

CivicsNJ

June 2025 Newsletter



CivicsNJ

What's New with CivicsNJ?

The CivicsNJ Steering Committee (in formation) now meets monthly. At our June meeting, we focused on 2025-2026 planning and membership.

In the fall, we will organize a Coalition event to begin planning for Civics Week 2026, America @250 and other 2026 Coalition Activities. [Get involved](#) with a CivicsNJ Subcommittee or project!

Introducing The CivicsNJ Exchange

We are excited to introduce **The CivicsNJ Exchange!** These one-hour, virtual Zoom sessions -- open to all -- will highlight the work of our members, while providing opportunities for learning, sharing and connecting with other practitioners and organizations working in civic learning and engagement.

Our first session will take place on **July 23, 2025 from 12pm to 1pm ET**. See the **Events** section below for details.

If you have ideas for future CivicsNJ Exchanges, please share them [here](#).

Empowering the Next Generation through Civic Learning & Engagement

More than 325 nonprofit leaders, funders and state government representatives attended the action-packed Council of New Jersey Grantmakers' 2025 Conference for the Social Sector on June 18th. Members of the CivicsNJ coalition were well-represented, with Justin Kiczek, Brandon McKoy and Amanda Ebokosia all offering opening brief Civic Spark remarks.

Margarethe Laurenzi moderated a panel (Empowering the Next Generation through Civic Learning & Engagement) with: Tyneisha Gibbs, Policy and Youth Advocacy Director at the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition; Carlo Austria, a social studies teacher from Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Edison; Collins Esubonteng and Gabrielly Ferreira, both sophomores at Science Park High School and Gem Project Fellows from Newark; and Samvarth Raj, a YMCA Youth & Government Delegate who attends High Technology High School-Lincroft.

The youth civic leaders shared their own experiences of becoming engaged in civic life, and what they hope for in the future. They spoke optimistically of the benefits to civic engagement, and each called for more civics education among their peers to support their community involvement.



Youth leaders stole the show at CNJG's Empowering the Next Generation panel

Edison Celebrates with District-Wide Student Showcase

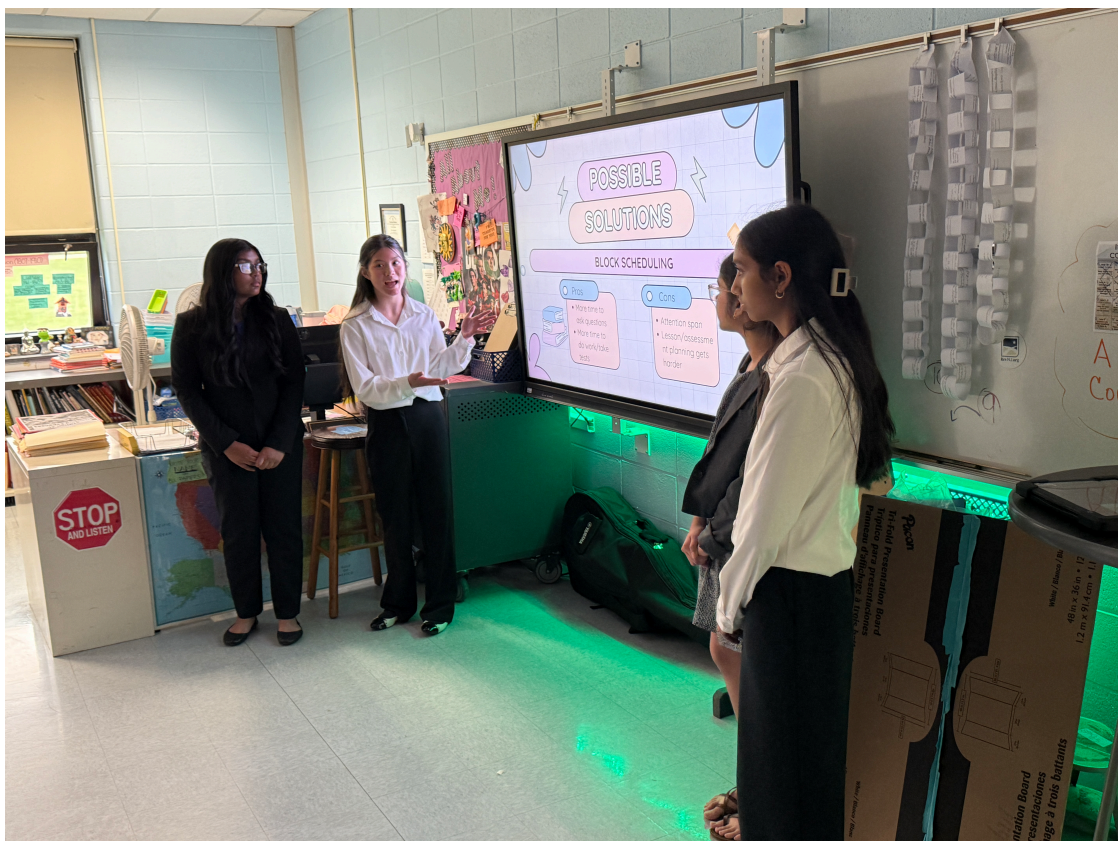
On June 3, 2025, more than 200 parents, staff members, and community partners gathered for Edison Township Public Schools' first-ever **District Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Showcase**.

The evening amplified the voices of more than 1,200 eighth-grade students who have spent the school year researching real-world challenges. More than 30 student groups presented their findings and recommendations on issues impacting their lives, schools, and communities. Topics ranged from the risks of too much academic pressure and competition, to the need to promote literacy by rebuilding school libraries.

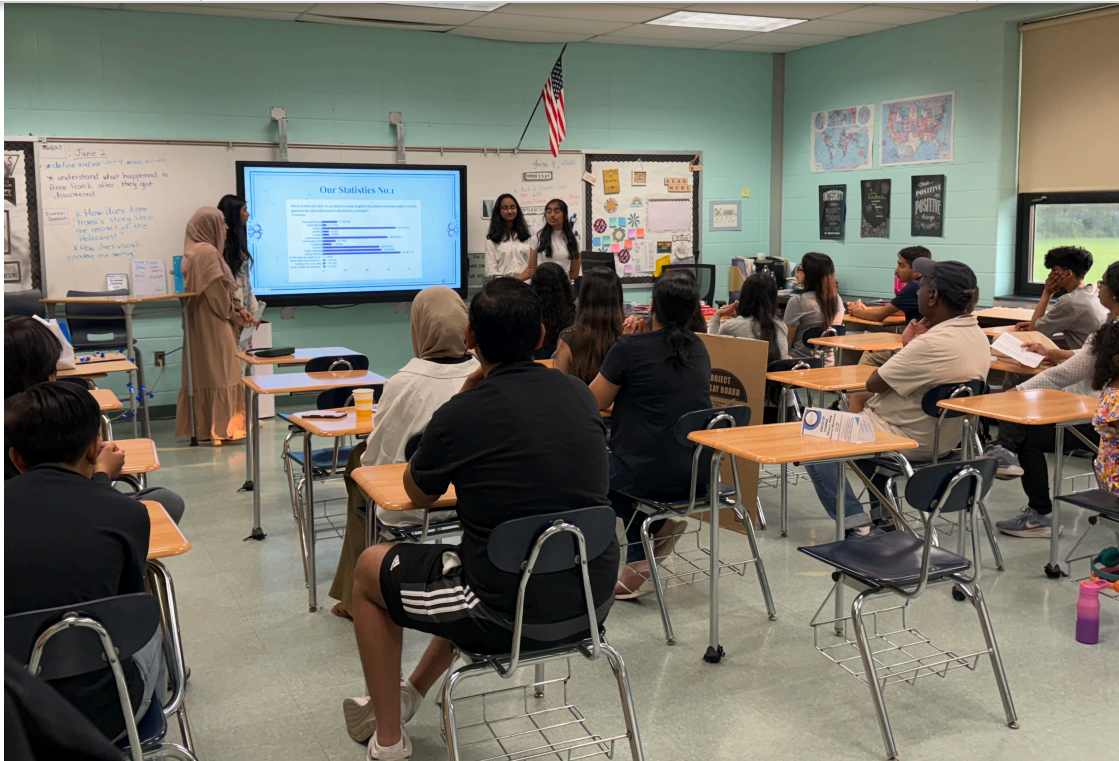
authentic civic engagement, empathy, and leadership. The YPAR model is designed to empower students to act as change agents who offer solutions, rather than just identify problems.



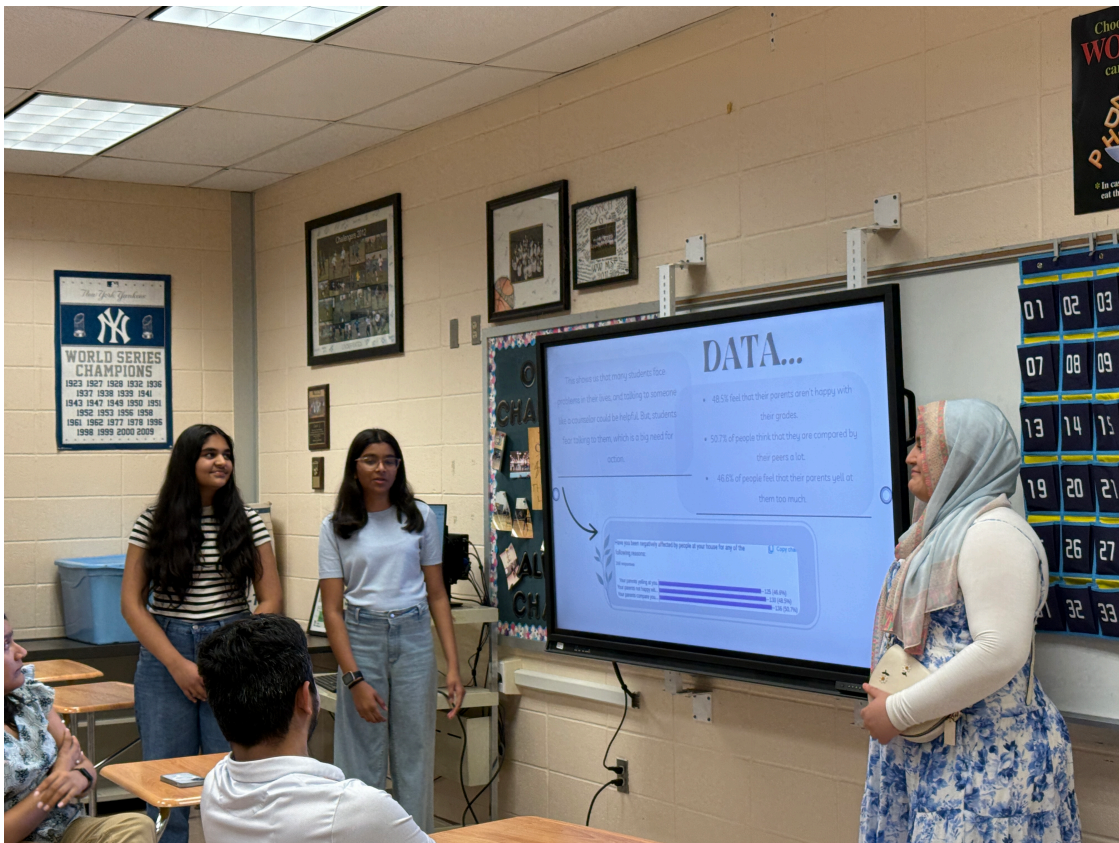
Teamwork! The Edison District YPAR Showcase



Teaching and learning



Head of the class



It's all about the data

Engaging College Students and Getting Out Their Vote

The Rutgers University-Camden (RUC) Votes Coalition — a joint student, faculty and staff initiative — has been actively engaged in advancing civic participation and voter engagement in the Camden community.

fairs, and the Campus Center. The Coalition acknowledged National Voter Registration Day, hosted a Celebrate Voting event in September 2024 with partner, The Philadelphia 76ers, and invited local high schools, LEAP Academy and Camden Academy Charter, to participate. The Coalition also collaborated with the Political Science Department and Political Science Society to host Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debate Watch Parties.

To enhance voter accessibility, the Coalition developed and deployed a comprehensive voting guide via Canvas Commons, and partnered with the Political Science department, the campus library, and the Wellness Center to organize a series of election-related events both before and after the national election. Beyond Camden, it played an active role in organizing the NJ Student Voter Summit throughout Spring and Summer 2024, working alongside All In for Democracy and other state-level/national practitioners. The Summit, held in Princeton, NJ reinforced the Coalition's commitment to statewide civic engagement. The Coalition's efforts were nationally recognized, securing third place in the NJ State College Ballot Bowl for Division 3 and second place in the statewide community Ballot Bowl competition. All In for Democracy honored the Coalition by recognizing their highly established campus plan (in collaboration with alumnus Matthew Brodsky), and awarding the group a Silver Medal for voter turnout in 2022, and the Most Engaged Campus Status.

The Coalition has continued its voter education initiatives into 2025, by tabling for primary elections and developing tailored materials for these events. It collaborated with All In for Democracy and state-level/national practitioners to coordinate NJ Student Voting Events scheduled in May 2025 and October 3, 2025. Beyond electoral engagement, the Coalition facilitates public engagement learning experiences:

- It organized a Fall 2024 trip to Trenton to meet the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education in Trenton for students in the Making Social Change course, led by Simanti Lahiri, Program Coordinator for Public Engagement and Mike Sepanic, Vice Chancellor for Governmental and External Affairs.
- Bonner Civic Scholars and other Rutgers-Camden student leaders met with the Department of Community Affairs, Assemblyman William Spearman, and Rutgers-Camden and Bonner alumnus Matthew Brodsky, now the Chief of Staff with Senator Greenstein's office in Spring 2025.
- The Coalition also led a three-day trip to Washington, D.C., where five Bonner Civic Scholars engaged with representatives from the Children's Defense Fund, met staff of New Jersey elected officials, and explored the Museum of African American Culture and History.

Through these multifaceted initiatives, the RUC Votes Coalition remains dedicated to fostering civic engagement, strengthening voter participation, and empowering students to be active contributors to democratic processes at the local, state, and national levels.



RUC Votes Coalition students meet with key leaders in Washington, D.C.

New Report on New Jersey Girls

The primary objective of the Girl Scouts is to empower young women to be leaders and agents of change in their communities. In June, New Jersey's four Girl Scout councils unveiled a new study on the experiences of girls growing up across the Garden State. Findings in "[The New Jersey Girl Report: Her Future In Focus](#)" have direct implications on programming for Girl Scouts leaders and members. The Northern New Jersey, Heart of New Jersey, Central & Southern New Jersey, and Jersey Shore councils collectively serve more than 55,000 girls across the state and are supported by over 30,000 dedicated volunteers.



Civically Engaged Districts Project

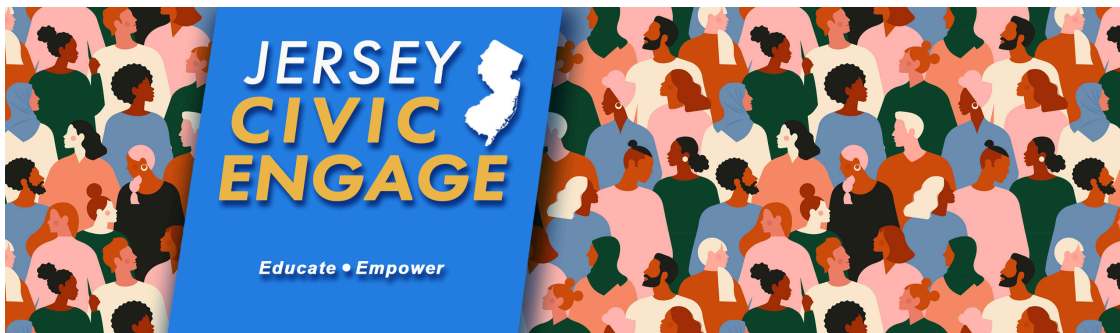
classrooms. Learn more about this year's accomplishments [here](#).

NJ High School Voter Registration Week Supports 2025 Youth Voter Engagement

The annual **New Jersey High School Voter Registration Week Program** expands youth civic engagement statewide and prepares teens to be voters. Led by Jersey Civic Engage, an initiative of the New Jersey Department of State, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education and the League of Women Voters of NJ's ***Energizing Young Voters*** program, this partnership engages high schools and communities to facilitate non-partisan voter registration for eligible 17-year-old and 18- year-old high school students. Students, administrators and community partners work together to educate potential voters and create enthusiasm around civic engagement.

This year, NJ High School Registration Week kicked off statewide action on April 6th through May 20th in high schools and communities across the state. During the initiative, **7,558** New Jersey teens ages 17 and 18 registered to vote, a 15% increase over the total registered (6,409) during the same time in 2024. The high school voter registration partnership will conduct a similar program for National High School Voter Registration Week this fall.

If you or your organization are interested in participating by organizing or helping to organize voter registration activities for young people in your community, please [contact Jersey Civic Engage](#).



The Institute for Citizens & Scholars Goes to the Capital!

On June 11th, The Institute for Citizens & Scholars (C&S) hosted the Frank E. Taplin Jr. Public Intellectual Award Event in Washington D.C. In addition to the culminating event which honored journalist Judy Woodruff, the evening included an inspiring youth panel focused on building a stronger democracy. Among the panelists was Yaa Ampofowaa Awuah, a GEM Fellow and participant in C&S's 2023 Civic Spring Fellowship program. Yaa spoke about what inspired her to become civically engaged, the importance of productive collaboration, and her commitment to her Newark community. This event represented the profile of what civic learning and engagement can be at the local, state and national levels.



CITIZENS & SCHOLARS™

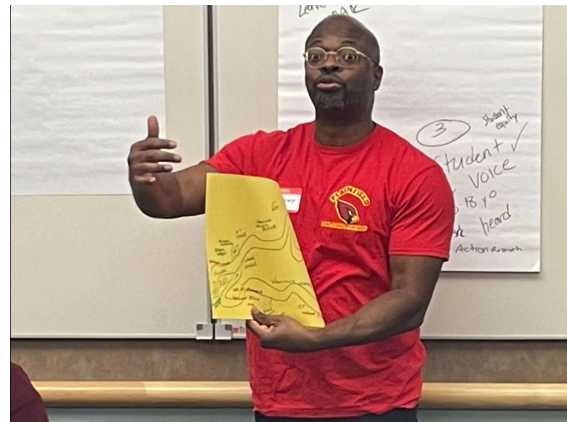
Advancing Fellowship Since 1945

Attention NJ Educators!

Are you a New Jersey K-12 educator looking to develop your students as active citizens and skilled researchers, critical thinkers, and communicators? Then Youth Participatory Action Research is for you!

The [Civically Engaged Districts Project](#) brings together educators from across disciplines and districts for a professional development series at Rutgers University that will help you to integrate civic action research into your classrooms, curricula, and/or clubs, and get students involved in hands-on civic learning that engages schools and communities.

Join us! Learn more and complete an interest form [here](#) or [email](#) with questions.



Educators learn YPAR to engage their students

iCivics Spotlight

CivxNow Coalition

On May 22nd, the CivxNow Coalition hosted a highly successful inaugural Hill Day in Washington. [CivxNow](#) is the nation's largest cross-partisan coalition working to prioritize civic education. More than 50 advocates held close to 40 meetings with lawmakers, including with four members of the New Jersey congressional delegation: Representatives McIver and Sherrill, and Senators Booker and Kim. Each diverse group included educators, students, and coalition partners, who offered their own perspectives on requests to expand civics and history funding. Among the advocates, pictured below with Senator Kim (L-R), were Wilred Chirinos (Generation Citizen), Sharonda Allen (Operation Grow, Inc.) and [Craig Uplinger](#) (New Jersey Center for Civic Education).



Hill Day in Washington, D.C.

Events



Be Well

New Jersey Citizen Action invites you to an evening of collective visioning and action planning at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey on **Wednesday, June 25th from 6:30pm to 8:30pm ET**. Nurture your mind, body, soul, and community in this arts-integrated workshop. Register [here](#).

America 250: How Will New Jersey Step Up?

With the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence now just a year away, how will we participate here in New Jersey? What is the role of civic learning in the celebration, and how can we engage young people across New Jersey in this one-of-a-kind, historic moment?

Join CivicsNJ Steering Committee member **Justin Kiczek of the F.M. Kirby Foundation** for this interactive session to discuss America250. Learn about what is already being planned, and let's explore together where we see opportunities to get involved and to advance civic learning and engagement in our state.

July 23, 2025

12pm - 1pm ET

[Link to join](#)

We hope to see you there!



We Want to Hear From You!

CivicsNJ is a member-led organization. We need your submissions for our next newsletter. Submit your content [here](#). NB Content may be edited for length and/or clarity.

CivicsNJ

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