

# Mitchell Elementary



**Go Bobcats!**

January 2, 2012

To Who it May Concern:

This past fall I had the opportunity to work with Citizenship Counts to enhance a unit I was teaching to my 8<sup>th</sup> grade students on U.S. immigration in the early 1900's. Students were learning about the process for immigrants coming to the United States and the challenges and opportunities presented to them. I was hoping to find a way to make a real world connection for my students so that they could build a deeper understanding of immigration and citizenship. I researched organizations and found Citizenship Counts whose goals were similar to my own. I contacted them and asked if they would help me to meet my students' needs. This collaboration has changed the way that I teach immigration and citizenship. It enabled my students to build deep and lasting understanding of immigration and what it means to be a citizen.

The representatives from Citizenship Counts were extremely helpful. They answered all of my many questions and provided support as I blended their curriculum with my own historical content. The curriculum they provided was appropriate for students and was aligned with my state and notional standards. The sequence of lessons allowed students to make discoveries and then build on their own insights. The activities go beyond articles and worksheets and allow students to grapple with issues of citizenship in individual, small group, and whole group activities. The work is rigorous and requires students to use higher order thinking. For example, in one lesson students had to evaluate what makes an "ideal citizen", create a definition and criteria, and write about examples of people who meet their criteria. The lessons are dynamic and require students to access and process information in a variety of ways to reach different kinds of learners.

A unique part of this curriculum was the community action component. After an in depth study, students planned and hosted a Naturalization Ceremony at our school. This experience really helped students to see the practical application of what they were learning. It also helped to build excitement and interest in the course topics. It taught students that they could be active participants in their own communities. Students planned the ceremony including invitations, keynote speaker, decorations, press releases, program design and much more. The earlier curriculum activities prepared them for this task and enhanced non-history areas of my curriculum as well. Students enhanced their reading and writing skills in practical ways by writing letters, ceremony programs, and press releases. For example, students used their own ideas of what makes an "ideal citizen" to help guide them in selecting a keynote speaker. They then had to write letters to invite and convince their chosen speaker to accept. This put their knowledge to use and also helped them build their persuasive writing skills. They used math to determine funds needed and held fundraisers to raise money to host the ceremony. They used art for decorations and program covers and technology throughout the process.

The experience really helped foster empathy and understanding of immigrants and the naturalization process. Students were able to see the way the process has changed over time. They were able to meet new citizens and talk with them about their challenges and triumphs in the process of becoming a United States citizen. These first hand experience have had a deeper impact on my students understanding and given students the desire for continued civic participation. They have asked if they can participate in other community programs. It showed them that adolescents could make a difference and participate in the world around them.

I would recommend this program for all teachers. It is my goal as an educator not only to teach content but also teach the whole child. This collaboration provided a curriculum that complimented my own, incredible resources, and wonderful support to enable me to successfully bring it to my students. This experience is one that all students should have in order to develop active, informed citizens.

Sincerely,

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