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THREE ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED AS DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS

Schools Pave the Way to a Brighter Future in Civic Education

CHICAGO, September 18, 2009— The Illinois Supreme Court in Chicago was filled with educators and policy-makers this morning as Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, in partnership with the McCormick Freedom Museum and the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, recognized three exceptional Illinois high schools as Democracy Schools. Illinois Democracy Schools are accredited secondary schools that provide students with authentic experiences in the rights, responsibilities, and tensions inherent in living in a constitutional democracy. The three high schools that have earned this distinction in 2009 include:

- Glenbard South, Glen Ellyn, IL
- Maine West, Des Plaines, IL
- Wheaton North, Wheaton, IL

Governor Pat Quinn sent a letter congratulating the schools and recognizing the vital importance of the civic mission of schools.

Each of the schools received a plaque signed by the Chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education, Jesse Ruiz, the Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, Thomas Fitzgerald, and the schools' state legislators—Senator Dan Cronin and Rep. Sandra Philos for Glenbard South; Senator Dan Kotowski and Rep. Rosemary Mulligan for Maine West; and Senator Carole Pankau and Rep. Franco Coladipietro for Wheaton North.

Democracy Schools provide numerous opportunities for students to participate in the democratic process through a range of classes and clubs. From class discussion on current issues and democratic simulations to extracurricular and service learning opportunities, students are able to experience first-hand the critical role they can play in shaping their government and society.

“The McCormick Freedom Museum’s mission is to enable informed participation in our democracy by demonstrating the relevance of the First Amendment and the role it plays in the ongoing struggle to define and defend freedom,” said Shawn Healy, managing director, McCormick Freedom Museum. “Reincorporating civics into the curricula of our secondary schools is vital to advancing our mission and sustaining democracy in Illinois and beyond. The committed students, teachers, administrators, and school board members of Glenbard South, Maine West, and Wheaton North exemplify this cause and should be commended for joining the growing ranks of Illinois Democracy Schools.”

“The climate for reform couldn’t be more promising,” said Healy. “In 2008, more than 6.5 million young people under the age of 30 voted in the presidential election, which is a 17 percent increase from the 2000 election. This is the perfect time to capitalize on this excitement and channel this interest into a lifelong commitment to civic engagement.”

“Illinois has several outstanding examples of high schools committed to their civic mission,” said Carolyn Pereira, chair, Illinois Civic Mission Coalition and executive director, Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. “Our goal, along with the Freedom Museum, is to increase the number of Democracy Schools in Illinois by working with policy-makers and educators to ensure all Illinois high schools become Democracy Schools.” (www.crfc.org)

Civic Blueprint for Illinois Schools

In May, the McCormick Freedom Museum and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition launched a civic blueprint entitled *Educating for Democracy*. The purpose of the civic blueprint was to illustrate innovative ways for Illinois high schools to incorporate civic learning opportunities across the curriculum. Just yesterday, September 17, 2009, the Illinois State Board of Education passed a resolution in support of the Illinois civic blueprint. To obtain a copy or to learn more about the Democracy Schools initiative visit FreedomMuseum.US/DemocracySchools.

About the McCormick Freedom Museum

The McCormick Freedom Museum enables informed participation in our democracy by demonstrating the relevance of the First Amendment and the role it plays in the ongoing struggle to define and defend freedom. Through extensive outreach initiatives our audiences improve their understanding of the First Amendment and its importance to our democracy, engage in civic dialogue, and prepare for their role as citizens. The McCormick Freedom Museum is part of the McCormick Foundation, which also includes the Robert R. McCormick Museum, Cantigny Park and Golf, the Cantigny First Division Foundation and five grant making programs. To learn more about the Freedom Museum’s new outreach program visit FreedomMuseum.US. A focus on children, communities and country unites the Foundation and its many parts and keeps us true to our mission of advancing the ideals of a free and democratic society. To learn more visit McCormickFoundation.org.

About the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition

The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition is a broad, non-partisan consortium including educators, administrators, universities, funders, elected officials, policymakers, and representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. Formed in 2004, its purpose is to create consensus among civic education advocates across Illinois relative to achievable goals, the means of attaining them, and the underlying rationale for the restoration of the civic mission of high schools statewide. To learn more visit crfc.org/programs/civicmission.php.

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