

McCORMICK TRIBUNE FOUNDATION



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CITIZENSHIP



Susan Echeverria (left), and Nisha Ladhani, Mather High School juniors and Illinois Youth Summit 2002 participants

Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago

Susan Echeverria

“Politically, the Summit opened my mind to different opinions.”



CRFC Program Chair Benjamin Ghesse says involving students like St. Gregory High School junior Francisco Martinez in the political process at a young age is crucial for democracy.

ensuring democracy's future



Students from 22 schools throughout the state participated in CRFC's Illinois Youth Summit 2002.



Unless young people learn the importance of voting and participating in our nation's political dialogue, the future of our democracy might be in jeopardy. It is therefore more critical now than ever to attract—and retain—their interest in issues and policymaking at an early age.

“Learning about the political system is very important, but it can also be engaging and fun. It doesn't have to be boring or irrelevant,” says Benjamin Ghesse, an attorney with Neal, Murdock & Leroy, L.L.C. and program chair of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC), whose mission includes introducing youth to the importance of serving their communities and the nation as active, responsible citizens. “So much of what happens in the world has a direct effect on young people.”

Supported by a grant from MTF, CRFC sponsored its Illinois Youth Summit 2002, in which high school students from U.S. history and government classes throughout the

state were invited to share their opinions on a variety of topics with public officials in Chicago as well as policymakers via live video conferencing in Washington, D.C.

Preparation for the Summit began with 1300 students from 22 schools selecting and researching the topics that would be addressed. The issues revolved primarily around consequences of the war on terrorism such as racial profiling, military tribunals, and press freedom. Several months were then devoted to teacher-mediated mock debates and developing service projects that address the Summit issues.

“Politically, the Summit opened my mind to different opinions,” says Susan Echeverria, a junior at Mather High School in Chicago. She credits the Summit preparations with overcoming her shyness and improving her communication skills, reflecting that if people are listening to her now at her young age, “imagine how much more they'll want to listen when I'm older.”