

**Presentation to LWVWA Convention: *Looking Backwards Moving Forward*
What's Working in Schools/Communities about Civics Education? Our Textbook,
Local Leagues and More!
June 6-9, 2019**

Workshop IV June 9, 2019

What's Working in Schools/Communities about Civics Education? Our Textbook, Local Leagues and More!

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Initial history of the Spokane Chapter's civics education work: The Spokane Chapter had several significant events in 2017-2018 that created the opportunity for development of our civics education program in the high schools. A chapter member, Suzi Johns, attended the 2017 LWVWA Convention, heard a speaker on civics education, and encouraged the Board to get more involved with civics education. In response, the Board asked Gretchen McDevitt to invite Susie Gerard, Coordinator of Secondary Social Studies Education, District 81¹ (covering the City of Spokane) to present to our general meeting on the District 81 Civics Education program. Gretchen McDevitt and Susan Gray convened a nascent Civics Education Committee in February 2018, with four members (Mardell Cochran, Gretchen McDevitt, Susan Gray and myself) sharing a variety of ideas of how to get started in civics education. I became chair of the committee.

Ms. Gerard presented at the March 2018 general meeting, assuring members that Spokane's District 81 was very invested in civics education. She provided a comprehensive list of resources used in teaching this subject in the high schools.² During the question and answer session, several members noted the difficulty they

¹ Spokane Public Schools. Spokane District 81 listing of high schools with boundary maps. https://www.spokaneschools.org/boundarychange?fbclid=IwAR0grCTTY-YWHP22x_LAkKZdbTrYNSji-Ubc9NG1UoxtmY9EtG7j0eEZ868.

² Gerard, S. (2018). Civics education resource list. Presentation to Spokane League of Women Voters on February 13, 2018. [https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/leagues/wysiwyg/%5Bcurrent-user%3Aog-user-node%3A1%3Atitle%5D/resources for civics education.pdf](https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/leagues/wysiwyg/%5Bcurrent-user%3Aog-user-node%3A1%3Atitle%5D/resources%20for%20civics%20education.pdf)

had in making contacts in the high schools for voter registration. Ms. Gerard invited us to meet with all the high school social studies classes in the upcoming months of May and early June (2018). We were to offer voter registration to all upcoming 18-year-olds through these classes. Our small committee accepted the challenge.

Creating a committee or alternative: Our chapter started this project with a committee. I created a mailing list for all committee members, adding additional members to the list at their request. Some members just wanted to keep informed about civics education and to share information. As we were starting our work, a vital few were willing to do high school visits during May and June 2018. As new members joined our chapter, I worked closely with the membership liaison to recruit new chapter members to our committee. When the committee met, I promised short meetings and held the meetings after our regularly scheduled monthly programs. The point about different members wanting different roles within a civics education committee cannot be overstated.

All committee members want to be “in the know” about civics education in the schools. Many of the publications and articles referenced in this paper were initially shared with the Civics Education Committee. The article on *Why Don't Young People Vote*³ is a particularly good example of a resource that elicited comments from committee members and also produced a handout⁴ on how mobile youth can have two addresses within the Washington State voter registration system. A sub-committee, those of us going into the high schools, reviews the non-partisan nature of potential handouts. The efficacy of paper handouts is still being discussed.

Starting small and being flexible: An important part of Katherine Murphy's (Clark County Chapter) advice on starting a civics education program is to “start small.”⁵ When Susie Gerard promised entry into six high schools and 41 classrooms, we were thrilled, but this was hardly starting small. One of the larger high schools involved presenting to 14 classes with sets of volunteers coming and going during the 8:00-2:30 pm school day⁶. If you have a choice, start with one classroom, one teacher, one high school and go from there.

³ Bouie, J. (November 5, 2018). Why don't young people vote? This system doesn't want them to. *SLATE*. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/11/voter-registration-young-people-apathy.html>

⁴ Pellicciotti, B. (2019). You are registered to vote. Next steps. Spokane League of Women Voters. [https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/you are registered to vote. next steps.pdf](https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/you%20are%20registered%20to%20vote.%20next%20steps.pdf)

⁵ Murphy, K. (2019). Civics is fundamental. Clark County Chapter of the League of Women Voters. <https://lwvclarkcounty.org/civics-is-fundamental/program-development/>

⁶ Lewis and Clark High School Schedule (December 14, 2018). [https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lewis and clark hs november 2018.pdf](https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lewis%20and%20clark%20hs%20november%202018.pdf).

Going to high schools and becoming immersed in the different cultures of each involves some flexibility. Our mission keeps changing. When we first started, we anticipated we would do voter registration in classes and would present briefly (for a couple of minutes) on the importance of voting. We found that teachers wanted voter registration, but hoped for more presentation time to cover the mission of the League, history of voting, why voting is important for different levels of government, why voting is important to us, and how to change addresses after high school.⁷ We learned from each classroom and from each student question, and quickly our mission for this project evolved.

Key contacts within the schools: If you are working with the high school(s) or colleges within your district, you will need to develop key contact(s) within the school or school district. Katherine Murphy describes her chapter's history with this approach⁸. She started with two teacher friends, gained permission to enter the schools through the district administration, and then expanded with presentations to a number of classes. The national LWV offers the same advice in their publication *Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow* (2018). The authors of this publication note that the hardest part in doing voter registration within the high schools is getting in the door.⁹

It is a tempting and an efficient use of volunteers' time for members to do voter registration outside the cafeteria during the lunch hour or to staff a table in the school hall. We have done these things, and we have been guests at career days for seniors. These activities may be the start of key contact building. Our focus is to develop relationships with teachers. We want to further our goal of civic involvement with youth by being a guest of a teacher for a day of classes, working with a smaller group of students and receiving feedback on a presentation from the class and the teacher.

Our initial liaison with District 81 was Susie Gerard, and she continues to this day. She arranged a meeting with the early-on Civics Education Committee members with Social Studies department leads for all the high schools in Spokane. During the

⁷ Murphy, K. & Pellicciotti, B. (2018). Outline of presentation to high schools. https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/ref_1e_murphy_and_pellicciotti_outline_script_and_summary_of_training_for_high_schools_november_and_december_2018.pdf.

⁸ Murphy, K. (2018, August 21). Civics is fundamental. <https://lwvclarkcounty.org/civics-is-fundamental/>

⁹ League of Women Voters United States Education Fund (Summer 2018). *Empowering the voters of tomorrow. Developing effective high school voter registration programs.* (p. 9). https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/empowering_the_voters_of_tomorrow.2018.final.pdf

initial meeting, she introduced us as potential partners, and we talked about the history of the League, and how our mission was in total alignment with civics education and registering upcoming 18-year olds in the classrooms. The minutes from this first, pivotal meeting with department leads show that both League members and teachers were engaged in this conversation, with both sides explaining their interest in and support of civics education.¹⁰

With the leads' buy-in, Susie Gerard then created schedules for each school, including the exact time for each class, the course instructor, any lunch break, and the class location. She also supplied maps of the school's location and advice on parking and how to gain entry into the school. A recent schedule of Lewis and Clark High School shows how volunteers are paired for each class and how schedules of volunteers are staggered during the class day.¹¹

Understanding the needs of several partners: District 81 administrators, teachers, students, volunteers, County Auditor, Civics Education Committee, League board and members: We realized after visiting a couple of schools that the school day starts early, classes move quickly, students need to be engaged in the presentations, and most of the student questions about signing up for voter registration come one-on-one to the volunteers walking around the classroom. We also realized that we needed to be clear that this was an *invitation* to register to vote, that we should give students the option not to register (just turn over the form), and that most students did not possess a blue or black ink pen for form completion.

Some students did not have drivers' licenses with them or at all for form completion, and many did not know their social security numbers (last four digits). We showed students how the registration form becomes a mailer; they could take the forms home and complete them with the key information needed.

Students liked our personal stories about why we think voting is important, erroneously placed some of our early voting history (involving 1972 for many of us) around the time of World War I. They definitely liked being asked questions. We received the following significant feedback from students, "Someone important felt

¹⁰ League of Women Voters Spokane and District 81 Social Studies Department Leads' Meeting Minutes.(March 19, 2018).
https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/civics_education_committee_march_19_2018.pdf.

¹¹ Lewis and Clark High School Schedule. (December 14, 2018).
https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lewis_and_clark_hs_november_2018.pdf.

that voting mattered enough that that person came to our class to talk about voting.”¹²

The teachers appreciated our energy level as they approached the end of a long semester. They liked the ways we reinforced what they had mentioned in class, and that we remained nonpartisan in our presentations. All Social Studies teachers received a copy of The State We’re In¹³ as well as League information about the availability of the publication’s free online version and the teachers’ guide. All teachers received a thank-you note after each school day.¹⁴

Staff in the main offices appreciated that we gave them a copy of our daily schedules and that we understood we had to sign into the school and wear our name badges. Each school routine was similar yet different. Schedules showed varying starting and ending times for classes. Some schools had lunch breaks; others did not. Staff members were vital to us getting to the starting classes on time, and we thanked them for their efforts.

The County Auditor’s Office staff not only processed the voter registration forms at the end of each high school day, but also interpreted questions we had on changing voter-registration legislation. The County Auditor, Vicky Dalton, is a League member. During our presentations, we referenced her office’s website <https://www.spokanecounty.org/177/Elections> as well as the Washington Secretary of State’s voter registration database (www.myvote.wa.gov). Katrina Osborne, Voter Outreach Specialist for the Washington Secretary of State, presented an update on voting information both to our Civics Education Committee and to the membership as a whole.¹⁵

Students and teachers want to know how students can maintain an address with the Secretary of State when they leave high school (anticipating a new college address or a relocation for employment). We explain to students that they can maintain a

¹² League Women Voters Spokane Meeting Minutes with County Auditor. (July 12 and June 6, 2018).

https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lwvsa_meeting_with_vicky_dalton_2.pdf.

¹³ League of Women Voters of Washington Education Fund. The State We’re In. (2018). 8th Edition. <https://learn.ospi.k12.wa.us/course/view.php?id=33>.

¹⁴ Pellicciotti, B. (June 2, 2018). Thank-you letter to Social Studies teacher at Lewis and Clark High School. https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/thank_you_letter_to_social_studies_teacher_at_lewis_and_clark_high_school.pdf.

¹⁵ Presentation by Katrina Osborne, Washington Secretary of State Office. (March 2019). *The Voter*. https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/march_2019_voter_0.pdf.

residential address and a mailing address. The residential address (in Spokane, for example) allows students' ballots to reflect their home district, city council representatives, etc., but the mailing address allows the ballot to quickly reach them at their new location. To make this point about mobility, we ask teachers during our presentations how many times they moved in their twenties. One teacher counted 20 times (college dorm to college apartment, transfer schools [twice], to first new job and so on). The presentations combine what we hope are motivational elements – how we became committed to the habit of voting – with the practical elements – how students can ensure access to the mailed ballot system even as very mobile, young adults.

While the Civics Education Committee members form a key constituency, the Spokane League Board and members overall are another key constituency. The Spokane Chapter's Board has been very supportive of the civics education work. They dedicated a monthly program to a panel discussion of members who talked about their high school outreach work and shared their personal voting stories. A member of the County Auditor's Office was also on this panel, bringing us up to date on voter registration legislation.¹⁶ All board members are on the mailing list for the Civics Education Committee and receive regular updates on presentations given and the number of students registered.¹⁷ The monthly chapter publication, *The Voter*, has showcased frequent reports of the work of the committee and results from the high school outreach.¹⁸

As chair of the Civics Education Committee, I have also reported any glitches to the local League Board. They need to know right away if a class was not covered or if a teacher had negative feedback about our presentation. I am very conscious that our volunteers in this high school outreach role are the public face of the League; if a problem occurs, I need to help remedy it, but the Board should know right away about the problem.

¹⁶ League of Women Voters Spokane Program Program on Civics Education. (September 11, 2018). https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/program_on_civics_education_2018_agenda.pdf

¹⁷ Pellicciotti, B. (July 5, 2018). Civics Education Committee report to the League of Women Voters Spokane Board. https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/report_to_spokane_lwv_board_july_5_2018-2.pdf.

¹⁸ Report from the Civics Education Committee. (January 2019). *The Voter*. Volume LVVV. Issue 1. (p. 5). https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/jan_2019_voter_pdf.pdf.

This leads to the most challenging part of telling our personal stories – we need to talk about our value-building experiences without displaying any partisanship. To this end, I have reviewed my own story and PowerPoint¹⁹ a number of times. We give feedback to each other and learn to talk about the importance of voting without delving into issues, unless we give both sides of an issue. Being nonpartisan in the public schools is so critical that when I invite volunteers for training, nonpartisanship is one of the first issues discussed.

Finally, Spokane Chapter leaders of Voter Services were instrumental in training members on voter registration and continue to take on multiple class presentations at several high schools. Once challenged by Susie Gerard to meet with six high schools within a couple of months, Bev Austin trained 12 new volunteers, hosting two sessions of just-in-time training at her home. Susan Hales contacted all volunteers who had been doing voter registration to commit to the high school outreach. Both leaders continue to provide valuable feedback on handouts and their experiences in the schools. Both have become ambassadors for this high school outreach program and are engaged members of the Civics Education Committee.

Scheduling logistics: The nuts and bolts of visiting six or seven high schools in a relatively short period (3 weeks) turns on accurate scheduling and consistent communication of those schedules to volunteers. We have been gifted with a key scheduler in Susie Gerard, and it is our responsibility to assure each class is covered. Each class has a minimum of two volunteers, sometimes three. Within this grouping, at least one volunteer is committed to presenting. Some volunteers commit to an 8:00-2:30 pm schedule, covering all 4-6 classes in one day. Others take a block of time. Newer volunteers sign up to observe, and others prefer to help with voter registration (not to present).

Once Susie Gerard determines the dates for the visit, I send an email to all volunteers with the high schools listed, and volunteers select the dates and in some cases specific times that meet their schedules. I then assign them to classrooms and send out the master schedule. The night before the visit, a final schedule for the next day is sent to those volunteers.

Each classroom receives a packet of materials including the schedule for the entire day, sufficient voter registration forms, and League handouts (postcards with upcoming election dates). Nametags for all volunteers are clipped to the assembly of packets, and we meet in the high school office about 15 minutes to one-half hour prior to the start of school to distribute packets and for sign-in with the office staff.

¹⁹ Pellicciotti, B. (November, 2018). Presentation to high schools.
https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/presentation_to_high_schools_powerpoint_2018-3_compressed.pdf

In larger schools and in more complex schedules (for example, Lewis and Clark High School), volunteers receive a layout of the classrooms. This helps all of us, but particularly volunteers who come mid-morning to take a shift and have to navigate what may be a new and by then crowded building for them. Everyone receives driving directions to the school and information on parking.

Within all this planning and structure, we have learned to be flexible and adapt to any changes as they occur. One school was experiencing heightened security because of threats made to a student the week we were there. Another schedule shifted significantly so that volunteers had a surprise, two-hour “advising” break in the middle of the day. One teacher asked us to shorten our presentation to 10 minutes so he could take his class outside for a pep rally. One volunteer was sick that morning, and the second one had texted me earlier that she couldn’t make it (I learned to text after that). At a school in May 2019, students entering the classroom had just learned their prom that night had been cancelled by the venue. They rallied for the presentation, and now call their last-minute save of the day their “miracle prom.”

The importance of nonpartisanship in our presentations: At the risk of being redundant, I return to the subject of nonpartisanship. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization, and we have been invited into the classroom to speak to students based on that reputation. We live in a charged political climate; the League, at both the state and national level, has studied issues and has supported legislation, which might be aligned with one candidate or another. When we present in the high schools, we do not address these issues unless we present both sides. When students ask us questions about our own values, policies and candidates we might support, we strive to remain neutral. We know we are guests of the teacher and the school district, and we can easily be uninvited.

I recognize the passion we all bring to our presentations. That passion has to be directed to focus on the importance of voting overall, the importance of voting for different levels of government, and the ballot system in the State of Washington. When we talk about our own voting stories, we emphasize the voice that our vote gave us as young adults and the importance of having that voice throughout our lives. Many of us recall that when we graduated from high school, we could not vote because we were not yet 21, and how significant moving the voting age to 18 was for young people of our generation.

We review our handouts carefully. Most recently, a potential handout from another organization summarized new voting legislation. Several Civics Education Committee members reviewed the potential handout, and one pointed out potential problems with aligning with this partisan organization. We created a different handout with our own summary of new legislation. I believe we should be more vigilant about being non-partisan in the high schools than in any other area of our chapter’s work...for good reason.

For me, the most enjoyable part of being a second or third member of a classroom team is listening to members present. One member reflects on what it was like being in a military family on foreign bases, listening to the news and knowing that conflicts might affect them directly. Within this context, she says, “Even as a child, I knew the importance of voting. My family talked about it all the time.” Another member describes how family members have lived in countries other than democracies, and how important voting is to sustain a democratic society. A member talks about her work with refugees who have become naturalized citizens and how these new citizens question why some Americans choose not to vote, with the right to vote being so precious to new citizens. A member describes her mother as strong-willed and determined not to follow the norm in the 1950’s that women should vote according to their husband’s preferences. I show a picture of my 101-year-old mother-in-law, born before women had the right to vote, and my school graduation picture, when I was 18 and too young to vote. We emphasize voting is a right, an obligation, and a privilege in a democratic society.

Summary: We started the civics education committee and project in the Spokane Chapter in January 2018. Since this start, we have met with 1984 students in 91 classes, registering 754 students to vote.²⁰

Launching any large project involves being aware and sensitive to the needs of many audiences. This public-facing project involved the Civics Education Committee, LWV volunteers, the Spokane League Board, District 81 administrators, teachers, high school students, and county election officials. Significant help has come from Susie Gerard in Spokane’s District 81.

League members are interested in civics education; different members engage with the subject in different ways. Some want to learn more about civics education; some want to give input into the high school project; others want to be visiting high schools and presenting to students and registering students to vote.

The project involves extensive organization, focused efforts, the ability to adapt to changing situations, and presentations intent on the importance of voting. The school days are intense; the classes and time move quickly; the students range from half-asleep at 8:00 am to fully engaged and asking questions. The teachers appreciate our work, and we ask them to add comments during our presentations. For all this good work, I thank the following Civics Education Committee members and particularly, the high school project volunteers²¹.

²⁰ Data on League of Women Voters High School Project (May 27, 2019). https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/lwv_spokane_report_on_high_school_project.pdf.

²¹ Listing of Spokane Chapter Civics Education Committee and High School Project Volunteers. (May 27, 2019). https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/civics_education_committee_members.pdf.

Bev Austin*	Marilyn Darilek*	Suzi Johns	Bob Oviatt
Pam Behring	Vicky Dalton	Judy Krueger*	Catherine Oviatt
Judith Broveman	Janet Gillespie	Lisa Kuhar-Pitters*	Beth Pellicciotti*
Susan Brudnicki	Susan Gray	Jeff Lambert	Sally Phillips
Denise Campitelli*	Susan Hales*	Gretchen McDevitt*	April Redden
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Christine Clark	Eric Henderson*	Linda Milsow	Jan Wingenroth*
Mardell Cochran*	Alicia Heiser	Marji Mitchell*	
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**High School Project Volunteers
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