



**THE GMHS
PUBLIC
PROJECT
INITIATIVE**

*A public project for every George Mason High School student
A life lesson in civic creativity and grit
Democracy reborn in a new generation*

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A. Overview

The GMHS Public Project Initiative is a movement by Falls Church students, parents and alumni to make **the imagining, developing and implementing of a public project** an institutionalized part of each George Mason High School student's civic education experience. This will involve: (1) making "the creation of a public project" a new **graduation requirement**; (2) developing a cross-curricular and multi-year **Public Project Program** for the implementation of this new requirement; and (3) organizing **community support** for and engagement with the program.

A. Overview

- A Significant Need
- A Public Project Program
- Examples of Public Projects
- Benefits of a Public Project Program

B. Why Does Teaching Civic Creativity Matter?

- What is civic creativity?
- Why does teaching civic creativity matter?
 - Individual, Democratic: Civic creativity engages students deeply in learning
 - Individual, Economic: Civic creativity prepares students for college and their careers
 - Public, Economic: Civic creativity trains a 21st century American workforce
 - Public, Democratic: Civic creativity is needed for an active American citizenry

C. Five Concerns about a Public Project Program

- Concern #1: "But don't we have Virginia standards to follow? Where are we going to fit this in? Where's the real learning -- where's the facts to memorize, skill sets to master and curriculum to cover?"
- Concern #2: "But some kids aren't into creativity, public service work or project management... isn't this unfair to them?"
- Concern #3: "I see this working for advanced students, but it's not going to work for all students."
- Concern #4: "But aren't there too many projects out there anyway? Why should kids reinvent the wheel when they can work on and learn from adult-made civic creations?"
- Concern #5: "This is too idealistic, utopian and different. Why not aim lower and just have this be a project for service hours or a unit in civics class?"

D. First Steps Towards a Great Public Project Program

1. View a Public Project Program as an integrated, attainable solution to various imperatives raised recently
2. Generate Mason stakeholder enthusiasm
3. Appoint a public project and community engagement coordinator
4. Learn from the CAS hours program, but understand the difference between community service and civic creativity
5. Start a conversation in Social Studies and English departments about incorporating public projects into curricula
6. Maintain universality

E. Contact

A Significant Need

"*Democracy must be reborn in each generation and education is its midwife*" rings as true today as it did when John Dewey first penned it a century ago. The public institutions and shared commonwealth of our local, national and global communities – our public culture, our environment, our media, our government, etc. – will in time be stewarded by a new generation. If this young generation does not develop the **democratic values, civic skills, and public-minded determination** to tend to, innovate, adapt and grow our civic culture, then our nation's public life will assuredly wither, taking our democracy down with it.

A single AP Government course and the occasional nod to civic development in history classes are not sufficient to the task at hand. To become the citizens that our nation deserves, students need more than just historical and Constitutional literacy, the memorization of the names of elected officials and Supreme Court cases, or the knowledge of how a bill becomes a law: they also need to develop *the hands-on skills, experience and commitment* that are needed to become *the confident, public-minded, world-changing, problem-solving, civic creators* that our society desperately needs them to be. Put another way: knowledge of how the federal government works, deliberative practice, and historical literacy are indeed important parts of what it means to be a good citizen...but civic creativity and public action are, too, and Falls Church students need to have their learning in those aspects of public life fostered as well. A program at George Mason High School that would institutionalize the encouragement and support of student-driven public projects would make great strides in developing these important democratic practices in Falls Church youth.

A Public Project Program

The creation of a major Public Project Program at George Mason High School would address these needs. To have the desired effect, the Program could not be a small one, affecting only some students or only some courses. Rather, it would have to be a significant addition to the George Mason educational experience— one that the entire school community supports and takes pride in. **Here's the idea:**

- Early in 11th grade, each Mason student decides on a **public project** to personally create, develop and implement throughout their **final two years** at G.M.H.S.
- In determining what their public project will be, students have two simple parameters:
 - **Each student's public project has to be a *project*, meaning it has to be something that they create— something that does not exist now, but will exist because of their creation of it.** Volunteering at a soup kitchen does not count, but setting up a

student club for regular volunteering at the soup kitchen does. Performing a dance at a variety show does not count, but setting up a new annual dance showcase for the community does. Working with a community garden on the weekends does not count, but working with a community garden to set up a new plot in the garden for students (or for the elderly or for a new type of vegetable or even a new garden altogether!) does count. **In short, each student must be individually indispensable to the existence of his or her project.**

- **Each student's public project also has to be *public*, meaning that it has to be for other people, affecting a wider community than just the student and his or her family and friends.** Painting a portrait does not count, but working with a business to paint a themed mural (as one GMHS student did a few years ago) on one of their walls with the help of recruited volunteers absolutely counts. Making one's own podcast episode to show to his friends does not count, but setting up a weekly podcast about school affairs, getting interviews with school officials, and training a staff to do special radio stories does count. Getting experienced in yoga does not count, but working with the athletic department to set up a new yoga unit in P.E. Class counts. **In short, each student is engaging with his or her community to build a project that affects his or her community.**
- Before embarking on their project, each student will spend much of the first half of 11th grade **investigating** the community and problem that their project addresses. During this period, they will explore: what other organizations and projects are in the same 'space' as theirs; whether their project would be better accomplished inside or outside a present organization or system; what their 'theory of change' is (i.e. the causal mechanism by which their project concept addresses a problem); what populations and groups would have a stake in their project; and what scope is realistic for their project given their time and resource constraints.
- Early in 11th grade, students also **recruit an advisor** for their public project. The advisor must be an adult who is not the student's parent— she can be a civic or business leader in the public project's arena, a family friend, or even a coach or teacher at GMHS. Each student's advisor will mentor, brainstorm with, and advise each student as they translate their idea into a reality, as well as help their advisee navigate the public institutions – governments, businesses, civic groups, funding sources – that each student needs to engage with in the process of creating her public project. The G.M.H.S. PTA could help set up a pool of willing advisors in the community on which students could draw in their search for an advisor.

- Each student will be ceremonially given a **project journal**. They will fill it up (write, draw, jot, paste, scrapbook) with all their thoughts, ideas, reflections as they work on their project.
- **Each student in 8th, 9th and 10th grade will be required to work on an upperclassman's public project.** The upperclassmen will have a chance to exercise leadership and team-building skills with the younger students, while the younger students will learn the importance of not only one-off community service, but deep civic activism and youth power. In addition, it will prepare the younger students for their own public projects later in their high school career.
- The English and History departments will **integrate the Public Project Program** into their curricula:
 - For the 11th and 12th graders working on Public Projects, an English class unit on **persuasive and deliberative writing and speaking** would be tremendously beneficial. Every mover and shaker in society needs to be able to clearly articulate ideas, explain why they are passionate about them, and outline the benefits of said ideas to skeptical audiences. On the flip side, everyone working with others needs to master the art of deliberation— how to listen to other's ideas, how to use criticism to improve ideas, and how to understand clearly how ideas affect different groups of people. One can envision an inspiring unit where students: watch and read persuasive cases for historic public ideas, analyze them, and draw lessons from their use of language, while all the while writing and refining their own persuasive cases for *their own* public projects.
 - History class could provide students with an engaging unit on **placing public projects into historical context**. Each student could write a research paper on the historical precedent for their projects— a student working on establishing more bike lanes could write a paper on the history of the Bikeability and Walkability Movement in towns across the country; a student working on establishing a student radio station in town could write about historic uses of radio as a broadcast medium.
- **The school will provide other support to the Public Project Program.**This could include:
 - An elective where students could work in school hours full-time on their project
 - A member of the staff or faculty who is designated as the coordinator of the Public Project Program
 - A general fund for student's projects
 - A training for teachers on the philosophy of the Public Project Program.
- Finally, each year will end with a **project fair**, where students exhibit the results of their public

projects to the GMHS and Falls Church community, publicizing their initiatives and inspiring fair goers.

Examples of Public Projects

School community:

- Organizing a band jam for Mason bands
- Refurbishing the junior courtyard
- Revitalizing the Student Council system
- Working with school officials to change a school policy
- Establishing an innovative tutoring program

Falls Church Community:

- Building a new monument, play area or garden on the bike path
- Recording a local oral history series of nursing home residents telling their stories
- Starting a community news blog and recruiting a staff of writers
- Investigating the city's walkability standards and developing an improvement plan
- Lobbying local governments to put solar panels on municipal buildings
- Working with the community center to build a skate park
- Starting a business or a new product or service line for an existing business
- Organizing a city-wide art show
- Filming a documentary on local history or a regional issue

State and National Community:

- Starting a political movement or opening up the George Mason or Falls Church chapter of a larger movement
- Organizing a local group to lobby Congress or the state legislature to pass a law
- Throwing a documentary series to shed light on a national issue
- Putting together a student group to support a candidate
- Developing a fundraising event to raise money for a cause

Benefits of a Public Project Program

A Public Project Program would teach personal skills and civic skills to participating students, as well as deepen the school and city communities.

Personal Skills: *A unique self-driven lesson in commitment, leadership, creativity and*

resilience

Each student who goes through The Public Project Program...

- ...Experiences the pride and confidence that comes with turning her own new idea into a reality.
- ...Learns a deep lesson in *commitment*— a lesson unique to taking responsibility for something *as one's own*.
- ...Develops both a *creative problem-solving attitude* and *determined resilience*— qualities needed in navigating the bumpy terrain of translating personal ideas into public initiatives and public initiatives into lasting community creations.
- ...Has a compelling, unique new line on their college application and resume.
- ...Grows leadership skills through her management of a team of younger students.

Civic Skills: Every student a civic leader

Each student who goes through The Public Project Program...

- ...Learns about an area of their community in an active, deep and hands-on way.
- ...Develops skills in both public problem identification and public problem solving.
- ...Learns how to navigate public institutions – governments, administrations, businesses, civic society, funding sources – to achieve a goal.
- ...Gains a deeper understanding of the role that public leadership, public initiatives, and public work plays in society.

Community Connection: An even tighter bond between GMHS and the Falls Church community

- Each student gains a mentor— an adult invested in not only the student's project, but in his or her wider education and growth.
- Students become more invested in the public world around them... for they have had a hand in shaping it!
- Social capital is built up in the school community, as younger students make connections with older students while working with them on their public projects.
- Faculty and staff morale improves as any adult in the school community – the principal, a secretary, a janitor, a coach, a nurse, a teacher, a counselor – can be a student's public project mentor.
- George Mason High School has another feather in its many-feathered cap: being the pilot school for a groundbreaking 21st century skills and civic education initiative.
- The Falls Church and GMHS communities benefit from dozens of new beneficial public projects each year! Additional youthful vigor and creative dynamism sweeps into Little City civic life, mixing with age-old public virtue and civic wisdom to create an atmosphere that befits our dynamic, unique and vibrant Falls Church community.

B. Why Does Teaching Civic Creativity Matter?

What is civic creativity?

Citizenship is not just about *voting* (deciding between different candidates for elected office once every few years), *deliberating* (staying informed, having opinions, talking about those opinions with others), *protesting* (pressuring large organizations and powerful individuals to do something differently), and *serving* (being an occasional helping hand to social services and others' projects)... it's also about ***civic creativity***: developing new ideas for the public world and working to execute on such ideas' implementation. Like an entrepreneur in business, a civic creator sees a need, puts forth (or appropriates) an idea, and works to bring said idea to reality, in any way possible, through multiple platforms. Like an engineer, a civic creator see a problem and use tools at hand to invent and tinker with a possible solution. Like an artist, a civic creator has an idea in her head that she wants to realize in the world so that others can share in it.

Why does teaching civic creativity matter?

A common way to explore the purposes of public education is to see that education serve students' *individual and public* and *economic and democratic* purposes:

- **Individual, Democratic:** School helps each student become well-rounded, educated, confident agents in the world.
- **Individual, Economic:** School helps each student eventually get a job.
- **Public, Economic:** Education ensures that we have an intelligent, skilled workforce.
- **Public, Democratic:** Education ensures that each generation has the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and values to tend to our democracy

One can explore the benefits of educating for civic creativity along these lines as well:

Individual, Democratic: Civic creativity engages students deeply in learning

Since William Kilpatrick first proposed the Project Method of Learning in 1918, education experts have been singing the praises of project-based learning, the pedagogical method where students – instead of learning concepts through rote memorization or even textbook-style knowledge comprehension – are provided with complex tasks that require creative problem solving, decision making, exploration, investigation and synthesis to be completed. The genius of the method is that students are not enticed to

learn through the standard methods – rewards, punishments or even a drive to increase their knowledge or skills base (which for many is too distant and abstract a concept to be inspired by) – but rather by their excitement for completing the project.

As Mason students work on their public projects, they will – without ever necessarily opening a textbook – learn about:

- Community power structures, as they work to gain necessary support for their project
- Banking and fundraising, as they raise money for their causes
- Historical research methods, as they place their project within history
- Clear writing and strong public speaking, as they pitch their project to others

This does not even cover the various knowledge and skill areas specific to each project that the student will learn— the particularities of solar panel installation for a student's green energy initiative, how scheduling works at a Congressional office for a student's lobbying effort, video lighting and editing for a student's documentary. Learning such knowledge and skills because you *need* to learn them to complete a project you are proud of is tremendously more inspirational (and effective!) than learning such knowledge and skills because they were the the content areas in the next unit of a curriculum.

Individual, Economic: Civic creativity prepares students for college and their careers

Today, employers are looking for more in prospective employees than just industry-specific skills— they are also looking for meta-skills, like *leadership*, *creative problem solving*, and *resilience*.

Researcher Angela Duckworth recently argued that *grit* – what she defined as "a combined passion for a single mission with an unswerving dedication to achieve that mission, whatever the obstacles and however long it might take" – as the quality most found in people who accomplished great things.

Qualities like leadership, creative problem solving, and grit cannot be standardized and traditionally 'taught'. However, they can be *learned*, through serious practice. Such practice can only come from the authentic experience of having responsibility for the success of something and *needing* to develop the leadership, creative problem solving skills, and grit to make it work.

Even more, colleges are looking beyond GPAs and SATs in their admissions processes. Having a creative civic project on resumes and applications is going to bode well for Mason seniors.

Public, Economic: Civic creativity trains a 21st century American workforce

There is a growing consensus among business leaders that there is a new set of "21st Century Skills" that the American workforce needs to get by in the new millenium. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills argues that we should join the 3 Rs with the 4 Cs: *critical thinking* and problem solving,

communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation. A civic creativity curriculum centered on student-driven public projects is going to be one of the best methods to train a generation in such skills and mindsets. The "next big thing" for our economy will not (and has never) come from groups of people who know the most facts, or who even understand a subject's concepts most comprehensively. Indeed, the firms that add the most dynamism to our economy are always those whose founders and employees are masters of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. These concepts cannot be learned from a book or a well-crafted sequential curriculum—they must be practiced, and nothing is better practice than the real thing: a real project that the student leads; a real responsibility that *forces* and *inspires* the student to develop such skills (because they are necessary for the project's success!).

Public, Democratic: Civic creativity is needed for an active American citizenry

Today we face great public problems: the Earth is warming at an alarming rate, we have a bloated prison system, we have failed to free our energy infrastructure from foreign oil, we face a continued jobs crisis, and economic inequality creeps up each year. These problems are not going to be solved by small subset of our population— **they need to be solved by all of us and we need a generation of creative, problem-solving leaders to do it.** Leadership, problem-solving, and civic creativity are not skills that are going to be learned out of nowhere. Just like learning how to shoot a free throw, how to solve an algebra problem, or how to write an essay needs to be practiced... such skills of civic creativity need to be practiced, and – better yet – practiced within a learning environment, surrounded by guiding teachers, mentors and feedback systems.

C. Five Concerns about a Public Project Program

The George Mason High School Public Project Program is a *new idea* and – as with any new idea – it comes with a set of understandable concerns. Below, some common concerns with a Public Project Program are addressed:

Concern #1: "But don't we have Virginia standards to follow? Where are we going to fit this in? Where's the real learning-- where's the facts to memorize, skill sets to master and curriculum to cover?"

With the stakes for SOLs getting higher year by year, it is understandable that one would be concerned that a new program would distract from the type of schooling that directly follows Virginia state curriculum standards. Even outside of the curricular standards, some might wonder how this fits into a school day, the IB program and a four-year sequential class order for the main subjects of Math, Science, Social Studies, and English. Others still might question whether a program like this is worthwhile, given that it does not guarantee direct learning of a specific set of skills or knowledge base.

To open your civic hearts to the possibility, one must remember that there is precedent for the implementation of new programs and subjects in schools that had been previously thought to be fully saturated. There was already a rigid, standard school day when physical education was identified as a national need and schools figured out a way to 'fit it in.' When Congress identified nutritional education as a new necessity in 2004, they passed legislation that required all school districts with federally funded school meal programs to develop and implement wellness and nutrition curriculum. When the nation found computer literacy to be a necessary skill to make it in the modern world, schools across the country found time for computer education curriculum. The current set of subjects taught are not a natural set of subjects— all the current arrangement is is the patchwork of historic accidents, past educational movements, and a century of compromises. In other words: we can and must tweak and re-imagine what we see as "the standard school day" or "the standard set of school subjects and programs" to fit our current needs. Currently, we need a school program that trains a generation of civic leaders to solve the great problems of the 21st century. The only thing stopping us is our inability to imagine how we can make that work.

Concern #2: "But some kids aren't into creativity, public service work or project management... isn't this unfair to them?"

Public schools have never held the premise that students should only learn the subjects that they are comfortable and experienced with. We make poetic kids learn Chemistry and make engineer types learn literary analysis every day in schools across the country. If we identify project management, public service

work and civic creativity as skills that are important to be learned, then we should treat them like we do any other skills development in our curriculum— something that we challenge all students to work to develop. Lo and behold, we might discover that these skills are ones that might come naturally to those who have struggled in standard classes and be difficult for those who have excelled in standard classes!

Concern #3: "I see this working for advanced students, but it's not going to work for all students."

Again, this is not a standard we hold on any other skill we deem important. Algebra and essay writing are both difficult skills to master and yet we never hear anyone say: "I see this working for advanced students, but it's not going to work for all students." Rather, we hold the belief that both algebra and essay writing are important skills for everyone to have, and thus we will work to find a way to teach them to everyone. We should hold the same belief with civic creativity. In a democracy, we do not sort teenagers into "those who have it in them" to be community leaders and "those who don't." Every citizen – and especially every teenage citizen – has the potential to be a leader.

Even more, a Public Project Program could be especially beneficial to students who are struggling in other aspects of school. Apathy and alienation towards schooling is one of the underlying causes of academic slacking and disciplinary problems in school. This apathy and alienation arises in part from students feeling that they never control their own destiny in school— that academic excellence means to best adapt to the present order of things. To a student who has felt labeled as an 'underachiever', school can seem like an endless stream of assignments, instructions, hoops and bell schedules determined by others. This culture can be broken by giving students the space, support and real, authentic power to craft something that is both new and their own. But instead of letting this creation live in an imaginary world with no rules, the student's own creation must be established in the real world thus teaching the student about creativity and collaboration, ownership and responsibility, and vision and implementation. A student's project is not just a creation of their own— it is much better than that... it is a creation of their own that they will earn.

Concern #4: "But aren't there too many projects out there anyway? Why should kids reinvent the wheel when they can work on and learn from adult-made civic creations?"

There exists the problem of the inefficiencies of "overlapping missions" within the world of social change. Why have three organizations in town addressing Washington Park Beautification when they could all be more helpful if they teamed up? Or, specific to this initiative: why should a student start a soup kitchen when there already is a soup kitchen in town? There are a few ways to think about how a Public Project Program could address this problem:

- Students will spend the first half of 11th grade exploring the current state of the problem they are addressing. Part of that period will be reflecting on if their project is necessary.

- Students will be allowed to work within present systems and organizations. The only requirement is that they lead the creation of something new within that organization. For example, if they want to work with the Town Soup Kitchen, they cannot just work there nor lead a previously existing program there—they have to start something new within the organization, such as a new service program, an elaborate study of the Kitchen's effectiveness, or a new Soup Kitchen partnership with the school.

One must remember that a Public Project Program does not have the same mission as community service. Community service can help students become more civically responsible, as well as learn new things through their experiences interacting with the public. But only acts of civic creativity can make students directly understand their ability to reimagine the contemporary arrangement of the public sphere and effectively act on such visions. Teaching civic creativity is not about 'getting out into the community' or even about 'playing one's part in the community.' Though both are tremendously important acts of civic membership, civic creativity is specifically about taking on our roles as not just active participants, but also imaginative and confident partners in crafting the future of our communities.

Concern #5: "This is too idealistic, utopian and different. Why not aim lower and just have this be a project for service hours or a unit in civics class?"

We know that a smaller program – one placed as a unit within a single class – will not have the desired effect— students will not learn about resilience, projects will not have enough time to be serious and lasting, and school culture will not change to help support student initiatives. Thus we have to do something new and difficult: implement a successful Public Project Program schoolwide. Everything that we take for granted today – and especially everything we take for granted today in education – was because a group of people worked to implement something new and difficult in the past. We are indebted to those brave citizens in the past who reimagined their contemporary institutions so as to make them better for us. Our best way to repay them is to continue to reimagine our contemporary institutions so as to make them better for future generations. Implementing a successful Public Project Program will be so new and difficult that we probably won't even get the logistics right the first time around— we will have to tweak the program for a few years before we find the right balance. We will have to utilize creative problem solving skills, leadership, collaboration and grit to make it work— all the qualities we are expecting of students in the program. However, we must be up to this challenge: the quality of civic leadership in the coming century is at stake!

D. First Steps Towards a Great Public Project Program

The process of setting up a great Public Project Program for George Mason High School will – like it has been and always should be with FCCPS initiatives – be a thorough, deep and inclusive conversation between every stakeholder: students, teachers, parents, administrators and the community.

To kick off this conversation, here are some first steps towards a great Public Project Program:

1. View a Public Project Program as an integrated, attainable solution to various imperatives raised recently

At the 2013 community visioning, many ideas were in the air that were too early-stage to have their own initiative, yet are too resonant to ignore: *"GM students should have more community mentors;" "GM should focus on building 21st century skills;" "GM students should have more project-based learning and less standardization"; "The community should know about and be involved in GM students' big projects"; "GM should double down on community service;" "GM should connect students with opportunities out in the 'real world'"; "There are too many programs for just some students and not enough unified experience"; "GM students should have a capstone to their education"; "GM students need to learn creativity and grit as well as just facts and analysis."* Instead of providing dozens of half-measures and half-solutions to each of these goals, **why not focus on developing one stellar, jewel-in-our-crown program that provides an integrated, holistic answer to these imperatives?**

2. Generate Mason stakeholder enthusiasm

A school-wide Public Project Program will have *a lot* of stakeholders. In fact, if it didn't, it's probably not implemented correctly. A Public Project Program needs the district administration on board to change graduation requirements and put resources behind staffing for such a program. It needs the school administration on board to weave public project work into the school culture and each student's educational journey. It needs English and Social Studies teachers to discuss how their curricula can support the program. It needs the Falls Church community behind it to be mentors and to be open to the dozens of creative public project proposals coming out of the school each year. Finally, and most importantly, it needs present students on board to be excited about being the first generation of a new George Mason tradition.

3. Appoint a public project and community engagement coordinator

As a community, we have decided that navigating the I.B. Program, accessing library resources, and applying for college are important enough processes to student life that George Mason needs appointed staff members to help. It's time that we did the same for community engagement. For now, the community engagement coordinator can lead the development of the Public Project Program, run and

learn from a trial run of the program with a few students during the 2013-2014 school year, work with teachers to iron out concerns and generate ideas for the program, and develop a network of community partners that want to participate in the program throughout the coming years. After the program is implemented, the community engagement coordinator can manage the program, educate new students about the program, guide 11th and 12th graders through the ups and downs of the program, manage program-to-community relations, set up the Program fair, and even provide support for school-to-community relations outside of the program.

4. Learn from the CAS hours program, but understand the difference between community service and civic creativity

Creating a public project is a way to serve one's community, but one would be mistaken to confuse a "Public Project Program" with a "community service program." When one talks of the "community service" we expect from high school students, we generally mean the providing of support to the provision of public services -- be they social (soup kitchens, retirement home visits), educational (mentoring programs), or environmental (tree plantings) -- for short, occasional spurts of time. Community service of this kind is very important: it teaches students about humility, hard work service; it provides helping hands to important causes; and it shows kids new corners of their public world. However, community service is not civic creativity: only through envisioning and implementing their own public ideas can students directly understand their ability to re-imagine the contemporary arrangement of the public world and effectively act on such visions. Teaching civic creativity is not just about 'getting out into the community' or even just about 'playing one's part in the community.' Though both are tremendously important acts of civic membership, civic creativity is specifically about taking on our roles as not just active *participants*, but also imaginative and confident *partners* and *leaders* in crafting the future of our communities. To put it another way, a Boy Scouts' experience picking up trash at the park is a very different animal than his later experience of imagining and implementing his Eagle Scout Project of researching why and where people litter and developing a multi-faceted plan to decrease littering through better trash can lid design and placement.

5. Start a conversation in Social Studies and English departments about incorporating public projects into curricula

For the 11th and 12th graders working on Public Projects, an English class unit on persuasive and deliberative writing and speaking would be tremendously beneficial. Every mover and shaker in society needs to be able to clearly articulate ideas, explain why they are passionate about them, and outline the benefits of said ideas to skeptical audiences. On the flip side, everyone working with others needs to master the art of deliberation— how to listen to other's ideas, how to use criticism to improve ideas, and how to understand clearly how ideas affect different groups of people. One can envision an inspiring unit where students: watch and read persuasive cases for historic public ideas, analyze them, and draw lessons from their use of language, while all the while writing and refining their own persuasive cases for

their own public projects.

History class could provide students with an engaging unit on placing public projects into historical context. Each student could write a research paper on the historical precedent for their projects— a student working on establishing more bike lanes could write a paper on the history of the Bikeability and Walkability Movement in towns across the country; a student working on establishing a student radio station in town could write about historic uses of radio as a broadcast medium.

It is going to be exciting to see what wonderful ideas English and Social Studies teachers and curriculum designers have about how to incorporate students' public project experiences into curricula.

6. Maintain universality

It might be tempting to make a Public Project Program into something for a subset of Mason students. This would be a shame. Democracy is for everyone, citizenship is for everyone, civic creativity is for everyone, and a George Mason High School Public Project Program should be for everyone. Imagine how grand it would be to have a new Mason tradition that unifies each students' high school experience:

"Did you hear what Jared's doing for his public project...so cool!"

"30 people showed up! Woot!"

"I'm trying to decide between this and that for my public project next year...what do you think I should do?"

"Jeremy and Tanya's mentor is going to help me get connected with the Mayor about my project, too!"

"Ugh... this meeting stuff can be sooooo frustrating!"

"Brook, could you show me how you did that swooping thing in your intro video for your project...I've been trying to figure it out all week."

"I saw you in the News-Press with the community garden, Ethan...so great!"

E. Contact

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Final words: This is going to be new and difficult, but it's well worth it: a new pillar of Mason student life that helps save American democracy! Help us make the dream of *a public project for every Mason student, a life lesson in civic creativity and grit, and democracy reborn in a new generation a reality!*