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Clerk Valencia hosts over 50 CPS students for Next Gen City Council

CHICAGO – City Clerk Anna Valencia, in partnership with Chicago Public Schools Social Science Department and CPS Intergovernmental Affairs, hosted over 50 CPS students at City Hall for this year’s Next Gen City Council, the final event of the year for the civic engagement program. Throughout the program, students get the opportunity to engage with issues in their communities from the perspective of an alderperson, ending with a mock City Council meeting where one proposal is chosen for possible consideration in a Chicago City Council meeting.

“In close collaboration with CPS’ Social Science Department, we developed Next Gen to empower high schoolers across Chicago to engage with their local government and learn about all of the different ways they can impact their communities beyond running for office,” Valencia said. “It’s heartwarming to watch students grow and light up throughout the course of the program. I’m humbled to have the opportunity to highlight the brilliance of our young people, who are too often portrayed in a negative light.”

This year’s participating schools include Amundsen High School, Benito Juarez Community Academy, Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy High School, Lake View High School, Michele Clark Academic Prep Magnet High School, and Social Justice High School, and the focus is issues affecting our youth.

“As a District, we always work to strengthen partnerships that bring learning to life for our students,” said CPS CEO Pedro Martinez. “This program makes connections between public policy and systemic issues facing Chicago’s youth, demonstrating that classroom lessons are relevant to our students’ lives.”

For the 2024 school year, Next Gen started off with a civics lesson in the classroom from Clerk Valencia that took place in the fall and early spring. Then, students were brought to City Hall for simulations where they identified and developed ideas for solving issues in their communities. Those ideas are voted on by the students and move on to today’s event, Next Gen City Council, where they are fine-tuned for a mock City Council exercise complete with a student mayor and clerk.

To tie in the work students are doing in the classroom, teachers used inquiry-based, standards-aligned curriculum to engage students in deeper learning about the issues and policy solutions in between the program’s key events.

Volunteers from the Next Gen Civic Engagement Advisory Council help students throughout their civic journey. The council includes CPS, the Cook County Assessor’s Office, the Chicago Community Trust, UCAN, Mikva Challenge, AOD, Playworks and Northwestern University. The sponsors for the program, Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Public Schools Social Science, University of Illinois, Amazon, ensure students have transportation, meals and materials.

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