and active participants in both the democratic process and their communities may be our single-most important mission as educators. As John W. Gardner so simply and eloquently stated in his pamphlet *Building Community*, “Freedom and responsibility. Liberty and duty. That's the deal.” **PL**

References

- The Carnegie Foundation and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. (2003). *The civic mission of schools*. College Park, MD: Author. Retrieved June 7, 2003 from www.civicmissionofschools.org/CivicMissionofSchools.pdf.
- Keeter, S., Zujin, C., Andolina, M., & Jenkins, K. (2002). *The civic and political health of a nation: A generational portrait*. College Park, MD: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, University of Maryland.

