

Sentinel & Enterprise

Editorial: Fitchburg teacher, star student impart valuable civics lesson



Fitchburg High School freshman Georgianna Gallo, left, got a VIP tour of the State House on March 13 from State Rep. Michael Kushmerek, right, after she spoke on a panel about civics education. (COURTESY KRISTEN CANTERBURY)

By EDITORIAL
March 26, 2024

The Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement, signed into law by Gov. Charlie Baker in November 2018, mandated that American history, social sciences and civics be taught in public schools.

It also required that public schools implement student-led civics projects in eighth grade and high school, with the intent of encouraging young people to work with public officials and learn how their government works.

The letter and spirit of that law were recently on display during an appearance by a Fitchburg teacher and her former star student at a State House panel discussion on that subject.

That invitation coincided with events celebrating the annual Massachusetts Civics Learning Week, March 11-15. The series of virtual and in-person events aimed at building broader awareness of and support for civics education, and empowering participants to envision themselves as change agents in our democracy.

Eighth-grade civics teacher Kristen Sachse and former pupil Georgianna Gallowere invited to participate in a legislative briefing on civics education, where the discussion focused on why getting students involved is so crucial.

“Civics is more important than ever in today’s world,” Sachse said. “We give the students the opportunity to find their own voices and use them to get involved in their community. Civics and the action civics project give them the skills and confidence to be change makers and it prepares them to engage and lead.”

Sachse said that Gallo’s speech before the assembly “went great,” and that Gallo, now in her first year of high school, was thankful for the opportunity to speak to the legislators and guests about their own personal experiences with civics.

“I felt she was the perfect choice to bring to the State House, as she has always been a hard-working student and outspoken about things she is passionate about,” Sachse said. “... She is finding her own voice and using it for great things. I cannot wait to see and hear about all the great things she accomplishes in the future.”

Gallo said that the civics project – merits of the MCAS graduation requirement – she did in eighth grade while a student of Sachse’s at Memorial Middle School “was enjoyable in so many different aspects because not only were we educated, we built unbreakable bonds.”

That civics project gave her the “motivation and confidence” she “could not fathom having before,” so much so that she ran for class president in high school and won the election.

Gallo said the State House experience enabled her “to connect with important people, connect with all ages making an impact, and truly express my hard work and efforts when it comes to civic engagement.”

For a 14-year-old, the opportunity to express your opinions before members of the state Legislature must surely rate as an unforgettable experience.’

It’s also an example of the political and governmental knowledge gained from participatory lessons in democracy that the knowledge of civics provides.