

Pathway to Citizenship: bringing teens on board! HPS and HPL Partner to Provide Citizenship Classes for Immigrant Teens 17 and Older: By Judy Wyman Kelly

Hartford Public Library in collaboration with Hartford Public Schools has launched an exciting new initiative—citizenship classes and workshops for immigrant teens age 17 and older! The federally-funded, two-year grant aims to get young immigrants firmly connected to the pathway to citizenship before they graduate. Students can take a citizenship elective, incorporate a citizenship component into their senior capstone project, take an online citizenship tutorial, and/or attend a workshop explaining the process for obtaining citizenship.

Why this new initiative?

Surprisingly, most immigrant teens are under the mistaken impression that they are already U.S. citizens. “I already have my papers, why bother?” one student said. But once the many benefits of U.S. citizenship were explained—such as access to college financial aid, increased job opportunities, and the right to vote, serve on a jury and petition for family members to come to the U.S. —these students decided to give this citizenship idea a chance.

Citizenship electives and capstone projects at Hartford High School



Figure 1 Some teen participants, Brian, Jake, Risher, and Aiti

At Hartford High this past spring, students attended a weekly after-school elective taught by a certified social studies teacher, followed an independent study of their choosing, and worked on citizenship-based capstone projects. They tutored their parents, siblings, and/or their wider immigrant community in English

and citizenship, and volunteered with immigrant adults at the public library. Students also accessed citizenship activities online and took a field trip to the U.S. Immigration office for a behind-the-scenes tour.

At the senior capstone celebration in May, students set up booths explaining the process and benefits of citizenship to hundreds of other students and teachers who filed through the larger exhibit. Only several months earlier these very students had been skeptical of the benefits of pursuing citizenship. Now they were experts encouraging other teens to become U.S. citizens. These citizenship ambassadors even knew the intricacies of special exemptions for people with disabilities or limited English language proficiency.

Expanding the reach of teen citizenship electives, capstone projects, and workshops



Figure 2 Students explain what it means to become a citizen

Hartford Public Library will continue to engage immigrant teens during the 2015-16 school year. At Hartford High, eligible seniors will integrate a citizenship component into their capstone project and juniors will have the opportunity to attend citizenship workshops and/or follow online citizenship tutorials. Planning is also underway with

English Language Learning Lead Coach Mary Beth Russo to offer a citizenship class and other activities at Bulkeley High.

The Library strongly encourages other Hartford high schools with immigrant populations to invite seniors to incorporate a citizenship component into their senior capstone project and direct juniors to participate in the library's citizen workshops and online tutorials. Please watch for our flyers and announcements!

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