



News & Updates

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Bold Ideas Discussed At 'Civics Symposium'



In the annual New Rochelle High School Civics Symposium this week, intellectual heavy hitters discussed and debated proposals from students to improve their community – including a suggestion to radically redesign the City School District of New Rochelle grade structure.

Having gleaned ideas and data from communities around the country, teams of students from Tim Kuklis' Advanced Placement U.S. Government and Politics class proposed bike lanes, community policing and a required NRHS course in African-American history. Perhaps the boldest idea presented was to invert the District, repurposing the high school – and City Hall – as centralized elementary schools while converting the current grade schools into themed high schools with focuses such as law, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and technical training.

Bringing together the youngest students from around the District would help erase disparities, “providing all students with the same start,” said Zoe Seward, one of the students presenting the idea, called the Princeton Plan 2.0.

The annual event, presented by the New Rochelle Fund for Educational Excellence in partnership with the NRHS social studies department, brings professors and other thinkers to the table to discuss the students' ideas. This year, it was presented virtually on Zoom. Hugh Price, a former President of the National Urban League and one of the panelists, praised the Princeton Plan students for a “thoughtful and thought-provoking idea” but asked if there was a less extreme way to close achievement gaps: “Is there a path of less resistance with a similar outcome?”

Seward said the other end of the plan – the themed high schools – will engage students more.

“When students are allowed to choose where they learn and what they learn, they put their best into it,” she said.

Students advocating for more bike lanes in New Rochelle touted health and environmental benefits. Student Neil Costa recognized that a bike-share program in New Rochelle was discontinued not long ago, but he felt another push could make it work.

“With more bike lanes, it could make a very successful comeback,” he said.

(Indeed, the city is planning to reintroduce the program this year.)

Professor Alexander R. Eodice, chairman of the Iona College Philosophy Department, questioned whether there was demand for bike lanes and asked if narrow streets would become less safe if lanes were carved from the scarce space.

The team presenting The Inclusion Project advocated for an African-American Studies high school class that would be a required course. Students said the existing teachings about African-American studies focus on the same few figures, slavery and segregation.

“There have been other black leaders in the United States,” said student Ava Vernor. “There have been Black movements since Martin Luther King.”

New Rochelle City Councilwoman Yadira Ramos-Herbert, one of the panelists, took the idea further.

“It has to be more than a course,” she said. “It has to start with kindergarten.”

Kuklis started off by asking audience members to give serious thought to the students' ideas.

“I ask that you please give the ideas presented today serious consideration,” he said. “Talk to your friends and neighbors about these ideas. Write a letter to the City Council or to the Board of Education expressing your opinions – or do more.”

Jonathan Stark, Chair of the NR Fund, said the Civics Symposium has long been a highlight of the Fund's enrichment programming at NRHS. “The high caliber of the students' research and their discussions with the panel shows that we can take pride in our students and their teachers,” he said.