



PUBLIC LEADERS:
This
Kids Around Town[®] (KAT)
HANDBOOK

IS FOR YOU

MISSION NECESSARY:
*Nurturing the Next Generation in
Self-Governance*



© By Ann L. Rappoport, Ph.D.
Director, KIDS AROUND TOWN
<http://palwv.org/kat/>
800-692-7281

A Project of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania Citizen Education Fund

Thank you, PUBLIC LEADERS, for what you do.

THIS Kids Around Town (KAT)[®] HANDBOOK'S FOR YOU!

©MISSION NECESSARY:
Nurturing the Next Generation in Self-Governance

PREFACE

Perhaps you're hungry for a project that can raise a positive spirit of excitement in your community. Maybe there are issues in your township you think someone should tackle, alienated groups you'd wish to reach out and involve, or a sense of public partnership and initiative you'd like to foster.

We are Kids Around Town [KAT], an award-winning civic education program from the League of Women Voters of PA Citizen Education Fund. [<http://palwv.org/kat/>] For a decade now, we've provided training to teachers across the Commonwealth to engage their students in community problem-solving. We've had tremendous success (please note the enclosed articles, for example), and we've all learned a lot in the process.

Our most satisfying success stories seem to have one major feature in common.

That feature is the active participation of public officials – township managers, mayors, commissioners, police officers, department heads, members of historical commissions, school boards, recreation committees, utility services, etc.

Leadership of your colleagues has bridged many a gap between school and community. Our excellent educators know children and youth, but most aren't experts in public policy or civic affairs. Your guidance can make all the difference.

If our children are going to be able to carry the torch of democracy into the future, they need to experience civic life today.

Noted public servant and educator, Horace Mann (1796-1859) urged:
“In order that men may be prepared for self-government, their apprenticeship must commence in childhood.”

KAT is a tool to help you work with educators and their classes

- to create productive community partnerships,
- build grassroots support for local civic improvement
- facilitate constructive youth engagement.

*We invite you to work with KAT to enhance your community.
Contact Ann L. Rappoport, Ph.D., KAT Director, 215-884-4155 or
annrappoport@comcast.net for more information.*

Table of Contents

Section I: Accepting Mission Necessary.....	
Section II: KAT Executive Summary.....	
Overview of KAT Model	
Section III: A Note About Service Learning.....	
Section IV: Defining Your Own Role	
Section V: Why You? The A to Z Assets YOU Bring.....	
Section VI: Just a Few KAT Examples.....	
Section VII: Public Meeting Primer.....	
Section VIII: Comments About Controversy.....	
Section IX: “Culminating Projects” with a Civic Twist.....	
Section X: Celebrate!	

Section I – ACCEPTING MISSION NECESSARY: Team Approach...

Even with today's enthusiasm for youth volunteer and community service, our nation's students remain painfully ignorant about how local government works and they are unequipped to engage in meaningful community problem-solving.

Fortunately, your leadership - through a local Kids Around Town [KAT] program - can help transform their volunteer hours into knowledgeable civic action.

*Don't worry: you're not replacing the teacher!
But your role is extremely inspirational.
You're the inside expert, consultant, ambassador, celebrity, hero, leader,
role model...*

By collaborating with a school in your community on a KAT project, you can help teachers lead children to go beyond scratching the surface of societal symptoms they're addressing. Your unique expertise offers opportunities they're not getting elsewhere, including perhaps:

- an inside look at a local public issue of interest
- authentic research on relevant problems with real materials
- development of actual civic skills and information base
- supportive, friendly experience coping with complexity of regulations, bureaucracy and policies
- accessible public role models
- positive, personal interaction with local public offices and stakeholders
- coached attendance at public meetings
- public service careers exploration
- meaningful expression for creativity, idealism

During the 1990s and into this century, KAT students have, among their many other accomplishments:

- revitalized playgrounds, parks, commercial districts & historic landmarks
- tackled traffic and animal problems,
- addressed sources of bullying, violence and prejudice,
- worked to curb urban blight

- initiated nutrition, health, fire protection and safety programs in their school neighborhoods
- improved literacy and voter registration in communities
- expanded recycling and composting programs and protected/restored environmentally damaged sites.

It all starts with YOU, your **community's** ISSUES, and an INTERESTED CLASSROOM in your community.

You'll see the steps of the KAT Process on the following pages. **Public Leaders: This Handbook is for You** – is designed to help you partner effectively with potential KAT schools and teachers. But you're not alone!

KAT also has a comprehensive **Teacher's Manual** for the educators, and a great Supplement (*Civic Education & Community Problem-Solving as Life Skills and as Skills for Life*) for involving students who have special learning needs. KAT provides an orientation video, and a supportive website (<http://palwv.org/kat/>) as well.

And once you're all plugged into addressing an issue there in your local community, you're in your own element! We're the background context, trouble shooters, and public relations cheering squad, at your service!

Section II - KAT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A civic education program for elementary and middle school children, KAT was launched in 1993 by the League of Women Voters of PA Citizen Education Fund in cooperation with West Chester University. KAT then expanded into secondary education and elements of the KAT program are also being used in college courses.

KAT enhances public commitment and competence among youth by engaging them in local policy matters. Instead of memorizing or simulating democratic processes, KAT students engage directly in them.

KAT students explore their local communities and select a local issue of concern. They research this issue, analyze alternative solutions and problem-solve their way into taking positive civic action.

In this process, KAT students apply academic skills from their many subject areas to meaningful community-building. Teachers observe greater motivation, harder work, longer concentration and new learning among KAT students engaged in relevant local activities.

Studies show that whereas neither maturation nor community service alone enhance civic skills, the inquiry- and research-based KAT program does! Pre- and post-tests confirm that KAT students learn to gather information and consider alternative perspectives before making decisions. They also learn appropriate ways to express their opinions.

Over the years, KAT has provided professional development to educators reaching many thousands of children across Pennsylvania, much of the training conducted as an Act 48 Provider, approved by the PA Department of Education. Grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Annenberg Foundation, William Penn Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Prudential, Pennsylvania Service Learning Alliance, and Wachovia, among others, have enabled KAT to develop a range of top quality educational materials, including a website (<http://palwv.org/kat/>). Numerous publications in major national journals and the prestigious “Outstanding Program of Excellence” recognition by both the National and Pennsylvania Councils for the Social Studies (1996, 1995) attest to KAT’s pedagogical leadership.

Issues addressed by KAT students over the last decade have included, among others:

*abandoned houses; abandoned vehicles;
over-population of deer; pet nuisances;
senior citizens;
new immigrants;
community pride;
facilities beautification;
recreational facilities;*

*lead in drinking water;
fire safety; school safety;
development and zoning;
shad in the Delaware River; pollution;
traffic around the school; pedestrian safety;
school food & nutrition; municipal services & careers;
school facilities;*

*violence; bullying; peer mediation;
community gardens;
libraries and literacy;
graffiti and mural arts;
community grief;
AIDS/HIV; child abuse*

KAT Overview ...

KIDS AROUND TOWN®

A Local Government Education Model

- **Introduce Students to Local Government**
 - what is public policy?
 - who is in my community?
- **Choose a Local Issue to Explore**
 - under jurisdiction of local public authorities
 - of direct concern and interest to students
 - manageable within time frame
- **Research the Issue**
 - history
 - factual bases
 - public opinion
 - alternative perspectives
 - multiple sources
- **Analyze the Research**
 - distinguish fact from opinion
 - recognize arguments
 - verify accuracy of facts and arguments
 - identify points of view
 - evaluate evidence
 - look for patterns
- **Develop an Action Plan**
 - reframe the problem
 - develop possible alternatives
 - analyze feasibility of solutions
 - discuss criteria
 - select best solution for “public good”
- **Take Civic Action**
 - inform the public
 - convince local authorities
 - participate in suggested course of action
- **Assessment and Reflection**
 - self evaluation
 - teachers’ observations
 - public policy scenarios
 - apply knowledge to new situations

Section III – A NOTE ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING

Perhaps you're already acquainted with a form of Service-Learning. Schools in your area may be using some version of Service-Learning to involve students in community programs, to enhance school/neighborhood relations, and to meet state curriculum requirements.

Service-Learning is a method of teaching that ties academic learning into student work in the community. There are almost as many styles of Service-Learning as there are people who engage in it! Service-Learning is conducted from kindergarten through college, across the U.S., and abroad as well. Millions of students have been involved.

There is a huge and growing body of reports, books, research and professional conferences on the subject of Service-Learning. This authentic, hands-on approach to learning has been receiving significant public, corporate and foundation support.

Among the greatest strengths of well-executed Service-Learning are:

- its motivational, inspirational power to reach students, including reluctant and disabled learners
- increased study and learning by participating students
- participants' sense of positive contribution and empowerment
- increased respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives
- greater connection with the broader community

However, many studies fail to demonstrate the link between volunteer projects and CIVIC competence. Lots of students tutor younger children, but they don't necessarily learn about how taxing policies relate to funding public education, or how school boards work. They don't necessarily envision themselves as future school board members. Similarly, students may engage in intergenerational programs with senior citizens, but they don't necessarily learn about the public policies that impact the lives of seniors. They don't see their role in democratic, political processes or as shapers of public policy.

Unfortunately, in many Service-Learning programs, students engage in formulaic, feel-good missions, but don't focus on understanding and acting on the underlying problems and processes. They become part of the "band-aid" but not part of the problem-solving or sustaining solutions.

That's where YOU and KAT come in!

KAT, *in contrast*, has always emphasized the explicit connection of students to these underlying, background issues.

KAT urges research on the relevant public policy context of community issues. If citizens want to improve the status quo, they need to understand the multiple and often complex causes of the current issue. They need to analyze previous approaches, and see

where they may have gone wrong. They need to consider alternative perspectives and alternative solutions to move forward, and to consider possible consequences.

Students are capable of understanding more than we typically “give” them. They’re capable of more powerful inquiry than we typically encourage.

Once again, their education cannot depend on a single teacher alone. The best program is one that partners with experts in real life, in real issues. You can be that vital, missing link.

Section IV - DEFINING YOUR OWN ROLE

KAT doesn't prescribe a set script for you. You're your own boss on a KAT project. You can be as pro-active as you want to be, or keep the project, and your role in it, quite tame. Variables include how much time you have, your relationship with the schools, the nature of the issue/s chosen to address, and how empowered the school feels on the subject.

Some public officials love children and can't get enough contact with school groups! BUT we know of other public leaders who excel at public relations but who totally freeze when it comes to children and school settings! For those of you like this, we repeat: *KAT doesn't expect you to replace the teacher!*

Furthermore, feel welcome to re-arrange the sequencing from what we describe here, to whatever makes the most sense in your situation.

ESTABLISH a WORKING RELATIONSHIP with a SCHOOL or TEACHER

Perhaps you already have a natural, prior relationship with a local school. Maybe your own children attended that school and you know the principal, or you've worked with a scout troop based there.

Or perhaps you know of a particular school you'd like to work with because it's a site of controversy in your community. Or it's located conveniently to your office!

Speak with the Principal – or with the District Curriculum Director - about your willingness to work with a class on a civic project. Ask to be connected with the teacher or classroom most interested or with the most appropriate curriculum for such an experience.

Come bearing sample KAT materials to share!
(We can supply you!)

Part of establishing the relationship is discussing a vision of how such a project would benefit both the students and the community. You could suggest a couple of community issues you'd like to see eager youngsters accomplish – from public health awareness, to sponsoring an educational forum on a hot issue, to testing the water in a local stream, to designing a public mural - and the teacher could consider the ways those, or alternative public issues, could simultaneously meet many instructional goals and academic standards.

You could agree on a general timetable and on areas in which your expertise would be most useful.

YOUR PIVOTAL INPUT

KAT knows from the past decade of projects that there are certain phases of a project in which the public official's help is most appreciated by the teachers. Once again, these might vary depending on your own circumstances.

- ☺ Offer to make a brief presentation to the class at the start of the program, presenting 2 or 3 possible areas where the community could benefit from student research and problem-solving.
- ☺ Suggest coordinating a tour/field trip to a public site of relevance. *(Whatever works: It could be to a public hearing, a deteriorating park; a water treatment facility, the municipal building or recycling center, health department, or historic site that needs attention.)*
- ☺ Share basic, background information about your office, its mission and decision-making processes accessible to public involvement. Often teachers don't live in the same communities where they work and feel uninformed or intimidated by presenting such information themselves.
- ☺ Provide – or refer the class to – specific written information, pamphlets, videos, speakers, etc. about the issue at hand. Students need to learn to research the context of the problem.
- ☺ Introduce vocabulary and concepts from your profession. You might be surprised how excited you can get third graders about showing off their new knowledge on taxes, land use, licensing, peak use, or saving money through competitive bidding.
- ☺ Encourage questions and multiple perspectives. KAT is inquiry-based and promotes critical thinking, even among young children. We know issues are complex and have alternative solutions. Students need practice applying their learning to challenging and realistic content.

BE THE CELEBRITY

Maybe you don't think of yourself or your job as **glamorous**. But to KAT, WOW!

Here's what we mean.

You're not the teacher and you're not the parent. But here you come anyway, acting as if you care about school, and education, and your work, and the community
AND THESE KIDS.

That's special.

You're special.

Their teacher is struggling to make each day really count. That's pretty special.

Those kids are our future, and that's very special.

So play it for all you can!

When Hazleton Mayor John Quigley walked into the elementary school's large instructional area and saw all those young faces staring up at him from the carpeted floor, he waved a kind of broad, howdy-partner greeting and said, "Hi Boss!"
The kids were puzzled to imagine there might be someone higher than the mayor, and looked around the room. Quigley repeated himself, and as most of the children continued to look around, a few smiles and quiet chuckles warmed the confusion.

The Mayor explained to the children that THEY were his boss! And quickly – and memorably - unfolded the concept that textbooks might otherwise have droned on about as 'popular sovereignty': power, in a democracy, resides in the people!

You don't have to be a politician or a gifted teacher to come up with an entrance like that.

Your presence,

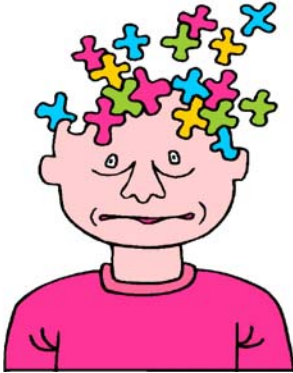
warmth,

genuine interest in their work

or willingness to share information with their teacher

guarantees that in KAT's book, you're a celebrity.

Section V - Why YOU? The A to Z ASSETS YOU BRING



You bring many otherwise missing pieces to the puzzle that is civic education.

Some pieces are concrete, some more abstract. Some are very specific to your job, whereas others are more generic.

- A. You represent **ACCESS**. Your cooperation in this KAT process signals openness and responsiveness of government and public policy-making to the citizenry.
- B. You provide **BACKGROUND**. You know something useful about the historical or political context of the issue being studied. Sometimes this context helps contribute **BALANCE** to students' understanding of issues.
- C. Where else can students get a *better* glimpse of local **CAREERS** in community development and public work?
- D. The authenticity and reality that accompanies you and this work is real, live **DRAMA** up close and personal!
- E. Your **EXPERIENCE** is part of your **EXPERTISE**.
- F. You can share some **FINANCIAL FACTS** about your position or the community or the issue being studied by the students. You can help students make realistic, relevant **FORECASTS** about the **FUTURE**.
- G. You can demonstrate, visit, tell or engage in some aspect of democratic, self-**GOVERNANCE**!
- H. Many young people fail to consider possible, unintended consequences of actions that may **HARM** or **HURT** others in the community. You're probably in a strong position to explain examples and analogies for the students – whether it has to do with throwing snowballs at passing cars or the plaintiff viewpoint in the court controversy over reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in school.
- I. One of the best parts about community problem-solving is that authentic issues are **INTERDISCIPLINARY**. You can help students see how many

subjects are relevant to this project. Seeing applications across multiple subjects will help students think in broader, more complex ways.

- J. Even though we take civic education seriously, effective learning needs some humor and levity. So share some “trade” **JOKES** or funny stories you’ve collected during your public work or relating to the issue at hand. Jokes and humor can serve as helpful memory tricks to link students back to important information.
- K. One significant thing that distinguishes a textbook understanding of democracy and real life is your **KNOW-HOW about the system and processes**. If kids really want to change something in the local community, how should they start? What steps should they take? Most teachers will be especially grateful for your support in this area.
- L. **LOCAL LAWS** and state/federal **LEGISLATION** define the context in which we conduct so much of our lives. What laws apply to the KAT issue being studied? Are they still reasonable, or do they need to be changed? How can the students improve these regulations and policies? Here’s another place where teachers usually deeply appreciate your help.
- M. Orient students better to their communities by providing **MAPS** and other informational **MATERIALS** on the demographics, policy-makers and relevant issue in your locality.
- N. **NEWS** clippings, **NEWSPAPERS** and **NEWSLETTERS** are useful print resources for students. You may have a collection of articles that can help students gain insight on their community issue.
- O. Students must learn how to deal with diverse **OPINIONS** and **OPPOSITION** to their own viewpoints. In addition to learning how to provide evidence and support for their own perspectives, they need to recognize legitimate arguments for less conventional views. You can show them the merits of alternative arguments, thereby helping students use different opinions to help strengthen any ultimate solutions.
- P. **Informed PARTICIPATION** is key to a healthy democracy. Help empower students to **overcome PASSIVITY** and take an active role in their community.
- Q. Intellectual growth and healthy self-governance require strong **QUESTIONING** skills. You can help students frame effective, meaningful **QUESTIONS** that probe below the surface and into the causes of and potential solutions to important problems.
- R. Hopefully, you’re not the only **RESOURCE** for the students as they pursue their **RESPONSIBILITY** to **RESEARCH** their issue. But you may be able to

provide some unique insight about **RELATIONSHIPS** in their study. For example, you may help them *connect the various stakeholders* they may not have recognized otherwise. Perhaps you can explain **RELATIONSHIPS** of different *kinds of power* in different circumstances. You may be able to explain the **RELATIONSHIPS** between *cause & effect* of different problems, and warn students about the **RELATIONSHIP** between certain alternative policies and their possible *consequences*.

Guided **REFLECTION** is helpful throughout the KAT project.

- S. When we think of civics, we don't always realize how important a role **SCIENCE** plays in **SOCIETAL** issues. But **SCIENCE** and technology are important aspects to KAT research, and almost any public issue has at least one angle relating to **SCIENCE**. Science doesn't have to be the more obvious themes of environment, recycling or nutrition: it could be a sub-theme in the realm of methodology, public health & safety, geriatrics, materials science, combustion, engineering, chemistry, transportation, waste treatment, etc.
- T. Understanding of **TAXATION** could lead to more responsible civic habits. Help students see the impact of **TAXATION** on public attitudes and behaviors, on business decisions, and on land development and other policy decisions.
- U. Sometimes a local **UNIVERSITY** has resources, with which you may be in a better position to connect than the classroom teacher.
- V. **VOTING** is only one way to express ones' civic **VOICE**. Help KAT classrooms use their **VOTES** knowledgably and find additional ways to make their public **VOICES** count.
- W. The "**WATCHDOG**" function of citizens and organizations is valuable. Although we want to encourage civic participation that goes beyond the role of spectator, there is value to regularly staying up with, and monitoring, the actions of public policy-making and the leaders who make public decisions.
- X. **EXAMINE** primary sources and sites in KAT research, when possible. Opportunities to collect and analyze **EXCELLENT** data or case study **EXAMPLES** typically make an enduring impression on students.
- Y. **YOU** are the most valued asset you bring to KAT classes. **YOUR** presence, **YOUR** time, **YOUR** own words and stories, **YOUR** perspective, questions and ideas, and **YOUR** enthusiasm are significant motivators to student learning about the community.
- Z. Don't be afraid to **ZERO in** on complex and even controversial issues. Even **ZONING** fights are good examples where students can experience the **ZEST** of participatory democracy!

Section VI: *JUST A FEW KAT EXAMPLES*

As you'll see in the examples below, KAT "partners" in the field have really bolstered the content of the civic experience. Our teachers work hard to ensure development of academic skills and to reinforce the learning, **but experts like you supply meaningful public context and unique details.**

In addition to the brief descriptions below, make sure you check out the articles attached. KAT's longest, continuous partner has been **Robert Gill, Township Manager of East Pennsboro**. The team of Gill and teacher, Carrie Lewis, has provided a decade of civic-empowered students and a visibly stronger, more dynamic community.

- When two special education classes taught at Overbrook High School by Deborah Weeks Coleman and Brenda McCleary in Philadelphia decided to **study the problem of lead in school drinking water**, a number of different community experts offered their help. Guided by Karen Young, an educator with the **Philadelphia Water Department**, the students visited the nearby Belmont Intake Pumping Station on the Schuylkill River and Belmont Water Treatment Plant. She loaned the teachers some equipment for testing water back at the school. Later the same week, an engineer, Drew Brown, also representing **PWC**, came to school with slides and hand-outs. Reviewing the urban water cycle, Brown explained how and where lead can enter the system. He also explained ways to prevent or fix the problem. The following week, **EPA** sent Lisa Donahue to meet with the students. She brought maps of all the water outlets in the school and data sheets from previous inspections and tests on those outlets. By the time the students completed their study, they were sharing their new safety tips with families and child care centers in the community.
- **Violence Prevention** was the two-year focus of a 7th-8th grade class at Thomas Middle School in Philadelphia. Among the numerous community "partners" supporting teacher Maureen Salvo, were a **district Judge**, an **attorney** from the office of **City Council Chair**, Anna Verna, and the coordinators of a regional peer mentorship training organization, **Good Shepherd**. One student independently contacted the **Anti-Violence Partnership** of Philadelphia, connecting with Mr. Laws of the **Student Anti-Violence Education (SAVE) Program**.

Violence prevention also captured the interest of Lower Merion Township middle school students, who took their concerns to **their state** representatives in Harrisburg.

- **Former State Representative** Ellen Bard worked with Abington Township elementary school children on an historic trails redevelopment effort. Biking safety was an offshoot of a similar project in Dallas, PA, where

local rails-to-trails organizations worked with middle school students. Local businesses and the chamber of commerce cooperated as well.

- Local recreation facilities brought elementary school children in Hazleton, PA together with their Mayor and Police Chief. Playground “watch” – a version of Town Watch – was one of many positive outcomes.

Recreational planning was also the theme of a major KAT project in Upper St. Clair, PA. The Township administrators, as elected officials, and a prominent architect worked with the students to ensure meaningful, outside-the-classroom walls learning experience.

- Landfill capacity problems catalyzed a KAT project in Harrisburg, PA. Students at St. Catherine Laboure School teamed with environmentalists, solid waste managers, recycling experts, naturalists, garden store personnel, and public relations experts to develop schoolyard compost bins and an information-rich public awareness campaign.
- A number of projects initiated by Pittsburgh classrooms ranged from traffic safety, to litter, to local heritage, to the city’s curfew ordinance. Councilmen Dan Onorato and Jim Ferlo played inspiring and pivotal roles, as did the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, and other non-profits, museums and libraries.
- Health-related organizations have also contributed valuable expertise for assorted KAT projects. Hershey Medical Center provided area students with memorable experiences about biking and auto safety, and public health offices have supported KAT research on AIDS, disabilities, geriatric issues, child abuse and animal nuisances.

See Appendices A, B & C for articles

Section VII: PUBLIC MEETING PRIMER

Think about the public turnout at civic meetings in your community... Routine school board, township, county and borough meetings are sparsely attended. Only at budget time, major zoning contests and redistricting do local officials really expect a crowd. And only a few members of that crowd are well informed about the underlying issues behind the immediate problem that evoked their emotions and drew them to attend.

Think about your own background... When did you first attend a civic meeting? Why? What did you think of it? How has your opinion changed over time and experience?

And think about this...

How can we expect democracy to work well when most adults have never attended a routine school board or municipality meeting? Do they recognize the difference between a committee meeting and a legislative meeting? How do they get their information and how do they analyze it? When was the last time they communicated directly with an elected official? What determines their civic role ?

This chapter proposes the active use of public meetings - by educators and civic leaders - as significant, first-hand opportunities to educate students for responsible adulthood and citizenry in the U.S.

There are a number of reasons – excuses, perhaps – why Americans *don't* attend public meetings (No tickets required! Your taxes are staging the show!) with the same gusto with which they pay to pack sports venues and music performances. We won't argue with each reason here.

However, we strongly propose that some of the reasons typically given can - and must be addressed and overcome – by specific, school-based initiatives.

- **Lack of Awareness**. It's startling to see how many adults are completely unaware of the public meetings that take place representing their own school, municipal and county jurisdictions. Many don't even know for sure their jurisdictions' names or how to contact the relevant offices, much less the times and places where the meetings take place. We must teach all children how to access this basic information, and how to seek it out when they change their residence in the future.
 - Since all students in the class share the same school, you can begin with the school district, and its location in a specific township/borough and in its particular county. **Concentric circles and mapping** of various kinds will help students picture the different levels of government.

- **Physical tours of these centers of operations** will make the levels of government come alive for the youngsters and demonstrate accessibility.
- **Carefully plan visits to public meetings** to help students **connect public business** in many spheres to different aspects of their lives.
- Plan visits to different public meetings and courtrooms to help students **distinguish** the different levels and branches of governance in their jurisdictions.

→ Sense of “Boredom” When a person attends a meeting without preparation, and knows little about the process, purpose, vocabulary, agenda or context, it’s a little like sitting in on a lecture conducted in a foreign language one hasn’t learned. Furthermore, many Americans are used to being entertained and most don’t lightly submit to situations requiring extra concentration, thought or effort. Fortunately, not every public meeting is punctuated by dramatic protests or vituperative controversy to build in TV-style “excitement.” So the response to observing routine work-in-progress at a public meeting is therefore sometimes, “It’s boring.”

- But schools are training grounds for democracy. Schools must help demystify the language, processes and agendas of public administration. **Translate!**
- To the extent ignorance and difficulty breed boredom, attendance at public meetings must be used to enlighten and enliven. Many youngsters enjoy baseball better when they follow along by marking up a scorecard. They memorize hockey players’ jerseys and follow their hoops heroes intently. Even though “democracy is not a spectator sport,” it doesn’t hurt to learn how to be an avid fan! **Create your own “scorecard” for the meeting, and have students follow along! (Modify the agenda with questions and observational challenges.)** A time may come when the students may be called up off the bench!
- Just as in sports and music, different players at the public meeting have different roles. **Instructing students in the many careers and jobs they see (and don’t see, behind the scenes)** will give them a deeper understanding of the action on the floor, and increase active interest.

→ Relevance? If most adults don’t fathom the direct relevance of civic affairs in their everyday lives, it’s hard to expect they’ll convey the urgency of public awareness to youngsters. Moreover, some adults write off public policy as the work of social studies, and thus don’t see it as part of their world. Such views are short-sighted and narrow.

- Public policy affects everyone. **Democracy is cross-disciplinary.** Public decisions impact scientists, mathematicians, accountants, lawyers, athletes, health workers, educators, salespeople, skilled

tradesworkers, retirees and students, among others. And all these fields have important interests in appropriate public administration.

- We must **establish this relevance** for and with students. Work with students to connect some of the complex or seemingly obscure issues at those meetings to them, their families, their communities, their budgets and their immediate (and future) environment.

There are numerous additional ways to overcome lack of awareness, and a sense of boredom and irrelevance that often discourage civic engagement.

→ Hold a “reception” for a class after a public meeting so that students and officials can “network.”

→ Try coordinating with the teacher a class community “treasure hunt” or “scavenger hunt.” Items can include things like:

- maps of their community (with the municipal building circled)
- agenda of a public meeting (with eyewitness notes!)
- minutes from a public meeting (with personal commentary)
- handouts available at the town or school district offices (along with a single paragraph explaining their significance)
- community calendars (with the meeting circled that the student plans to attend)
- handouts available at the office of your county commissioner or state representative
- newspaper articles about a policy decision made in your community
- government directories (from your local League of Women Voters, civic club or blue pages)
- recreational or extracurricular educational offerings from your municipality, school district or county
- volunteer information from a local fire or rescue squad
- information about the governance and funding of your local public library
- OTHER!

→ Encourage the class to send a **regular “delegation” of students to particular school board or township committee sessions.** As students become familiar with the format and the content of the meetings, they learn to distinguish routine business from unusual events, and can take on an active, civic watchdog role.

→ Develop a reporter system with the class, so that a **“liaison group” from school can meet with an official or public relations representative** of the township on a regular basis. As elected or appointed officials interact with the students, the young citizens grow a sense of belonging. Make sure that student questions are welcome.

→ Increase sample size! One meeting is not enough to permanently “hook” most people into the civic habit. Nor is it a fair enough representation from which to generalize to all meetings. Use curiosity, inquiry, intrigue and content, among other strategies to **create a sense of suspense and desire to return**. There’s always some item or issue that needs follow-up. A warm acknowledgement by leaders at the meeting will help students feel welcome and comfortable.

New experiences are daunting for many individuals. Sometimes, the older one gets, the less likely that person may be to stretch himself to overcome the unknown. That’s why youth must be empowered in civic participation and the schools must be supported in this goal. All students need to understand the rules of the ‘game’ of public meetings; they should be able to figure out how to identify the primary players. Skills of thoughtfully monitoring public meetings aren’t learned automatically. They must be taught. Attendance at civic meetings should be second-nature to U.S. citizens. The consequences have much greater impact for them than the ballgame they’re more likely to follow.

Section VIII: COMMENTS ABOUT CONTROVERSY

No community is immune to controversy over public issues. One can imagine – and even worry about – students somehow falling prey to partisan purposes in an emotion-charged climate.

KAT does not shy away from controversy. It's one of the characteristics that vibrant democracies cherish. Rather than isolate students from the authenticity of controversy, KAT believes students must be taught to rationally research and analyze flammable issues and claims involved in public controversies. Their teachers – together with community experts like you – should actively seek to wisely integrate diversity and balance into the KAT study.

The best “protection” of students for dealing with an emotional hotbed is to help them practice skills of inquiry and critical thinking. Don't shield them from debate; help them understand the perspectives and arguments of all “sides.” Show them how to probe the validity of statements and sources. Help them discern strengths and weaknesses in each viewpoint. Teach them to dissect arguments. Demonstrate meaningful inquiry and constructive skepticism.

Public policy is complex. We do our students no favors to simplify the world into black and white, good guys and bad guys. *Convenience is not the point of self-governance.*

It is unfortunate that many adults become disillusioned by public policy debates and political realities. The slow process of deliberation, negotiation, compromise and sometimes, even change itself, often alienates and discourages people, who then become cynical about their power to make a difference.

But with the exception of situations of actual corruption and monopolistic abuse, this cynicism is partly a misunderstanding of democracy and partly a lack of persistence in their goals. Kids Around Town tries to help students understand how the reality can work to strive for the ideals and goals desired. When adults give up on a civic idea saying “Nobody cares; it will never change,” what they're often really saying is, “I don't know how to effect the change I think is necessary,” or perhaps, “They – whoever that is – need to fix this, and They won't.” It's a passive, “let-the-white knight-come-rescue and fix-this- problem” attitude.

Professor John Hibbing refers to “The Messiness of Democratic Processes” in his September, 1999 article (subtitled “Teaching Barbarics in K-12”) in the *American Political Science Association Journal*. He emphasizes exposing students to the realities of democratic processes. If we teach only the theory without the practice of democracy, we're setting the next generation up for further alienation.

For instance, a KAT observer once accompanied a middle school group to observe a legislative session. Unfortunately, these youngsters had not been adequately prepared for what they were going to see. Many came away ashamed that their legislators talked among themselves and read papers while someone else was speaking at the microphone. They perceived as rudeness and sloppiness the representatives' coming and going from the chamber. They interpreted what they saw as disorganization and the unwillingness of public officials to listen.

Granted, one could argue that American legislative practices could stand some review and revision, but these students simply didn't know what format to expect and why, so they interpreted what they saw against a preconceived, invalid set of assumptions. Fortunately, the teachers invited the district's legislator to come to school following this experience and clarify for the students why the session looked the way it did and how and why business was conducted that way on that day. It was necessary to try to un-do negative impressions that could have been prevented up front.

Partnerships with experts like you help prevent misperceptions, and reduce the gap for students between theory and practice.

Just a little of your know-how translates into a lot of foundation-building and learning in youngsters. And that translates into a stronger community and a more competent generation of citizens and leaders.

Section IX: “Culminating Projects” with a CIVIC TWIST

One of the statewide requirements for high school graduation in Pennsylvania is that each student complete a “culminating project.”

“The purpose of the culminating project is to assure that students are able to apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information and communicate significant knowledge and understanding.”

Title 22 Pa Code 4.23 (a) calls for each school district to specify its own criteria for implementation. As you might expect, there is great variety across the state in the ways districts actually conceive and roll out this requirement. Some districts link the culminating project with community service; others permit students to pursue some independent interest. The School District of Philadelphia even stipulates grade-level equivalents of a culminating project as part of its promotion criteria from grades 3 and 8, as well from 12th grade.

Kids Around Town sees the culminating project as a terrific opportunity for students to connect important local community issues, policy processes and understanding of government structures with their academic goals.

KAT urges that districts use the culminating project to incorporate and showcase student civic skills necessary for proficient citizenship.

KAT encourages YOU to help schools integrate civics into their culminating projects.

There are many ways to make this happen!

Contact your favorite teacher, school or district and let them know you’re willing to consult with students about their culminating project. Many districts even have a counselor or staff member dedicated to this program, who may be a good contact for you. Ideas flow from the student’s interests – and from your own experiences, expertise and imagination.

- Imagine that a student performs with the school choir or band at a local senior center. Or maybe students are volunteering to help with activities at a local

- nursing home. You can introduce them to the existence and purpose of the county Area Agency on Aging, setting the wheels in motion for a meaningful culminating project that goes beyond the typical 'oral history' project that so often limits the scope of intergenerational contact. Your questions can focus the students on studying the many assets and needs of mature adults living in your county jurisdiction, and examine how well the transportation, residential, employment, entertainment, or personal care and health services match. Perhaps the students could draw up several contrasting budgets and constellations of retirement living circumstances for local residents based on a range of different situations, including health needs and financial means.
- By pursuing the civic implications of elderly people living in your community as a culminating project, students will further develop and apply skills in economics, math, science, social studies and language arts. Your input ensures a fuller perspective, richer and deeper understanding. Students will appreciate another dimension of diversity in their community, be more attuned to alternative career opportunities, and be in a better position to contribute meaningfully to responsible public policy making.
- Or imagine instead that a group of students is enthralled by video games. They're also fond of poker, and watch poker games broadcast on television. With gaming now legal in Pennsylvania, there are many public policy facets that students can study. Maybe your expertise can direct them to examine the zoning, licensing and regulatory framework in which gambling takes place. You can guide students to look at the different economic implications for different demographic groups in the community, as well as tax impact. Students can consider the statistical probabilities associated with different sorts of games and they can learn to forecast expected revenues to particular community programs from those games.
 - By pursuing the civic implications of gaming in your community, students break out of a simplistic "good-bad" paradigm and learn how to meaningfully analyze the various impacts of real policies. Your input gives them experience applying academic skills to activities about which they've probably never given serious thought.
 - Maybe your district is in a fairly rural community, and outside of work, school, football, and perhaps religious organizations, the youth have relatively few constructive extracurricular opportunities. Perhaps a culminating project could address issues of youth development; within that context, you could help students work with the county/township recreation or library department to create new programs to benefit local children and teens.
 - Civic possibilities for such a project are limitless. From conducting a community needs assessment to researching relevant jurisdictions to analyzing costs and payment options, students engaged in this culminating project will move toward visible community improvements.

Once you've consulted on a couple of student projects, these experiences will fuel ideas and comfort for subsequent ones. And your mentorship is invaluable in terms of setting an example and serving as a role model of public engagement.

You are indeed nurturing the next generation in democracy, and, as Horace Mann exhorted, facilitating their apprenticeship in self-governance. THANK YOU!

Section X: *CELEBRATE!*

There are too many areas in our society where we equate success with “winning.” According to that thinking, you have no reason to celebrate unless you “beat” the other guy.

But that’s not a helpful attitude when it comes to democratic processes and civic engagement. Effective self-governance doesn’t just involve winning and losing. Effective self-governance is also about:

- Getting your ideas and arguments into the public conversation;
- Expressing your perspective, your data, your experience;
- Hearing other viewpoints;
- Increasing your comprehension of the issues;
- Improving the repertoire of potential solutions;
- Contributing important questions to be considered and researched;
- Entertaining novel approaches;
- Collaboration;
- Finding common ground;
- Building social and political capital;
- Forging productive compromises.

Democracy is hard work.

Good effort, respectful collaboration and creative thinking are all worth celebrating.

Go for it!

And congratulations!