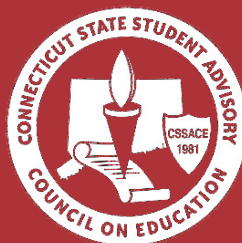


31st Annual

CHALLENGE TO EDUCATIONAL CITIZENSHIP AWARD PROGRAM



JUNE 2, 2026 | 10:00 AM
CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS | CHESHIRE CT



Connecticut State
Department of Education

Introduction

The State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE) is pleased to have offered schools throughout Connecticut the opportunity to apply for recognition in the 31st Annual Challenge to Educational Citizenship Award program. This program was the "brain child" of the 1996 edition of SSACE as a way of promoting citizenship through co-curricular programs.

Today, we honor 17 winning entries that embody the spirit of citizenship and an altruistic commitment to serving others. Submitted projects were judged by the high school student members of this year's council. The submissions were evaluated on the basis of the depth, breadth, and quality of impact on others in the school community.

Schools were asked to reflect on the organizations within their school community. Do any epitomize exemplary civic awareness, cooperation, and boundless potential for community impact?

SSACE Adviser

*Cherese Odukwe, Director of Student Activities
Connecticut Association of Schools*

Masters of Ceremony

SSACE Students

Welcome

CAS-CIAC Staff

Opening Remarks

*Chris Loomis, Family-School Liaison,
Student Activities Director- Farmington High School
Russell Crist- Principal, Farmington High School*

**EVERYBODY CAN BE GREAT
BECAUSE ANYBODY
CAN SERVE**

Martin Luther King, Jr.

2026 AWARD WINNING SCHOOLS

“Unified Spring Kickoff Dance” - Ridgefield High School

The “Unified Spring Kickoff Dance” at Ridgefield High School was a student-led initiative designed to bring together Unified programs from surrounding schools for an inclusive and engaging evening. In its inaugural year, the event welcomed approximately 80 students from five schools for a night of dancing, games, and community-building. A diverse student committee, including members of Student Government, National Honor Society, and Unified programs, planned every aspect of the event. Unified Art students created decorations, Unified Baking students prepared treats, and students collaboratively designed a sensory-friendly space and event playlist. This event fostered belonging, collaboration, and school pride while celebrating inclusivity.

“Thrive Together Campaign” - Ridgefield High School

The “Thrive Together Campaign” is a student-led wellness initiative at Ridgefield High School focused on promoting balance, connection, and healthy habits through authentic student voice. A committee of 20 students and 17 staff members collaborated to identify key challenges related to student well-being and developed actionable strategies through focus groups and school-wide engagement. The campaign expanded into professional development opportunities, integration with existing school programs, and presentations to the Board of Education. By emphasizing mental health awareness and peer-driven solutions, this initiative has created a more supportive and connected school environment.

“Dodgeball Tournament for Charity” - Norwalk High School

The annual Dodgeball Tournament at Norwalk High School is a long-standing, student-driven tradition that promotes school spirit, teamwork, and community impact. Running for over 14 years, the event brings together approximately 250 participants each year and is organized by a dedicated student committee. This year, students raised \$10,000 for the Norwalk Special Olympics, contributing to a total of over \$140,000 raised for various local, national, and global causes. Through planning, fundraising, and event execution, students dedicate over 20 hours annually, developing leadership skills while supporting meaningful charitable initiatives that have impacted thousands.

“Student Leadership Council” - Broadview Middle School

The “Student Leadership Council” at Broadview Middle School is a dynamic, inclusive program of 82 students in grades 6–8 committed to fostering kindness, leadership, and community engagement. Meeting weekly, students lead impactful initiatives such as school-wide inclusion campaigns, Veterans Day celebrations, and a student-run food pantry and clothing boutique that serves approximately 85 students weekly. Additional efforts include mental health awareness campaigns, international relief projects, and community service for veterans and cancer patients. Through these experiences, students develop leadership, empathy, and real-world problem-solving skills while making a meaningful difference within and beyond their school community.

“The Pink Chair Project” - Interdistrict Discovery Magnet School

“The Pink Chair Project” is a student-led fundraising initiative at Interdistrict Discovery Magnet School that supports individuals recovering from breast cancer surgery. Each October, in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the school community participates in a “Pink Dress Down Day,” where students donate and honor survivors by displaying their names on symbolic pink chair cutouts. Serving a school of 500 students, this initiative has raised over \$1,000 in the past two years. The project not only provides financial support for recovery resources but also raises awareness and fosters compassion and unity within the school community.

2026 AWARD WINNING SCHOOLS

”Senior Hola Alliance Cord Ceremony” - Manchester High School

The “Hola Alliance Cord Ceremony” at Manchester High School is a student-led celebration recognizing graduating seniors for their leadership and contributions to the Latino community. Organized by approximately 40 student members, the event serves over 120 individuals, including families and community members. In addition to honoring students, the ceremony provides bilingual resources to support post-secondary planning and strengthens connections between the school and Latino community. Through cultural events, leadership opportunities, and educational outreach, the Hola Alliance fosters cultural pride, inclusion, and college readiness.

“Aerospace for Advocacy” - Academy of Aerospace and Engineering

“Aerospace for Advocacy” is a student-led initiative driven by the DECA Club at the Academy of Aerospace and Engineering, focused on addressing critical social issues such as food insecurity, racial injustice in banking, and school funding. Involving over 30 students, the project included legislative advocacy through emails, public testimony, community outreach, and a visit to the state capitol. Students successfully contributed to reversing a \$12 million funding cut to magnet schools while raising awareness across their school and broader community. This initiative highlights the power of student voice in influencing meaningful policy change.

“SEL Ambassadors” - West Rocks Middle School

The “SEL Ambassadors” program at West Rocks Middle School is a student-led initiative dedicated to promoting social-emotional learning and mental health awareness. Composed of 15 trained student leaders representing a diverse, multilingual student body, ambassadors lead school-wide campaigns, peer support efforts, and awareness events. Through partnerships with organizations like CHDI and NAMI, students are equipped to recognize warning signs, reduce stigma, and encourage help-seeking behaviors. Their work includes organizing mental health fairs and inclusive campaigns, ensuring all students feel supported and connected within a safe and welcoming school environment.

“Community Closet” - Information Technology & Software Engineering High School (Fairchild Wheeler)

The “Community Closet” is a student-led initiative designed to support peers experiencing financial hardship by providing access to free clothing in a respectful and private manner. Founded by a small team of five students, the project was created after recognizing a need within their school community. Students manage inventory weekly, organize donations, and distribute items to those in need. Now serving hundreds of students, the initiative has expanded to include the development of an app to streamline requests and donations. The Community Closet promotes dignity, inclusion, and equity while ensuring all students feel confident and supported.

“Freshman Ambassadors Program” - Woodland Regional High School

The “Freshman Ambassadors Program” at Woodland Regional High School is a student-led mentoring initiative designed to support incoming ninth-grade students in their transition to high school. Composed of upperclassmen volunteers, ambassadors visit freshman advisory groups throughout the year, building connections and providing guidance on academics, school culture, and social adjustment. With approximately 50 hours of engagement annually, the program fosters confidence, belonging, and peer connection. By creating a welcoming and supportive environment, the Freshman Ambassadors help ease the transition into high school while strengthening the overall school community.

2026 AWARD WINNING SCHOOLS

“Community Ramadan Iftar Dinner” - North Haven High School

The “Community Ramadan Iftar Dinner” at North Haven High School is a student-led cultural initiative organized by the Diversity Team and Muslim Student Association. In its first year, the event brought together over 300 students, families, faculty, and community members to share a meal and celebrate cultural traditions. By creating a space for authentic cultural exchange, the event strengthened connections within the school community while fostering greater understanding and inclusion. This initiative highlights the importance of honoring diverse identities and building a welcoming environment for all students and families.

“Layla’s Light Walk-A-Thon” - Naugatuck High School

“Layla’s Light” is a student-led initiative created to honor the memory of a beloved classmate while promoting mental health awareness and community connection. In its inaugural year, the event brought together over 250 participants for a two-hour walk-a-thon featuring raffles, music, and activities. Students dedicated weeks of planning and service to raise \$6,600 for a scholarship fund in Layla’s name. The event encouraged open dialogue around mental health and reinforced the importance of kindness, remembrance, and supporting one another.

“Kids in the Middle” - Chippens Hill & West Bristol School

“Kids in the Middle” (KIM) is a student-led service program that empowers middle school students to make a meaningful impact within their school and local community. With over 40 active participants contributing more than 100 hours of service annually, students support organizations such as the Bristol Public Library, Veterans Council, and local senior centers. Established in 2008, the program fosters leadership, compassion, and civic responsibility. Through consistent engagement and service, students embody the philosophy of “rising by lifting others,” strengthening both their school and the broader community.

“Woodstock Academy Kindness Club” - Woodstock Academy

The “Kindness Club” at Woodstock Academy is a student-led group dedicated to promoting positivity and strengthening school culture. With over 25 members, the club meets weekly to plan and implement activities that bring students together, including “Fun Fridays,” school-wide events, and seasonal initiatives like hot chocolate giveaways and campus-wide egg hunts. Through 4–6 events each year, the club serves a school community of approximately 1,000 students. By focusing on small, meaningful acts of kindness, the group fosters connection,

“Student Council” - Michael F. Wallace Middle School

The “Student Council” at Michael F. Wallace Middle School is a fully student-led organization of 38 members serving a school community of over 1,000 students and staff. The council is dedicated to promoting unity, inclusivity, and student voice through impactful events, fundraisers, and awareness campaigns. Members organize initiatives to support families in need and work to bridge connections across different programs within the school. Through leadership, collaboration, and advocacy, the Student Council empowers students to take an active role in shaping a positive and connected school environment.

2026 AWARD WINNING SCHOOLS

“Social Justice Week - Year 10” - Farmington High School

A decade-long tradition, “Social Justice Week” at Farmington High School is a student-led initiative that promotes inclusivity, equity, and meaningful dialogue. Reaching over 3,000 students annually, the program features presentations, discussions, and activities centered on social awareness and global citizenship. A cornerstone of the week is fostering civil discourse, encouraging students to learn from one another’s perspectives. Student leaders have also expanded the initiative by hosting a statewide conference, empowering other schools to implement similar programs. Social Justice Week continues to inspire student voice and leadership while building a more informed and inclusive community.

“Mindful Mondays” - Chippens Hill Middle School

“Mindful Mondays” is a small, student-centered initiative at Chippens Hill Middle School that provides a supportive space for students to complete homework and engage in creative activities. Meeting weekly after school, a dedicated group of students participates in structured time for academics followed by arts and crafts. This program fosters balance, creativity, and connection while supporting students’ academic success and well-being. Through a consistent and welcoming environment, Mindful Mondays encourages mindfulness, collaboration, and positive peer relationships.



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