

Reuben J. Thomas, an assistant professor of sociology at City College of New York, followed the first panel and presented his recent paper titled "[Joining Young, Voting Young: The Effects of Youth Voluntary Associations on Early Adult Voting](#)." "Studies show that participating in extracurricular activities and voting in young adulthood leads to adult engagement," said featured speaker Reuben J. Thomas of the City College of New York. Civic education programs, he said, create "micro-societies" that promote good habits and civic responsibility – and create emerging leaders.

A second panel highlighted new initiatives among Coalition members. Democracy School students are among the more than 850 students from 35 schools in the state who have participated in an annual student assembly in the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, where, sitting in legislators' seats, they debate issues, write and vote on bills, present legal briefs, and argue them as well. "You get goose bumps, looking at these future leaders," said panelist Deb Allen, president of Illinois YMCA Youth & Government, which administers the student assembly, part of a national program, in Illinois.

Through the Mikva Challenge, about 1,800 students served as election judges at Illinois polling places in recent elections. They brought to those jobs lessons in policymaking and experience on youth councils. Exposure to the workings of democracy, said Jill Bass, Director of Curriculum and Teacher Development for Mikva, can be the best cure for the crushing disappointment over election results that leads people to say, "My guy lost, I'm done, I'm never getting into politics again."

Fellow panelist Pat Usher, a social studies teacher at Carl Sandburg High School in Orland Park, highlighted his school's robust commitment to civic education and engagement opportunities for students, a resume that made Sandburg the Coalition's 2010 Democracy School. Monica Swope from Chicago Public Schools' Office of Social Studies and Service Learning walked attendees through their "Social Studies 2.0" curriculum and efforts to engage community partners and provide high-quality civic opportunities to urban youth.

Terry Pickeral, president of Cascade Educational Consultants, delivered the lunchtime keynote. He had a major hand in the production of [No Excuses: Eleven Schools and Districts That Make Preparing Students for Citizenship a Priority, and How Others Can Do It, Too](#), a report released in 2010 by the National Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and the topic of his talk. "Every student must get the opportunity to gain the civic knowledge and skills necessary to be a leader," Pickeral said, but, "Participation is not enough." He urged the implementation of a multi-step process by which students are first given a voice to express their views, and then leadership responsibilities to organize students to advance those views and, ultimately, power to make decisions on the issues that affect them.

Civic education, said Pickeral, should be for all grades. "Kids should get their hands dirty in democracy early," he said. "The earlier you get them to practice those skills, the better."

*To read an extended version of this ICMC 2011 convening recap, please click [here](#).*