

# Why Chicago Students Fight and How We Can Teach Others to Fight

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## *Abstract*

*Chicago is not alone in its struggle to properly and equitably educate a diverse student population, while keeping teachers happy and staying within budget. Chicago, however, has been in the national spotlight for its struggles, including teacher strikes and massive school closings. In a democratic society the fight towards a quality educational system seems to be a never ending social justice issue. However, Chicago students have not shied away from the fight for a better education and better communities. Their commitment to activism and civic engagement can be traced from Freedom Day 1963, to as recently as November 2016 with several walkouts in protest of Donald Trump's election. This paper argues that because Chicago Public School students are often subjected to injustices, especially in regards to their education, they are forced into socially just activism in the form of protests, sit-ins, walkouts and marches. This may not be the case for students from more privileged backgrounds and school districts. The literature states civic education is not promoting socially just citizens, but simply "good people" through participatory and responsibility citizenship education. These civic education models prevent students from critiquing the faulty democratic systems of the United States, therefore never addressing the root causes of social injustices. Though implementing a strong justice-oriented citizenship curriculum into civic education, students can learn skills teaching them to be socially just citizens engaging in democracy in a way that creates solutions to social ills.*

**Keywords:** *Civic Education, Deliberative Democracy, Social Justice-Oriented Citizenship, Responsibility Citizenship, Participatory Citizenship*

Segregation, school closings, budget cuts and teacher strikes. These are just a few issues that have plagued the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system for decades. Chicago is not alone in its struggle to properly and equitably educate a diverse student population, while keeping teachers happy and remaining within budget. Chicago, however, has been in the national spotlight countless times for its struggles. In the United States, the fight towards a quality educational system seems to be a never-ending social justice issue. Chicago students have not shied away from the fight for a better education and better communities.

One of the most significant actions taken by Chicago students was Freedom Day 1963. On October 22, 1963, almost 225,000 students organized a massive boycott and marched against the Chicago Board of Education to force school integration policies and address overcrowded schools

(Danns, 2003). Benjamin Willis was the Superintendent of CPS during the 1960's. Willis continued a segregated school system, despite federal legislation that opposed segregation. Black students were confined to schools in their communities, and due to the ever-growing population of Black residents within the city, their schools became extremely overcrowded. Instead of dispersing the students among other schools, including those attended by majority White students, Willis instituted mobile classrooms known as Willis Wagons. The Willis Wagons were small aluminum trailers that were placed throughout the grounds of the overcrowded Black schools and nearby vacant lots.

In addition to the mobile classrooms, Willis instituted a double shift schedule where some students went to school first shift, in the morning and some went to school in the afternoon. The city also rented commercial space to alleviate the overcrowding of Black schools, all to prevent integrating the school system (Danns, 2003). Students knew these segregationist tactics were wrong, as did parents and community organizations. They knew money was being wasted on rent and trailers to uphold the unjust system of racial segregation. Black students also knew that in addition to being overcrowded, their schools were under-resourced compared to schools attended by their White peers. The disparities encouraged students to act, in an effort to correct the system that wronged them. Unfortunately, the students were not successful in their request to meet with then Superintendent Willis to present their solution to overcrowding. Segregation continued under the Willis administration and many years after Freedom Day.

Chicago students' fight for social justice has continued since Freedom Day 1963, as recently as November 2016 in protest of Donald Trump's election. Student voices appear to be loud despite the continued injustices within CPS, the city of Chicago and beyond, even when they are not victorious in getting what they are fighting for. This paper seeks to examine why and how Chicago students have historically been involved in social justice movements and actions such as protests, walkouts and sit-ins. The more pressing question is how a more justice-oriented civics education curriculum taught within schools can encourage students to act against injustice, not just within education but within the broader society, eventually eliminating the need to fight against institutions and systems.

CPS students, who are overwhelmingly minority and low to middle income, are often faced with unjust actions regarding their education and within their communities. They are forced to take action as a way to show their displeasure. Their more affluent, White peers are less likely to engage in social justice actions, which is hardly surprising as they are not as likely to be affected by injustice. Yet all citizens should aim for a socially just society for all people. This paper highlights how schools fail to promote social justice by deterring students from critiquing current systems, instead promoting more passive forms of service to improve society. I draw on critical social theory and deliberative democracy as a framework for creating K-12 civics education programs that will develop civically engaged students and adults who are in pursuit of social justice and solutions to injustice. When deliberative democracy is followed by social actions, effective social change happens. I conclude, through implementing a social-justice oriented civics education, students will work to create systems and services that are more socially just and equitable for all citizens, eliminating the need for those oppressed by systems and services to fight against them.

## **Critical Social Theory**

The goal of critical social theory is to critique institutions and systems that result in injustice, followed up by action to achieve liberation from dominating practices of injustice (Hansen, Berente & Lyytinen, 2009). Critical social theory is the foundation for the empowerment needed for youth to engage in socially just actions resulting in improvements in their education systems and communities (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias & Kerry McLoughlin, 2006). “Empowerment refers to individuals, families, organizations, and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life” (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias & Kerry McLoughlin, 2006, p. 33). The first step in developing young people equipped to change unjust systems is ensuring they are empowered. Empowerment occurs when youth are encouraged and supported in critiquing systems, such as educational systems. All students must be free to call out unjust treatment they are directly experiencing, but those students who do not directly experience injustice should also understand the root causes of injustice and be willing to call it out. Once open dialogue occurs about these injustices, there must be an ability to act with the purpose of eliminating the unjust system.

Chicago students are directly impacted by unjust systems in their schools and within their communities. Even if they are not encouraged to discuss these injustices, the conversations are happening around them. They are bombarded with news stories about their failing schools, communities plagued by violence and budget cuts for essential social service programs. High school students in the Englewood community on Chicago’s south side witnessed the school board vote to close every high school in their community, sending a message that they cannot be properly educated in their own community (Fitzpatrick, 2018). The students hear and see their teachers discuss striking and the never-ending fight between teachers and the Mayor’s office; consequently, impacting their instructional time. Chicago students feel the anxiety as they fight through an overly complex high school application system to gain access to a quality school, while their suburban peers can simply attend their neighborhood school. Chicago students are fearful when their schools close and are forced to attend new schools in neighborhoods where they are not always welcomed and are possibly met with violence. It is difficult not to critique a system that too often works against them in so many ways. The students of Freedom Day 1963 not only critiqued Superintendent Willis’s decisions, but also sought out reasons why the superintendent would not use integration as a solution to alleviate their overcrowded schools. Even though they did not know it, those students by seeking rationale for Willis’s decision not to integrate were participating in deliberative democracy, which was then followed up by action when their demands were all but ignored. Engaging in deliberative democracy can contribute to socially just solutions to society’s problems when paired with socially just actions.

## **Deliberative Democracy and Citizenship**

Studies have found that deliberative democracy tends to produce outcomes and solutions superior to those in other forms of democracy (Elster, 1998).

Deliberative democracy produces less partisanship and more sympathy with opposing views; more respect for evidence based reasoning rather than opinion; a greater commitment to the decisions taken by those involved; and a greater chance for widely shared consensus to emerge, thus promoting social cohesion between people from different backgrounds. (Fishkin, 2011, p. 70)

Social cohesion is a step within the deliberative democracy process and essential when discussing issues such as education where disparities are so great. Chicago Public School students are 85% students of color and majority low-income (Klein, 2016). They are constantly faced with less than ideal educational environments. They are able to critique the system as they are oppressed by the system. What incentive does a White student in a high-performing, high resourced suburban school, have to critique an educational system that is benefitting them? However, regardless of not being directly impacted by an unjust school system, there should be an acknowledgement and cohesion among both groups on the idea that a quality education should be accessible to all students and acknowledge that a quality education is not accessible to everyone. If civic education adopted the concepts of deliberative democracy, the students who as voting citizens will shape our nation might learn to meet disparities within education not with indifference or along party lines but instead with a shared commitment to social justice.

More affluent students who may not be impacted by failing school systems would understand that having any segment of the population subjected to an inadequate education is detrimental not just to those students, but to society as a whole. When two different groups can agree that everyone is impacted by failing schools, those from different backgrounds could join forces fighting towards more just educational systems for all students. Social cohesion allows for more discourse between varying views, prompts justifications for decisions and is a way to ensure that everyone is involved in the decision making.

In addition to social cohesion, deliberative democracy encourages those engaged in discourse to respond to reasons to justify a law or action, and/or demand their representatives to provide reasons as well (Gutmann & Thompson, 2002). Deliberative democracy also requires the reason be accessible to all citizens and the reason is what is best for society as a whole and in general good will (Gutmann & Thompson, 2002). Gutmann and Thompson capture these demands with their notions of non-discrimination and non-repression. Based on these characteristics, a student in a more affluent suburban school should question the root causes and reasons students of color and those from low socio-economic communities often do not have access to a comparable education system. In addition to questioning an unjust educational system, they should seek solutions to obtain equity within education as it the best for society. The quest for justice should not fall solely on those oppressed by the system. Solutions should not fall solely on those not impacted by unjust systems. In the case of the school closings in Englewood, very few Englewood residents were involved in the decision that directly affected them.

In the same vein as critical social theory, deliberative democracy encourages critique of ideologies, systems and institutions followed by action resulting in solutions (Hansen, Berente & Lyytinen, 2009). Unfortunately, we are not teaching students to critique systems working in their favor, even if they are harming large segments of society. We are not developing citizens seeking solutions to problems, but more so citizens that tend to the symptoms of social problems. Our educational system develops citizens to be “good people” that want to feed the hungry, house the homeless and heal the sick, but not citizens that question or critique systems that allow someone

to be hungry, homeless or sick. So how are we developing “good” citizens, but not socially just citizens?

### **How Are We Producing Citizens?**

Westheimer and Kahne categorizes citizenship into three categories (2004). Most civic education promotes one of the three categories, each with their pros and cons. The three categories include personal responsibility citizenship, participatory citizenship and justice-oriented citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Most students receive their ideas of citizenship, democracy and political affiliation from their parents (Kiesa & Levine, 2016). They take on these beliefs without much questioning or critique, therefore whatever citizenship category your parent falls into, most likely that is where you will fall unless you are exposed to other options. School would be the most likely place a student would have access to other types of citizenship, especially when some believe a school’s purpose is to produce productive citizens. Regardless of the category, research finds civic education at school constructs how students see the strength and weaknesses of society and the ways they act as a citizen in democracy (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Based on the type of education a student receives, dictates to them what it means to have a voice within society.

The personal responsibility concept of citizenship most closely aligns with politically conservative values. This concept connects citizenship with moral character. Instead of addressing social changes, personal responsibility addresses personal deficit of things that need to be changed (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In this concept a voice might simply be having the power to address a social issue through passive volunteerism. Westheimer and Kahne use the example of a food drive to illustrate the three concepts. Donating to a food drive demonstrates personal responsibility. Donating, while passive, is still an opportunity to have a voice in addressing the issue of hunger and poverty.

Participatory citizenship comprises more active behaviors and falls in the middle of the political spectrum. Planning a food drive would exhibit participatory citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Using your voice in this manner results in addressing a social issue on a large scale, but like personal responsibility citizenship, participatory citizenship does not seek to eliminate the issue. Lastly, social-justice oriented citizenship seeks to change the system that caused the need for a food drive in the first place. The socially just citizen wants to understand the social, political and economic causes of hunger as this is the first step to developing a solution to hunger (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As Westheimer and Kahne argue, the goal should be eliminating the need for food drives all together. The critics of personal responsibility and participatory citizenship argue that they detract from the collective and public-sector initiatives (2004). Solving the issue of hunger is not going to be done through individual good deeds of donating food when policies are in place continuing economic disparities that limit food access. It is the systems and policies widening disparities that must be challenged and critiqued.

Westheimer argues that students are not encouraged to challenge traditions, widely accepted ideas and values. Teachers are unable to speak about injustice, thus hindering justice-oriented citizenship (2015 p.12). Solutions to injustice are based in critiquing faulty systems, ideologies, and beliefs, as well as seeking the reasons and root causes of injustice. When students are taught about injustices such as slavery, voting rights and the Holocaust, discussions regarding injustice arise. However, most students learn of injustice in the historical sense and can easily leave

school believing most injustices are satisfactorily resolved. There is a failure to relate injustice to modern day events. This sends a message that one, injustices are a thing of the past and two, injustice is something that can be overcome with a single action such as passing legislation or winning a war (Westheimer, 2015). If students are taught that all major instances of injustice are in the past, there is no need to challenge the system as it eventually works out.

With all the current injustices happening in the United States and abroad, there is no reason to limit discussions of injustice and democracy to those injustices that can be viewed through a historical lens. Westheimer highlights several examples of school districts putting policies in place limiting and restricting the teaching of history and the democratic process as a means of not critiquing the United States and its policies and traditions. In Connecticut, students were banned from putting on a play about the Iraq War. The students conducted extensive research using reliable sources, however the play contradicted the local school board's preferred patriotic narrative about the war (Westheimer, 2015 p.15). Arizona passed SB1108 in April 2008 stating districts that taught on topics "that denigrate or encourage dissent from American values" would not receive funding (Westheimer, 2015, p.15). In 2006, Florida became the first state to ban historical interpretation, encouraging only "genuine history," meaning only the testable facts could be taught such as dates, people and places (Westheimer, 2015, p.15). A Florida State Representative asked whose facts were going to be used pointing out that Florida textbooks referred to Christopher Columbus and the colonization afterwards as the "period of discovery" (Westheimer, 2015 p.16.). These are just a few examples, but the overarching message is that promoting nationalism is more valuable and important than promoting justice and democracy. Events including the Iraq War, colonization and even slavery have been sugar-coated as not to expose injustice and social issues tarnishing the exceptionalism of the United States. Rorty and other supporters of social justice-oriented citizenship in civic education would argue that you can be proud of America and critique America simultaneously. The critiques will encourage action that fixes the issues being critiqued (Rorty, 1998).

Keisa and Levine's research led them to the same conclusion. Too often public schools' civic education is reduced to learning history and testable information about governmental processes. Students learn significantly more historical information about wars and individual people than skills that can teach them to solve problems through civic engagement or involvement within the democratic process (2016). Instead of learning simply that slavery, voting rights and the Holocaust happened, teachers could take the curriculum a step further and discuss the root causes, the social, economic and psychological factors that caused these tragedies to occur. Teachers should go one step further still and relate these events to the social structures that are in place today as a result of these historical events. Integrating civic education into history curriculum is one way for students to learn their role in using their voice and civic rights to address and prevent injustices.

Most textbooks highlight the end of slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation, skim over Jim Crow which is a direct result of slavery and often ignores the racial injustices happening today which are all connected to beliefs stemming from slavery. Students are often taught the Holocaust is halted with the end of World War II, but teachers often fail to address the oppression that continued with the development of East and West Germany, or the connection to more recent acts of genocide as in Rwanda. Discussing these injustices at home and abroad does not support the nationalism, patriotic and American exceptionalism narrative and as a result young people are at best indifferent about what justice and democracy really looks like in modern day. How do we encourage people in affluent suburbs to understand or care about the challenges of the students in

Chicago and in communities with similar challenges when the educational system teaches them to be unaware of injustice or indifferent in moving towards justice?

Most students are required to take a civics course whether it is encompassed within a history, social studies or government title. There are some teachers and schools that make concerted efforts to move beyond simple testable facts, but federal education policy has not supported this effort in recent decades. There are schools and districts encouraging civic action in conjunction with their civic education. Unfortunately, those choosing to incorporate civic action into the curriculum do so in a way that often promotes personal responsibility and not necessarily democracy or socially just civic engagement. Community service graduation requirements are an example of this practice. Westheimer argues, “volunteering and providing services for those in need is important but providing services without looking at the root of the problem makes no sense” (Westheimer, 2015, p. 44).

Chicago Public School students are required to complete forty community service hours to graduate. For some students, this service requirement may spark a sense of civic engagement, but for most it is simply a means to an end for graduation. Community service activities usually allows students to help minimize a social problem, but not to solve the problem. These behaviors of volunteerism (personal responsibility citizenship) without promoting actual social change (justice-oriented citizenship) will continue into adulthood. Chicago students have historically been involved in social justice movements, however they are reacting to the unjust treatment they face. By ensuring all students understand their ability and responsibility to create social change through implementing a justice-oriented curriculum, they could become proactive in their movements to maintain socially just systems instead of always having to fight against them.

Chicago Public Schools is guilty of participatory citizenship with their 40-hour community service graduation requirement. Only about a quarter of CPS high schools offer a course that implement a civics curriculum (Rado, 2015). Only a few schools provide civic education and even fewer teach civics with a justice-oriented lens. Community-based organizations in Chicago provide a way for students to receive justice-oriented civic education and engagement opportunities. Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE), Mikva Challenge as well as youth councils of advocacy organizations such as the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and Center on Halsted are examples of organizations teaching students about democracy and creating social change. VOYCE’s mission reads “VOYCE is a youth organizing alliance for education and racial justice led by students of color from across the city of Chicago.” Their website uses terms such as “youth-driven research and organizing” “participatory action research” “root causes” “advance district-level policies” (www.voyceproject.org, 2016). Mikva Challenge (2016) aims to

develop youth to be informed, empowered and active citizens and community leaders. We do this by engaging youth in action civics, an authentic and transformative learning process built on youth voice and youth expertise. (www.mikvachallenge.org)

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless is an advocacy organization but involves young people in their social justice campaigns such as preventing budget cuts for support programs for homeless students and medical care for unaccompanied youth, by allowing students to testify in front of legislators in Springfield, participate in letter writing campaigns and meet with local elected officials and policymakers. Similar to VOYCE; Mikva Challenge, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and Center on Halsted use social-justice oriented terminology to describe their programs aligning

more with the type of civic education research deemed as most effective in creating citizens focused on solving social problems. Chicago students are effective in identifying issues that impact them and organizing around those issues in a social justice-oriented manner. However, Chicago is also home to organizations that promote justice-oriented civic education and fill the void left by public schools.

There is a small glimmer of hope on the horizon in an effort to increase civic education, at least in Illinois. In 2015 the Governor, Bruce Rauner signed House Bill 4025 requiring a semester long civics course for high school graduation. The “civics course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current controversial issues, service learning and simulations of the democratic process” (Rado, 2015). This is an attempt to expand civics-based courses such as history and government beyond testable facts and “memorization of the three branches of government and the Bill of Rights” (Rado, 2015). While this is a move in the right direction, the “state law also requires public schools to teach American patriotism, principles of representative government, as well as proper use of the American flag” (Rado, 2015). This could still result in the previously mentioned issues within current civic education curriculum, preventing students from openly critiquing systems that perpetuate the controversial issues they will be prompted to discuss. Within the new curriculum, students are still required to participate in some type of service learning, which usually falls within the category of personal responsibility and participatory citizenship. The Illinois Board of Education allows schools currently offering government related courses to opt out of offering a civics course, as long as they add the curriculum components outlined in the new bill to their current course offerings. The bill also states, “districts are free to determine how to incorporate civics education into their current curricula in a way that best meets the needs of their students” (Rado, 2015). Opposition from various educational groups and districts claim this new bill is an unfunded mandate and that addressing controversial topics is forcing teachers out of their comfort zone, posing additional challenges in creating a civics course-let alone one that is justice-oriented.

### **Why Chicago Students Fight for Justice**

Community organizations, students and parents worked together to conduct the walkouts during Freedom Day. Unfortunately, the students did not get the result they wanted, but the boycott inspired similar protests against segregation and other discriminatory practices promoted by Superintendent Willis (Danns, 2003). Freedom Day became a significant event within the Civil Rights Movement (Danns, 2003). In addition to Freedom Day, social actions by Chicago students include the Equal Rights Walkouts of 1968 and prompted students in other cities to take action against segregation among other educational issues.

Today, Chicago is still one of the most segregated school systems in the country. While there have been improvements, Rosie Simpson, a Freedom Day protestor said that her peers got lax and gave up too soon “We thought the battle was over we had a little success and thought things would keep going up and changing for the better. Of course that didn’t happen” (Klein, 2016). Deliberative democracy and social justice movements must continue, even when there are gains. As political administrations change and social structures change, what is best for the greater good, will also change. Therefore, citizens must always be working towards the goal of achieving justice for the greater good, engaging in discourse and ensuring everyone maintains access to participate in democracy.

Despite the lack of progress in some areas, Chicago students have never stopped their social action. While they engaged in protests and sit-ins in reaction to what they felt were national injustices such as the Anti-Immigration Law Walkouts of 1995, Iraq War Walkouts of 2003 and Donald Trump Election protests in 2016, Chicago students were also demonstrating against injustices within their own schools. The Social Justice High School protest and King High School student sit-in in 2012 and the Lane Tech student protest in 2013 were all in reaction to harsh treatment by administration, lack of resources and funding in their schools (Steiber, 2013). This does not even include the numerous marches and protests held in response to the 50 school closings in predominately, low-income and minority communities in 2013 and student support of the teacher strike in 2012. Most recently, we saw student-centered social action in reaction to the Stoneman Douglas school shooting in Parkland, Florida. Unlike Freedom Day these actions were organized and carried out with little to no adult support. The students did not get everything they wanted, but their actions brought attention to their needs resulting in small gains, such as a change in administration and the retention of support programs in some schools. Social Justice High School is a rarity as it does implement justice-oriented civic education in their curriculum, which students utilized in 2012. The district decided to fire two Social Justice High teachers without warning or reason. When the students demanded a rationale for the popular teachers' termination, they received unacceptable answers from the district. The students used their justice-oriented education to organize actions in protest of the decision and put pressure on the district. Ultimately, the teachers were reinstated and given back pay (Steiber, 2013).

Freedom Day did not result in a "quick win" as in the case of Social Justice High School protest, however the voice of students and their families were heard, and their message was spread all over the country. During a student protest against the Iraq War, Claire Wullner stated, "Maybe it (protest) won't make Mr. Bush change his mind but at least our community will know what we think" In this case, the protest was not about "winning," the protest was about making their voice heard against something they believed was wrong (Steiber, 2013). During a March 2015 CPS board meeting a student questioned, "Do the things we have to say not matter? In my eyes, that's exactly what I see. I see a man [Mayor Rahm Emanuel] who only devotes his time to schools with money and doesn't take students like us into consideration". In regards to "students like us" they were implying that students from lower-socio-economic backgrounds had a voice but it did not matter to those with the power to make decisions. In this case the student questions whether the Mayor values their voice and yet speaks up anyway. The previously mentioned instances were examples of deliberative democracy actions and supports the idea all citizens should have their voices heard and taken into account regarding decisions that impact society.

Through my work as a Program Director at a Chicago educational non-profit and my volunteer work with various youth programs, I had the opportunity to interview 10 Chicago students and ask them if they had been involved in any justice-oriented activities and if so, why they believed it was important to be engaged. The students had varying levels of civic education through school and/or through a community-based organization. Four of the students had been engaged in a justice-oriented program, class or training. The common theme in their responses for engaging in civic action was that they have nothing to lose by trying, but everything to lose if they do not. The idea of possible progress keeps them motivated to keep fighting. They stated:

Sometimes we do win, but we would never know if we didn't try.

Even if you don't win you can still help others achieve their goal with what you have gained from your experience.

I am affected whether I speak up or not so I might as well try to help myself and others.

You have to use your voice to let people know where you stand or you are giving them permission to walk all over you.

We have a long way to go and we may never get there, but we should keep going because any improvement is better than nothing. Try to get as close as possible.

### **Conclusion**

Chicago students will continue to be leaders in the fight for social justice. They continue to follow in the footsteps of those before them in social actions such as protest, sit-in, walkouts and marches. Ultimately, they have nothing to lose by at least trying to create change and have their voices heard. Students from more privileged backgrounds do not often face injustices that directly affect them and therefore they are not as engaged in critiquing systems, ideologies and beliefs they do not understand or in which they are unaware. The literature highlights the lack of civic education and how the civic education incorporated into history classes does not develop socially just citizens, but simply “good people” with a sense of patriotism and nationalism that prevents them from critiquing the faulty democratic systems of the United States. The literature states, to develop citizens seeking to solve social problems, they must engage in justice-oriented civic engagement and education. I argue this engagement and education should be rooted in deliberative democracy.

Chicago students are often reactive to injustice and also suffer from the lack of justice-oriented education to learn the need to be proactive in the fight for a more just society. While Chicago students have access to programs aimed at social justice versus personal responsibility citizenship and participatory citizenship, these organizations do not have the capacity to reach most students in the city. Also, these organizations rarely exist in more affluent, White communities. Chicago students believe in using their voice in spite of not gaining a socially just outcome with every fight. They are not idealistic that change will come quickly, but Chicago students remain hopeful that eventually they will indeed “win.” We must continue to empower and teach them and other students to keep fighting towards a more socially just society. At a time when public goods and services in Illinois are under attack, empowering students through civics education will allow a greater understanding of the systems and policies that create public goods and services. They will also be encouraged to use their knowledge to create and change systems, so they work for all citizens. Lastly, when majority of citizens are civically-engaged and systems benefit all groups the need to fight against a system is diminished.

To create active civically engaged citizens from all backgrounds committed to achieving a just society and dismantling oppressive systems for all citizens, students should be required to participate in civics education and must:

- Be taught and encouraged to participate in deliberative democracy by requiring reason for the way systems function whether it is beneficial to them or not. This is not

to say everyone must be involved in protests and marches, to be a justice-oriented citizen. What it does mean is seeking the root cause of social problems and not just the symptoms, critiquing systems and how they can be changed to benefit the greatest number of people in society.

- Be justice-oriented, meaning they should connect justice to participation in the democratic process when voting and holding officials accountable through political action.
- Receive these lessons of deliberative democracy and justice-oriented actions through K-12 education. Teachers should be trained to incorporate these teachings throughout the current curriculum ensuring most students gain the skills to remain engaged citizens into adulthood.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a society where fighting is not necessary. Civic education should be grounded in deliberative democracy, so discourse is encouraged, opposing views are received with a request for rationale and justification and not dismissed due to partisan beliefs. Deliberative democracy should create cohesion amongst all citizens to address issues of injustice and provide all citizens the access to participate in democracy. By developing students that will ultimately become adults who are actively engaged in democratic practices and act with a justice-oriented lens, systems can become less oppressive to some citizens. Over time all citizens will feel comfortable participating in a socially just system instead of fighting against the system.

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