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William Mittlefehldt

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Proactive Citizenship and Service Learning at Anoka High School

WILLIAM MITTFELDLDT

Change is the central process in all schools. Students change because of biological and social forces. Schools change because of the social and economic changes in their students, staff, and communities. The communities that support our schools change in demographics, economics, and politics. Those forces make teaching the value and the skills of citizenship extremely challenging. Change threatens to erode our common ground; it undermines our shared assumptions.

The explosion of information has increased the sense of separation in American communities. Images, data, and information flow through our lives. Rather than weave us together, the differences in our abilities to access information have generated gaps between young and old and rich and poor. People have fewer shared perceptions and

experiences in the information age. Unless they can stem the division, communities will unravel. In the past, we relied on our institutions to lend security and order during the process of change. But today, families, jobs, government, churches, and schools are not what they were.

Working within this dynamic context, the social studies staff at Anoka High School in Anoka, Minnesota, the boyhood home of Garrison Keillor, has developed a response to separation and detachment. Service learning is the key. Anoka's service-learning program is supported by a network of community partners who want to improve community development. With their program, the social studies teachers at Anoka High School hope to develop proactive citizens, ready for life in the information age.

The Problem: Change

Anoka High School's staff identified the problem as change. Students were changing; the staff was changing; the community was changing. The fabric of Anoka's community was unraveling. Anoka was clearly not what it had been in Garrison Keillor's idealized "Lake Wobegon" boyhood.

The Anoka High School staff worked with community leaders in government, business, health, and environment to describe the problems confronting the community. The problems involved growing poverty, single-parent families, juvenile crime, unprepared workers, tobacco use, and teen-aged parents.

In the effort to define the nature of Anoka's problems, the school staff worked with the Search Institute in Minneapolis, a consulting team that studies, analyzes, and publishes materials focused on the developmental challenges of youth. Their study of adolescent development, *The Troubled Journey* (Search Institute 1994), was a valuable tool. The Search Institute's research suggested that many of Anoka's youth lacked "resiliency," the ability to adapt and respond positively to the challenges of development. The research revealed that the students who had developed "resiliency" also had "external assets," provided through their relationships with community partners who served as learning resources. The external assets were determined to be the following:

- Family support
- Communication with parents
- Other adult communication
- Parent involvement in schooling

WILLIAM MITTFELDLDT teaches economics, law, environment, futuristics, community problem solving, and psychology at Anoka High School in Anoka, Minnesota. He works with Anoka's Social Studies and Service Learning Programs to involve students in shaping their future. He and other faculty members at Anoka High School have developed new partners and processes to teach students to be proactive.

NSLC
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Scotts Valley, CA 95066

- Parental discipline
- Parental standards
- Time at home
- Positive peer influence
- Involvement with music
- Participation in extracurriculars at school
- Involvement in community activities
- Involvement in faith-community activities

The Anoka students who had more of those external assets tended to develop more "internal assets"—the convictions, values, and attitudes that promote prosocial development. According to the study, fewer Anoka students were developing internal assets (Search Institute 1994), such as the following:

- Achievement motivation
- Educational aspiration
- School performance
- Homework completion
- Value of helping people
- Care about world hunger
- Care about people's feelings
- Value of sexual restraint
- Assertiveness skills
- Decision-making skills
- Friendship-making skills
- Planning skills
- Self-esteem
- A positive view of their personal future

Without the internal assets, the students' performance in school, at work, in their health decisions, and in their community life were affected. In the assessment process, the Anoka team realized that those students who failed to develop internal assets tended to display deficits, factors inhibiting healthy teenage development. Deficits were not permanent but affected the character of young people in ways that made harmful behavior more probable. The team listed the deficits as follows:

- Alone at home
- Hedonistic values
- Overexposure to television
- Drinking parties
- Stress
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

- Parental addiction
- Social isolation
- Negative peer pressure

Because of the changes in Anoka, our students' internal assets were decreasing as their deficits were increasing. The Staff Development Team decided to devise a long-term process that would involve the students in solving the problems affecting their community. Such a process would simultaneously help the business community, the city, the police, the environment, and the health community achieve their goals for the future. Most important, addressing the problems in the long term could improve students' performance and the school climate while providing the human resources for a more sustainable future.

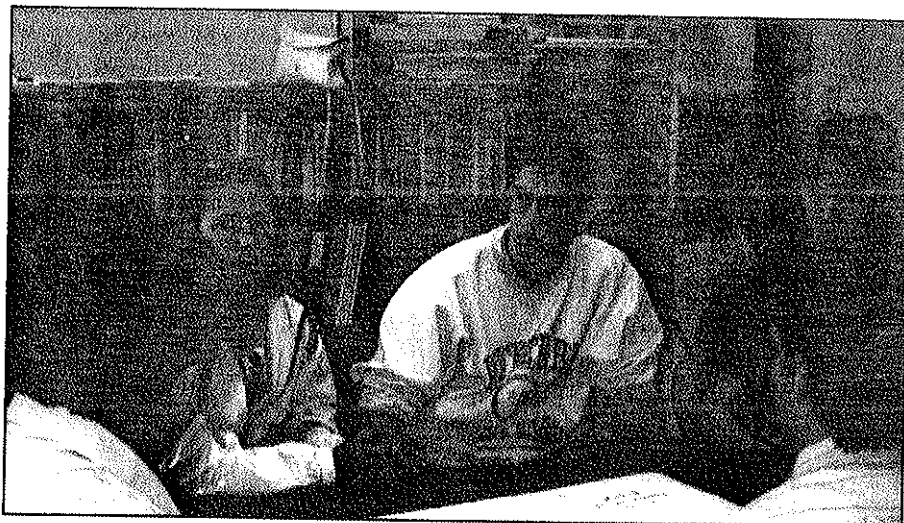
Resources for Developing Proactive Citizens

Anoka's leaders in the school and community were careful to avoid such terminology as "The problem with kids today. . . ." They understood from the outset that they were dealing with a system problem that required a system solution. That understanding generated a growing array of resources that would involve Anoka High students in the life of their community.

By being involved in the many aspects of change in their community, students have realized that they can

make a tangible and constructive difference in the community. That realization has released a wave of creative energy and commitment from the students, which, in turn, has generated more resources for Anoka High School and the community. The resources continue to increase, adding to Anoka High's focus on service learning. Anoka's staff and students are using that momentum to reach out to other schools and communities in Minnesota, the United States, and around the world. After extended observation, David Pines, executive director of Rescue Mission Planet Earth, commented, "Anoka's teamwork between school and community is one of the best operating models of grassroots collaboration aimed at the future [that] I've seen in the country" (Rescue Mission 1996). Assets need to be shared; and sharing grows more assets. That has been one of the keys to Anoka's successful program of civic education.

The resources organized for student involvement in Anoka can be found in most communities. The action over the last seven years in Anoka has been a mixture of planning and synergism. No one agency was responsible for the positive dynamics that have developed between Anoka High School and the community. The high school, district, city, county, business, and health partners have collaborated to develop a number of resources that have provided



Anoka students work with the county GIS leader.

Anoka High students with a challenging array of service-learning options.

The many challenges increased the students' interest, motivation, and their youthful capacity for commitment. In the process of serving, many of Anoka's students have clarified their personal priorities and values. Their families, faith communities, employers, and health providers directly benefit from that type of learning. Service learning builds hope, which can be infectious among students. Hope has been the most critical resource for the development of proactive students who will become our proactive citizens.

School and Community Collaboration

In 1989, Anoka's school and community collaboration became more focused through two processes. The city of Anoka was concerned about the increase of poverty, crime, and cruising. The Anoka City Council decided to involve students in addressing some of these issues. At the same time, Anoka High School received a small grant from the United Way to initiate a community-service program. Members of the community-service program and the social studies department worked together to increase the opportunities for service by Anoka students.

By 1990, the city of Anoka had decided to involve students in a strategic assessment of the hopes and fears of the community. Students worked with city and community partners to develop a survey tool. Students were instrumental in administering it and were involved in the process that transformed 4,000 surveys into Anoka's Community Vision Statement. The statement was adopted by the council in 1991. At the same meeting, the mayor and council established the Anoka 2010 Task Force to provide a vehicle for turning ideas from the vision statement into action.

In a parallel process, the Anoka social studies staff was working with Dr. Linda Klohs, the director of community service, to expand the opportunities for service learning. Dr. Klohs



Students on the Anoka High School Smoke Out Team lobby State Representative Kathleen Sekhon.

manages the database of organizations that need student help, designs and develops service fairs, maintains a record of student service hours, and publishes a monthly community-service newsletter. With such a support system, it was possible to give students credit for their service on Anoka's 2010 Task Force.

Anoka 2010, operating since 1991, meets approximately once a month in City Hall to discuss and work on projects that citizens and students initiate to transform their vision into action. Anoka students provide much of the energy and many of the ideas for action. The task force provides a community-based process for students to meet with adults from various sectors of the community who want to make a difference.

In 1992, Anoka was selected as the first Keeper of the Waters Community by the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Anoka is on the Mississippi and Rum Rivers and is situated in the county with the greatest number of wetland acres in its metropolitan area. For that reason, Anoka launched a two-year program of water resource protection. Two students served on the steering committee of the Anoka Keeper of the Waters Team. Their service learning took them to the

United Nations for a meeting of the preparations committee on the Earth Summit in 1992. They made a presentation about youth service and water protection, which sounded much like the GLOBE Program of Vice President Al Gore and which involves 400 schools around the planet in monitoring environmental quality. Those Anoka students and their partners organized a Community Water Festival in the summer of 1992 to involve area citizens in the celebration of our rich water resources and to increase our sense of responsibility for the resource.

A year later, a number of Anoka High teachers were trained as part of the Southern Illinois River's Curriculum Project by Dr. Bob Williams. The innovative program for involving teachers and students in monitoring the water quality of the Mississippi River stimulated the involvement of more Anoka students in water quality issues. Teachers Tom Buss, Gina Trousil, Gary Johnson, Mary Westerberg, and Dennis Colvin have collaborated through the interdisciplinary teaching of history, English, and biology to motivate their tenth-grade students to assume responsibility for water quality. Their work with students on the Mississippi has been recognized by the Department of Interior and has been highlighted on

CNN's "Teacher TV." They were cited for extending the learning of their students from the classroom to the community—literally into the river!

In 1993, the city of Anoka approached the high school's social studies teachers about having students on the City Council and the city's advisory boards. That year the Anoka Students in Government program was

Quality Improvement. Students earn service credit while they are engaged in the training because it benefits the entire community.

With the leadership of Anoka High's quality partners in the business community, three community task forces, part of the Anoka Quality System, were set up in 1993 to assess Anoka's business health, community

Anoka students before they graduate. The city of Anoka, the Anoka Chamber of Commerce, and the Pioneering Partners Program have helped build the common ground in training and shared experiences for Anoka students. Their combined efforts enabled our social studies teachers to have more proactive training options, which foster the internal assets of civic involvement, quality work skills, and hope, to use with our students.

In 1995, a team of Anoka's social studies staff, under the leadership of Anoka High's John Belpedio, designed and developed a new unit that focused on teaching students applied problem-solving skills. The materials defined a process and required students to work as partners with persons and organizations outside the school in defining, researching, and addressing problems that affect the community.

The critical element in the chemistry of such a project is the commitment of the teens. No one tells them what to choose. Students make their selection because they care. In that way, the teachers, working with the community, are preparing students for the collaborative teamwork and innovation that are the keystone of U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace. Through the unit on applied problem solving, the students are simultaneously building character and contributing to the good of the larger community. Students earn community-service credit while working with partners on authentic issues confronting their community.

New School Processes and Partners

Anoka High School recently altered the design of the school day by moving to a four-period format. Each week, students have four days of 85-minute classes, and on Wednesdays, they have 60-minute classes with an hour home-room period. Such a schedule has increased the opportunities for service learning. The longer class periods make it possible for students to become involved in process learning. They are able to undertake more projects to extend their learning process. Many of

The critical element in the chemistry of a partnership project that addresses community problems is the commitment of the teens. When working with organizations outside the school, students learn collaborative teamwork.

set up to provide service-learning opportunities to students interested in city government. Students served on the City Council *ex officio* for the school year. Students also were appointed to the advisory boards to share their youthful perspective. By attending meetings and training sessions, they earn service-learning credit. The program has been in operation since 1993. Each month through the school's video announcements, the student representatives report what they learn to the student body, thus keeping their classmates informed.

The Anoka social studies and business education departments worked in 1993 with their business partners to provide work force readiness training to interested students by setting up a sequence of quality training opportunities. The group formed the Anoka Quality Academy to equip students with the skills they would need as future employees to drive the area's economy in the global information age. Their quality training involves memorization of Deming's principles, school training by the business partners, business site training by partners, and application of quality problem solving and resolution at the teenager's place of work. Anoka High is now the only school in the country that offers a fine arts letter in Business

health, and environmental health (Anoka Quality System 1994). By design, the three factors were the components of total community quality (TCQ). The intent was to do a community-wide assessment of what was needed to improve Anoka's competitiveness, health, and environmental quality by involving all citizens, young and old, in the assessment of the three domains of TCQ. Students, teachers, and citizens served on each of the three task forces and published their findings in 1994 with the help of the Council of Great Lakes Governors' Pioneering Partners Program, which recognizes valuable grassroots innovation in schools. Once published, the documents were used by teachers in the social studies department to interest students in the problems of their community and to involve them in designing and developing solutions.

The support of Pioneering Partners helped the Anoka staff provide documents and training for other schools and communities interested in service-learning opportunities related to work-force readiness, character development, and community development. The Anoka Area Chamber of Commerce has long been a significant partner in the effort to promote competitiveness and problem-solving skills in

the projects involve community partners who may have more expertise than the instructor so that the teacher becomes the "guide on the side" who functions as a resource broker for the student research teams. Community partners affirm the students' initiatives and extend their understanding by offering more data and different perspectives. Teachers have noticed that Anoka students respond with greater creative energy and commitment when they are being affirmed by adults from the community. Through such activity and affirmation by elders from their community and tribe, Anoka students touch something transcendent (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). The connection inspires them to become more hopeful and effective decision makers.

The partnership of Anoka High School and the city of Anoka has been paralleled by the partnership of the school's social studies department and the Community Service Program. Those interactions continue to bear new fruit. Each year there are new instances of student-community collaboration, which have increased the positive momentum. The process presents more opportunities for Anoka students to acquire internal assets and avoid the deficits that can undermine the sense of community. The Anoka Success Committee, a group of professionals and community leaders, meets regularly to identify and initiate processes that will help diminish youth deficits and increase internal assets. As chairperson Jean Kincannon has observed, "It makes so much sense to unite the community in efforts to provide challenges for our kids. If we ignore this connection, the costs will be huge in the future!" Under Kincannon's skillful leadership, the Anoka Success Committee has grown from nine to ninety members who have rallied to support our youth.

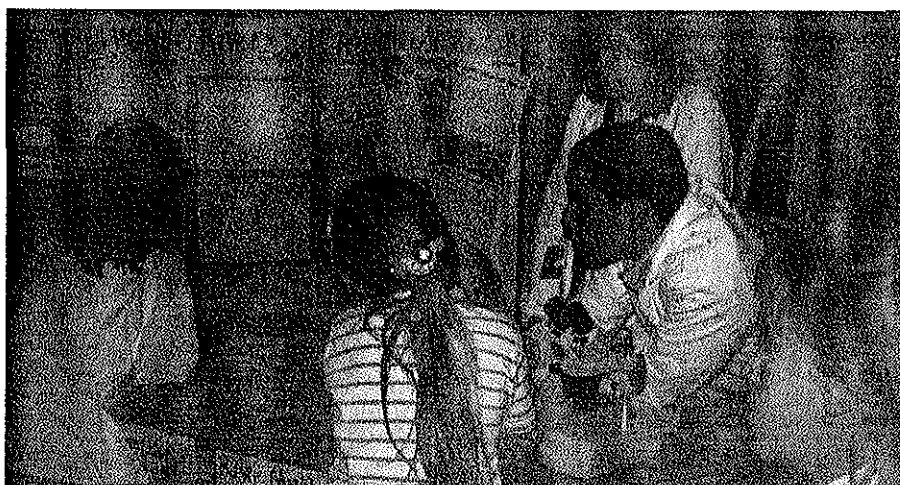
Robert W. Johnson, aged 78 and a retired Anoka County attorney, helped organize the Anoka, Ramsey, and Andover Community Consortium. Johnson grew up during Anoka's agricultural period and senses that the current threats to the community may gen-

erate costs unless additional resources are provided for today's youth. Johnson, who understands that schools are pressed by curricular and extracurricular demands, notes that "school cannot be expected to provide for all the needs of our youth. The community must provide more human and organizational resources to avoid the costs associated with youth deficits."

The retired county attorney has helped organize a task force to study the development of a community center. The task force leaders have included students in their group as they searched for a reasonable plan for a community center where generations would gather to share stories and talents. Students will earn community-service credit while they work with their partners to design a feasible plan.

their work in crime prevention and help juveniles who would otherwise end up consuming expensive correctional services.

Another organizational resource for Anoka High's service learning has been Mercy Hospital and its owner, the Alliana Corporation. The Anoka Quality System's Assessment of Community Health identified the cardiovascular health of its growing elderly population as an important target. Staff from Anoka High received a grant from Alliana's Community Health Improvement Office to begin a Forever Fit Program for area senior citizens. The original pilot group paired eight senior citizens with student trainers. They did a biweekly workout in the school's well-equipped fitness and training facility. After a year and a half, the



Students present information on water pollution at the Minnesota Science Museum.

Police Chief Andy Revering helped design and develop Anoka's Restorative Justice Program for juveniles who have been in trouble with the law. Chief Revering and Sergeant Allan Campbell have been featured on the ABC network for the success of their Restorative Justice Program, for which they borrowed ideas from a New Zealand tradition and a Scottish adaptation. The program provides juveniles who are not receiving or responding to home guidance and discipline with a significant dose of shame. Chief Revering involves young people from Anoka High in the process through the Anoka Anti-Crime Commission. Our students earn credit for

senior members reported greater vigor and mobility. They enjoyed the weekly contact with the energetic adolescents. The supervising instructor, Rick Rignell, reported that the senior citizens have had a calming influence on the students, who responded well to the presence of the surrogate grandparents. The pilot program has been expanded because it was determined that it had a positive impact on everyone in the training center. The students were better behaved, and the seniors were modeling healthy lifestyles. Observers have noticed that the seniors share local history tales and listen to adolescent tribulations. The exchange is therapeutic.

Mercy Hospital has also provided support for those students interested in the healing phenomena. Mercy Hospital's chaplain and members of Anoka's social studies department worked together to set up Anoka High's Mercy Healing Team. Under the supervision of Chaplain Allen Grant and an interested parent, Karen Kooda, students earn community service credit for sharing their healing energy with patients and their families. Healing Team members have occasionally met the persons or families on whom they had been concentrating their meditation and prayers. The service provided a powerful and unique learning experience for many of the participating students and the patients with whom they worked.

opening new doors for possible collaboration between Anoka students and students in other schools, states, and countries. Information on Anoka's service projects has been shared with student teams in other states and in Canada, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Egypt, Thailand, and Australia. Such sharing extends both the reputation of Anoka's service-learning program and the power of affirmation that students feel when they complete a project. Tech tools help expand exponentially the external assets available to our students.

Our school also has its own TV production studio and a direct connection to the local cable company, Meredith Cable. Anoka has used the school's video production tools to run the largest

Action Mentors) worked with partners at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Duluth office and partners at Anoka County to display three years of water monitoring data on the St. Louis River in northeastern Minnesota with GIS tools. Another student team made a formal presentation to the Anoka City Council, using a GIS map to display a plan for a park development. A team, using GIS tools, is working with the county and the Conservation District to identify and locate wells.

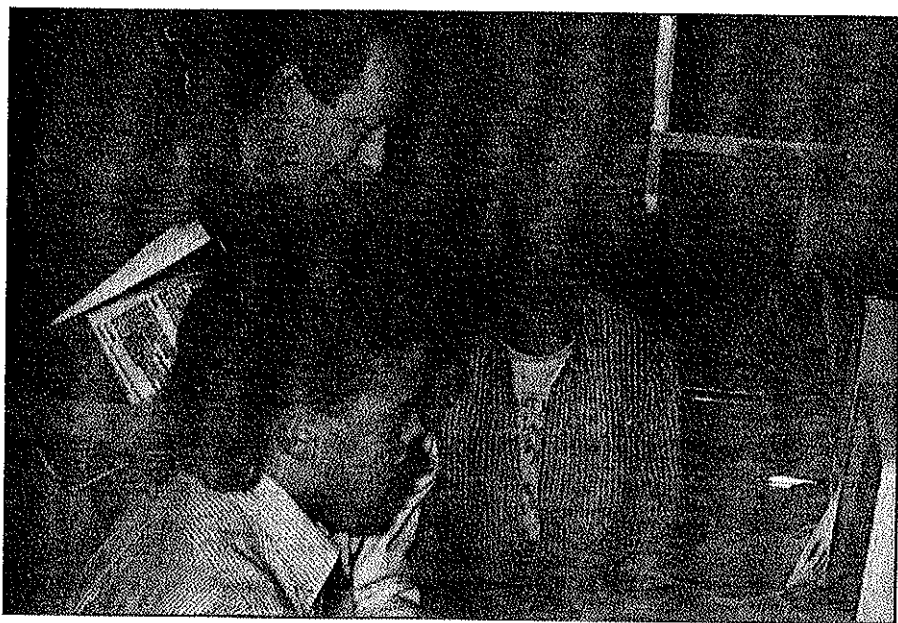
Anoka students who use technology tools to define, explain, and respond to community problems earn community service credit for their work. The process celebrates their work while simultaneously preparing them for creative and productive work in the information age. Very little of this work originates in textbooks. The ideas, concepts, and vocabulary are often found in texts, but their application to real problems takes place when student teams work with their community partners.

Anoka's service-learning process links students with the problems in their own community, and learning is grounded in the lives and events of real people in real communities. The young citizens strengthen their vision and commitment. They develop more tolerance and appreciation of diversity.

Another result of the program is the Web site for Anoka High. Potential partners and those interested in Anoka's service programs can reach the school's Web site—<http://anokahs/anoka.k12.mn.us>—to read about "Assets in Anoka" and other service-learning activities. The site highlights Anoka's new processes and partners and offers support for school-community teams interested in moving in similar directions.

Emerging Model for Service Learning

We cannot expect that federal funding for schools and communities will increase. At the same time, local problems will not abate. Anoka High School's experience may be useful to other communities concerned about

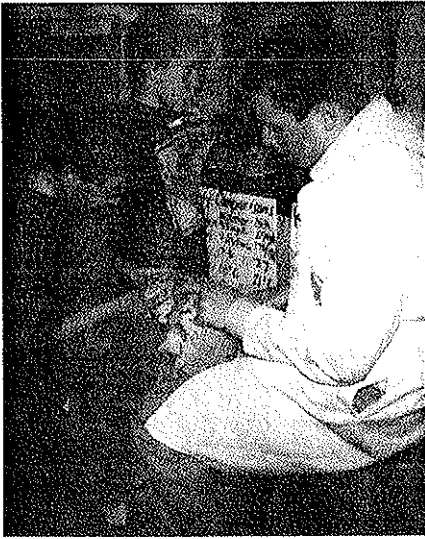


Before starting their projects, students analyze problems listed on the state's database.

Technology Tools Extend Resources

Anoka's voters generously supported a technology referendum in 1994, and Tim Sheie, Anoka's technology director, has worked with Anoka's Technology Committee to install and operate Anoka's technology tools, which have provided expanded service opportunities to Anoka students and their community. Teachers and students have computer work stations in each classroom. Access to e-mail and the World Wide Web has been an invaluable tool for

blood drive in the state. Twice a year, Anoka also runs a food drive for the area's Food Shelf. In addition to PCs and the video technology, Anoka High students have been learning to use Geographic Information System (GIS) to make graphic representations that define community problems. The more technically advanced students can work with Arc View (GIS) software to display problems. The Anoka County GIS office has been a key partner to the learning process. The Anoka GLEAM Team (Great Lakes Environmental



An Anoka student explains a geographic point to museum visitors.

youth and community development. What has taken seven years to establish in Anoka could develop elsewhere in less time.

Our program of new partners and processes grew from the concerns of city and school leaders and was supported with quality improvement training by the area business leaders. The partners developed a variety of learning processes for young people, a community's most valuable resource. We improved our technology and environment and increased our profits. With greater internal assets, the people at Anoka High School hope to develop a sense of community. Anoka's social studies team of proactive students is helping all the citizens of the city become more involved in community affairs.

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APPENDIX A

THE ANOKA SMOKE OUT TEAM

A team of Anoka High School juniors decided to do something about tobacco issues affecting teens. They reviewed the state's Report Card on Children to research issues affecting young people in Minnesota and noticed the growing problems with tobacco use. Group members spent some of their summer hours in training with the county ASSIST organization. In the fall, some of the members participated in ride-alongs with local police, doing compliance checks at convenience stores to learn how easy it was for minors to obtain tobacco products. They then decided to work on a city

ordinance to lessen the use of tobacco by minors. The senior leaders of Anoka Smoke Out team arranged with the Minnesota Attorney General's office to lobby at the state legislature.

Because of their student leadership and service, the students received a grant for round-trip tickets to Washington, D.C., from the Anoka chapter of the Daughters of the America Revolution. In February, Sarah Kurdziel, a member of Anoka's Smoke Out Team, went to Washington to seek legislative leaders who might use their expertise to stop tobacco abuse by minors.

Anoka Smoke-Out leaders, Katie Rykkeli, Adrianna Taborda, Sarah Kurdziel, Brian Simmons, Sara Edmundson, and Nick Hoffman, understand that they will ultimately pay for the health costs of tobacco abuse. That knowledge inspired them to organize a community information meeting about the problem. They are working with the mayor and a city council member on a new ordinance to regulate tobacco use by minors. Anoka's Smoke Out Team recognized that tobacco abuse by minors is not a sustainable economic activity and requires a proactive response by Anoka's youth leaders. They are waiting for a call from their new partners in Washington.

For additional information about the Anoka endeavors, readers can reach William Mittlefehldt by phone at (wk) 612-506-6362 or (hm) 612-427-5794 or send letters to 1334 3rd Ave. S., Anoka, MN 55303.

Readers may also wish to reach the web site of Anoka High School (<http://anokahs.anoka.k12.unus/>).