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Mayor and Superintendent Collaborate with Youth to Return Civics Education to Boston High Schools

Jamaica Plain, MA, December, 17, 2007 - **Mayor Thomas M. Menino**, Boston Public Schools (BPS) **Superintendent Carol Johnson** and the **Boston School Committee** announce their support for the *Campaign for Civics*, an effort led by the youth of the **Hyde Square Task Force**, with support from many organizations, to ensure all Boston public high school students gain an understanding of how our government works and how they can participate actively in bettering our society. Mayor Menino voiced high praise of the students: "I am so impressed by the young people who have undertaken this initiative; their dedication, drive, and focus speaks volumes for the importance of student engagement and the value of enhancing the opportunities for civic education both in and out of school."

Superintendent Johnson will identify a curriculum writer to design a civics curriculum with youth input. This month, the Youth Community Organizers (YCOs) of the Hyde Square Task Force will hold focus groups to allow youth and adults to weigh in on content and how the material should be taught. A civics class based on this curriculum will be piloted in the fall of 2008. The pilot phase and its evaluation will allow time to research the feasibility of making civics a graduation requirement in BPS high schools.

These developments arose from recent meetings scheduled among the Mayor, Superintendent, representatives of the School Committee and youth following a City Council hearing on the subject of the proposed high school civics curriculum.

Youth had worked with Councilors Chuck Turner and John Tobin to draft the hearing order—the *first youth-drafted order in the history of the Boston City*

Council. At the hearing on October 19th, youth and adult representatives from 15 organizations, teachers, and school officials testified in the City Council Chamber, which was packed with more than 200 people. Many Councilors were present and supported the efforts of the youth.

Why are youth asking for an additional class at school? At the Hyde Square Task Force, YCOs have experienced the power that knowledge of civics gives them to improve their communities and their own lives. YCOs want to ensure that all Boston youth have the opportunity they've had to become active, informed and engaged members of society and they believe that a stimulating civics curriculum will do just that.

Through educational trainings and workshops at Hyde Square Task Force and through participation in organizing campaigns like the *Campaign for Civics*, YCOs have learned how government works, how power functions, and how to take a problem in their community and work strategically towards a solution. One workshop, offered to HSTF youth in cooperation with **Facing History and Ourselves**, demonstrated on a small scale what a modern, youth-centered civics class might be. Readings included many by Latino and African American authors on identity, history, power, social movements and citizenship. Youth reported that they had not learned about history and civics from this perspective before, that it spurred their interest in history and gave them a new level of understanding of the structure of society. Now they are interested in every BPS graduate taking understanding of these concepts into adulthood, rather than accepting that this be a privilege of only the small portion of students who have been involved with community organizations like HSTF.

“...I never thought I would have had the opportunity to do what I’ve done here...I feel like every student in the Boston Public School system deserves the same. I’m ONE of the lucky students out of 57,000 students in the school system. Doesn’t every child deserve to learn these skills?” - *Victor Martinez, Age 17, New Mission Pilot School student and Hyde Square Task Force, YCO*

The mission of the **Hyde Square Task Force** is to develop the skills of youth and their families so that they are empowered to enhance their own lives and build a strong and vibrant urban community. All of our programs are developed by residents in response to community needs. Since its founding, the Hyde Square Task Force has developed on-going programs for youth and families that not only help them advance at school and in careers, but also help create positive relations and opportunities to take pride and action in our community.

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