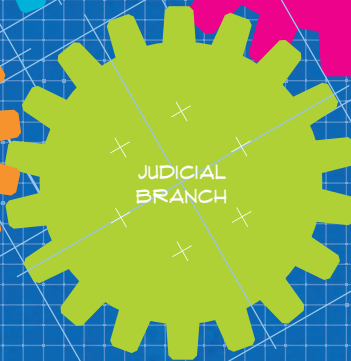
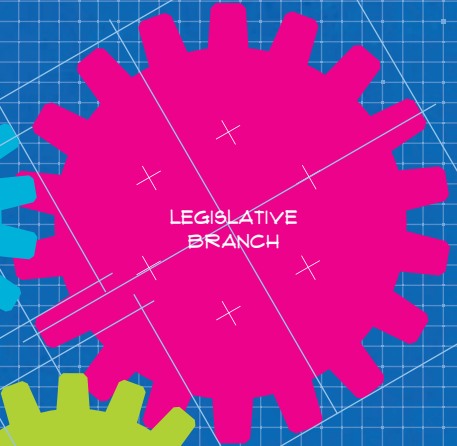
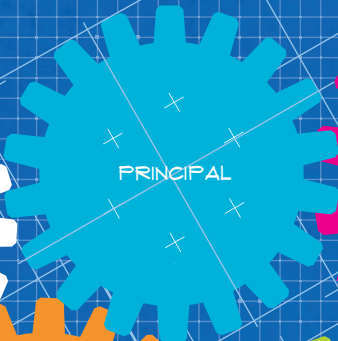
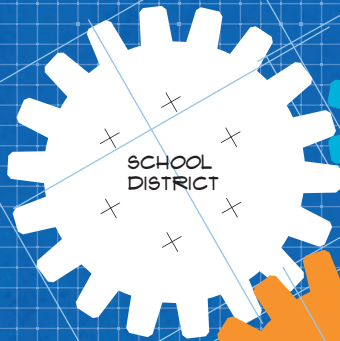


WE THE SCHOOL

developed by
CONSTITUTION HIGH SCHOOL
in collaboration with the
NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Constitution High School's Blueprint for a Democratic School Government



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“Using the United States Constitution as a blueprint, this guide offers schools a form of student government—**We the School**—that ultimately gives students a stronger voice in school affairs.” —Marc Brasof, Constitution High School

Introduction

Dear Educators,

One of the core functions of schools is to teach students about America’s democracy and system of government. Yet, students’ rights are often limited in schools for the purpose of creating an environment that is safe and conducive to learning. Laws have curtailed students’ rights to property and expression since the 1960s, sending a clear message that schools are not necessarily democratic institutions.

I invite you to imagine a school government that provides students with avenues to engage meaningfully in democratic processes, civic discourse and active citizenship. Using the United States Constitution as a blueprint, this guide offers schools a form of student government—**We the School**—that ultimately gives students a stronger voice in school affairs. This model allows students, faculty and administrators to address issues facing their school and community together, and enables students to practice democratic governance firsthand.

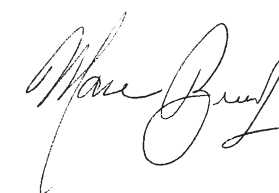
In Philadelphia, the birthplace of America’s democracy, this constitutional model of school governance became a reality. In 2006, the National Constitution Center—in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia and the Annenberg Foundation—embarked on a bold educational experiment: the opening of Constitution High School (CHS), a public school with a focus on U.S. history and democracy.

Could students really be trusted to govern their own school? Consider what happened during the 2008-09 school year. CHS students proposed a bill to change the school’s hours of operation. One might assume that students would propose starting the school day later in order to get more sleep, lengthening the lunch period or even shortening the school day altogether. But this was not the case.

Instead, after researching the legal definition of a school day in Pennsylvania and the after-school needs of CHS students, student representatives found that many students were unable to attend extracurricular activities or participate in sports programs because it was dangerous for them to return home in the dark. Additionally, CHS students were unable to compete for jobs because many nearby schools dismissed earlier, allowing their students to get to work sooner.

As a result of their research, student representatives proposed starting and ending the school day earlier while keeping the duration the same. After several deliberations and town hall meetings involving students, teachers, administrators and parents, the principal of CHS signed the bill into law. Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, the school day started and ended a half-hour earlier.

This process exemplifies how democracy can function successfully in a high school setting. Empowering students to make thoughtful, meaningful decisions related to their school culture stimulates civic discourse, cultivates a sense of community and gives students firsthand, experiential knowledge of our nation’s democratic system. I know the model of school governance shared in this guide has the potential to positively impact your school as much as it did mine.




Marc Brasof
Constitution High School Teacher
Education Fellow, National Constitution Center
Philadelphia, PA

A Brief History of Constitution High School

Constitution High School is Philadelphia's only public school focused on law, democracy and history. Opened in 2006, CHS was born of a groundbreaking partnership between the National Constitution Center and the School District of Philadelphia, supported by the Annenberg Foundation, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and Ballard Spahr LLP. The school draws students from across the city using a lottery admission. A block from Philadelphia's Independence Mall, the school capitalizes on the unparalleled historical resources of the city to deliver a program that emphasizes the study of social sciences through the American experience.

Located on Independence Mall in Historic Philadelphia, just a few blocks from Constitution High School, the National Constitution Center is the first and only nonprofit, nonpartisan institution devoted to the U.S. Constitution and its legacy of freedom. The Center inspires active citizenship and brings the Constitution to life through a state-of-the-art museum experience, engaging theatrical performances and the nation's best Civic Holiday celebrations. The Center houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, the national hub for constitutional education, which offers standards-based civic learning resources to millions of students annually—both at the Center and in the classroom.

The Center has maintained a strong partnership with Constitution High School since the first freshman class entered its doors. CHS faculty, working in hand with the Center's staff, aim to engage students in learning about democracy through a three-pronged approach: civic knowledge, democratic deliberation and public action. CHS serves as a laboratory for new civic learning programs and curricula designed by the Center's education and exhibits departments.

Learning about
democracy
through a
three-pronged
approach:
civic
knowledge,
democratic
deliberation
and public
action

We the School

One of the first programs implemented at Constitution High School was School Congress, an innovative structure for school governance designed by the National Constitution Center and CHS students, teachers and administrators. Using the U.S. government as a model, students and teachers serve in three branches of government and have the ability to introduce and pass legislation that positively impacts the school community. CHS was the first school in the nation to adopt the School Congress model, now known as **We the School**.

Student governments rarely serve as true partners in shaping how schools are governed. Typically, student governments hold elections in the fall, which may resemble democratic elections through their use of campaign speeches and secret ballots—but often tend to be popularity contests. Once elected, members of student governments are usually responsible for planning such activities as the school dance, homecoming and prom. While these events certainly play a central role in any school community, members of student government rarely have an opportunity to represent the needs or concerns of their fellow students in ways that have a significant impact on their school culture.

This familiar model of student government poses several challenges:

- It may not provide a space for students to voice their concerns about or implement meaningful changes in the school community.
- It bears little resemblance to the democratic processes that students will engage in as American citizens.
- It often limits the participation of faculty members. Teachers may serve as student government advisors or committee members, but they rarely work directly with students and administrators to shape a school's policies and procedures.

When implemented successfully, We the School allows students to make meaningful and positive changes

We the School (cont.)

The purpose of We the School is to address these challenges through a model of student government that closely resembles the Constitution’s framework for governance.

Just as the U.S. government is divided into three branches, each endowed with a distinct set of powers, We the School divides power and responsibilities among executive, legislative and judicial branches.

The **executive branch** of We the School includes a Student President, who is advised by an executive cabinet and works in collaboration with the school principal. Like the President of the United States, the President of We the School has the power to sign bills into law or veto them.

Modeled after the U.S. Congress’ bicameral legislature, We the School’s **legislative branch** consists of a House of Students and a Faculty Senate, which meet separately to discuss school issues and introduce, deliberate and vote on legislation.

Finally, much like the U.S. Supreme Court, the **judicial branch** is composed of nine appointed Justices who interpret the School Constitution with respect to specific cases.

It is important to bear in mind that the We the School model will only be successful if members of a school community are comfortable giving students a significant degree of power and responsibility. When implemented successfully, We the School allows students to make meaningful and positive changes with the thoughtful guidance of teachers, administrators and other adults. At CHS, for example, student leaders have been responsible for changing the school lunch policy (which now allows students to eat outside) and the school day schedule (which now begins and ends earlier, enabling students to pursue after-school activities and maintain part-time jobs).

We the School also works best if several key components exist, including:

- writing and ratifying a School Constitution.
- ensuring a balance of power among three branches of government.
- establishing a clear process for passing legislation and amending the School Constitution.

That being said, the way We the School is implemented will likely vary from school to school. No two school communities are the same, which means that key aspects of this model, such as election procedures or specific responsibilities of student representatives will differ. In order for We the School to function successfully, it must be tailored to meet the needs and goals of its school. Students and faculty should review the School Constitution each year.

case study 01 / The Dress Code Policy: Conflict and Compromise

by Marc Brasof

It's June of 2007, Constitution High School's second year of operation. The outside temperature is around 90 degrees, but in the Faculty Senate conference room it's much warmer. Diante, the acting representative of the House of Students, is presenting the House version of the School Dress Code Policy Bill to the Faculty Senate. When faculty members proposed a new, more conservative policy, students responded with their own bill.

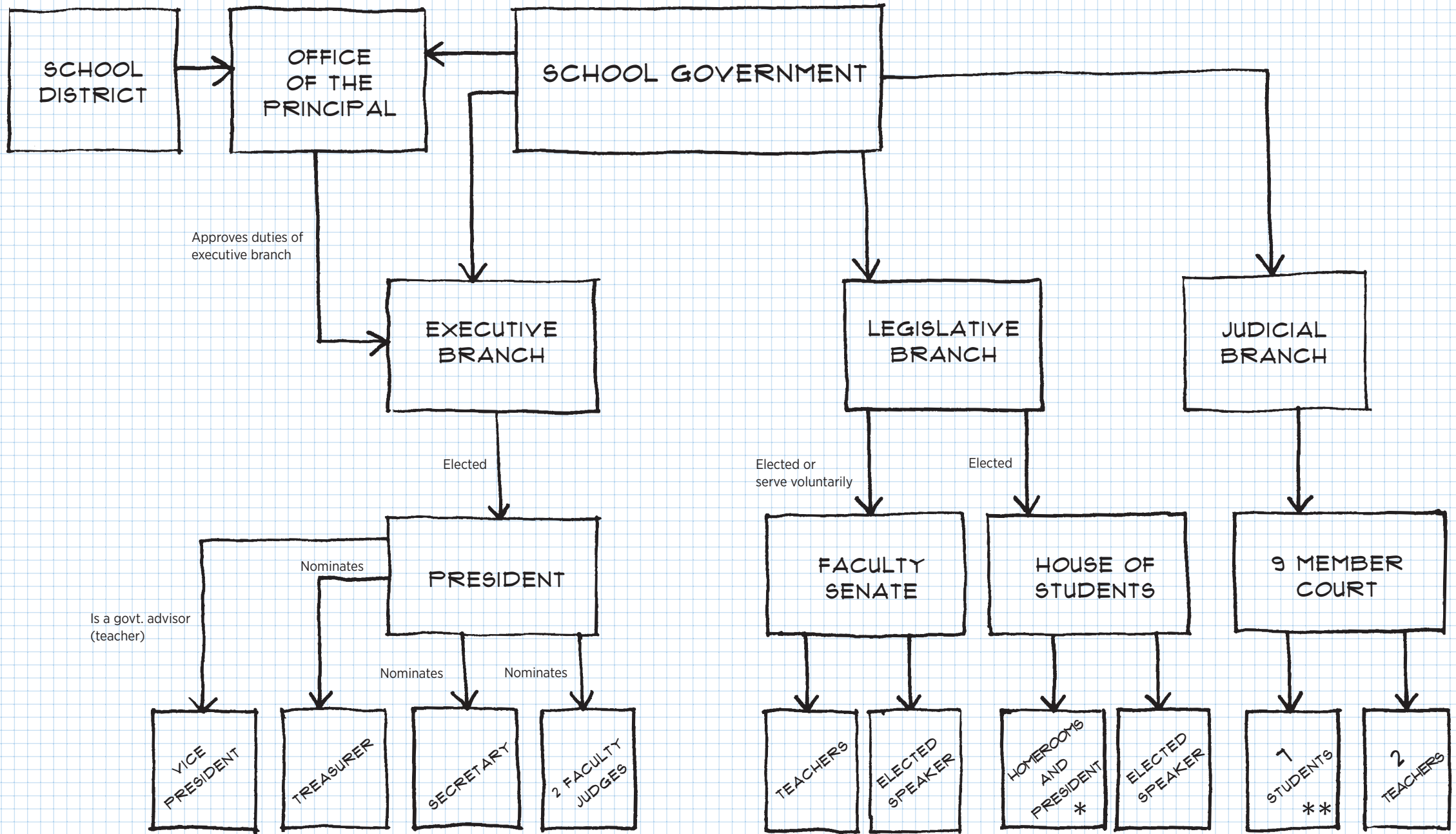
CHS's legislative branch debates the advantages and disadvantages of the two propositions, and a new policy is accepted. Diante leaves the conference room frustrated. Running after the sophomore, I ask him what is wrong. "The faculty destroyed our bill," he says solemnly. "No they didn't," I respond. "You just didn't get everything you wanted. Sure, you'll have to wear a collared shirt now, but you can choose any color and style. Plus, you got your jeans clause. A compromise has been reached." Still, Diante walks away frustrated.

But during the House of Students meeting the next day, he is much more upbeat. After reporting to the student-elected representatives, Diante speaks about victories including the acceptance of the students' jeans clause. Over those few weeks of bill writing and active deliberation, Diante, the faculty, and the student body learned a powerful lesson: in a pluralistic society, you will not always get everything you want. Democracy comes from our ability to reach a compromise between strong-minded opponents so that the greater good can be served. Through processes enumerated in the School Constitution, the two constituencies created a policy that balanced the needs of students, families and faculty with the mission of the school. This is just one example of how we teach democracy and civic responsibility at CHS.

Excerpted from "Living Democracy: How Constitution High School Molds Better Citizens," [Social Education](#) (2009), Volume 73, Issue 5.

For a We the School case study on school lunch policy, read "Student Input Improves Behavior, Fosters Leadership," [Kappan](#) (2011), Volume 93, Issue 2.

Chart 01: We the School Organization



Nominees require 2/3 approval from House of Students

* At CHS, 2 students represent each homeroom.

** After being nominated and confirmed by the Legislature, both teacher judges select 7 student judges.

Stage One: Writing and Ratifying a School Constitution

What is a School Constitution?

To establish *We the School*, start with the writing and ratifying of a School Constitution. An effective School Constitution establishes a solid foundation by outlining the school governance model, including how student representatives are elected, what the President's responsibilities are, and how bills are introduced and passed. Many high school students are already familiar with school handbooks, which spell out everything from the bell schedule to cafeteria rules. But few are familiar with School Constitutions, which, when written well, provide students, faculty and administrators with the structure and function of a democratic school government.

The School Constitution also can include a student Bill of Rights. For many Americans, the Bill of Rights is the essence of the U.S. Constitution, perhaps because it safeguards individual liberties—speech, press and religion—that are fundamental components of living in a democratic society. In fact, when the Constitution was ratified by three-fourths of the states in 1787-88, it was done so with a promise that a Bill of Rights would be added. You likewise may find that including a Student Bill of Rights in your School Constitution is worthwhile.

While there is no one correct way to organize the writing and ratifying of a School Constitution, it is essential that students are involved in the process from the very beginning for several reasons:

- It allows students to apply their civic knowledge of the U.S. Constitution to the experience of writing their own School Constitution.
- It provides students with an opportunity to deliberate about the many decisions that need to be made when writing a constitution, such as how to separate power among the branches of government fairly, whether to include a Bill of Rights and, if so, what rights should be protected.
- Students are more likely to understand and respect the guidelines and procedures established in their School Constitution if they are involved in writing the document.

Preparing to Write the School Constitution

Before students can begin writing a School Constitution, they must have a solid understanding of the U.S.

Constitution and the framework of the U.S. government.

It may make sense to begin the writing process in history classes after students have completed a unit about the U.S. Constitution. The following list suggests some of the key principles from the U.S. Constitution that students should understand before writing a School Constitution:

- Branches of Government
- Separation of Powers
- Checks and Balances
- Eligibility Requirements
- Rule of Law
- Popular Sovereignty

See Appendix A for online teaching resources.

Once students have a solid understanding of the U.S. Constitution and government, they can begin writing drafts of a School Constitution with the guidance of school faculty and/or administrators. The specific way in which students organize themselves will vary based on the structure of a given school community. In some schools, it may work best for students to write the drafts in their history classes, whereas, in other schools, students can work in their homerooms.

At CHS, students in each ninth grade history class divided into four groups to write drafts of different sections of the School Constitution. Each group worked on one of the following four sections: legislative branch, executive branch, judicial branch and amending procedures. Once each of the six ninth grade history classes had a complete draft, pairs of classes worked together to consolidate their drafts. All ninth graders and CHS teachers then participated in a half-day Constitutional Convention in which the three drafts were combined into a single School Constitution, which was ratified by at least three-fourths of the students and three-fourths of the teachers. The next year, a school-wide amending convention was held with the purpose of revising the School Constitution and adding a Bill of Rights.

Appendix B provides a suggested School Constitution template.

Helpful Hints: Running a Constitutional Convention

- Assign rooms to each section of the Constitution, including rooms for amending and Bill of Rights committees.
- Have teachers and students help lead the discussions, and assign students to be recorders.
- During deliberations, students should not expect everyone in the room to agree on every detail. Preparing questions prior to the event will help keep discussions focused.
- Each room should assign a “runner” who will visit other committees and then return to discuss issues regarding checks and balances and the separation of powers.

You will likely find that your school community needs to take a unique approach to writing and ratifying a School Constitution, depending on the number of students in your school, time constraints and other factors. The next section includes a step-by-step process for writing and ratifying a School Constitution.

Process of Writing and Ratifying a School Constitution

Step One: Hold a meeting of school stakeholders.

Stakeholders will vary based on your school community, but may include:

- Student government leaders
- Students interested in leadership roles
- Teachers
- Principal and other administrators
- Parents
- Members of the school board

Step Two: Designate a date to hold a school-wide Constitutional Convention.

To maximize involvement, this event should be public and open to all stakeholders who are interested in participating.

Step Three: Inform all members of the school community about We the School by distributing a newsletter to teachers, students and parents outlining the goals and timeline.

Step Four: Create a We the School Information Headquarters

for teachers and students to learn about news and events. Depending on how information is distributed in your school community, the headquarters may be a bulletin board, a website or another convenient and accessible location.

Step Five: Students begin writing multiple drafts of the School Constitution, with the guidance of faculty and/or administrators.

Step Six: Students edit drafts of the School Constitution and consolidate them into a single draft.

Step Seven: Students, faculty, administrators and all other interested stakeholders participate in a school-wide Constitutional Convention. The participants work together to edit sections of the final draft of the School Constitution and conclude the convention by voting on whether or not the Constitution should be ratified. Three-fourths of all participating

stakeholders must vote in favor of the Constitution for final ratification.

On Constitution Day (September 17th) in subsequent years, display a copy of the School Constitution and invite students to read and sign it.

Stage Two: Student Elections

Process of Organizing School Elections

After members of your school community have written and ratified a School Constitution, it is time to hold elections for student representatives and the President. Holding elections is a crucial component of creating a School Government because it gives students an immediate opportunity to exercise their voting rights and to witness their School Constitution in action. In order to make student elections as successful as possible, make sure that your School Constitution includes guidelines for determining the number of student representatives who will be elected, the eligibility requirements that all elected student representatives and the President must meet, the campaign events that candidates must participate in, and the voting procedures that students must follow.

Step One: Announce the beginning of election season.

Although your School Constitution will establish when student elections should be held each year, it is still important for the principal, student government advisor or other school leader to announce the beginning of election season. This announcement also should remind students of the qualifications they must meet for office, the rules of campaigning and other pertinent information, as specified in the School Constitution.

Step Two: Students complete candidate profile sheets.

Once a student decides to run for office, he or she completes a candidate profile sheet, which is posted on the We the School Information Headquarters for students to read. These sheets take the place of traditional campaign speeches by informing the student body about a candidate’s background, qualifications and goals.

Helpful Hints: Holding Student Elections

- In keeping with the spirit of a legitimate election, have stakeholders present when ballots are collected and counted. This helps to minimize possible accusations of a fraudulent election process.
- Establish an election commission of independent parties, such as parents or community leaders, to count votes.

See Appendix C for a candidate profile sheet template and a sample profile.

Step Three: Candidates begin campaigning.

The campaign should last no longer than two weeks to maximize student interest. Candidates should follow your school’s campaign rules and guidelines. On the date established by your School Constitution, students running for the presidency must participate in an issues-based debate that all students attend.

Step Four: Hold elections.

Students vote for representatives and the President on Election Day, according to the voting procedures established by the School Constitution.

Registering to Vote

At CHS, students had to register to vote before Election Day. The purpose of holding a “voter registration drive” was to teach students firsthand that, once they turn 18, they will need to register to vote before casting a ballot in a U.S. election. The entire student body registered to vote.

How is the Faculty Senate chosen?

While student representatives are elected, members of the Faculty Senate can be selected in a variety of ways depending on the needs of your school community. In a small school, for example, it may be possible for every teacher to serve on the Faculty Senate and hold meetings during professional development days. In a larger school, however, it may be more realistic to have one teacher from each department serve on the Faculty Senate and to hold meetings after school.

At CHS, serving on the Faculty Senate is entirely voluntary, but all teachers have chosen to do so. Meetings are held on professional development days.

Stage Three: We the School Meetings

Step One: Hold the first meetings of the House of Students and Faculty Senate.

At the first meeting, members should receive a copy of the School Constitution, templates for writing a bill, literature on current school policies, literature about the process needed to organize a town hall meeting, an overview of the budget, meeting procedures and a copy of the meeting attendance policy.

Each school year, during the first meeting of the House of Students at Constitution High School, students also begin discussing school issues and organize into issue-based sub-committees.

Step Two: Hold regular meetings of the House of Students and Faculty Senate.

Meeting times should be clearly articulated in the School Constitution and posted on the We the School Information Headquarters. Each meeting should have a prepared agenda to keep the meeting focused and moving. Student representatives are responsible for communicating news to members of their respective homerooms on a regular basis, as established by the School Constitution.

At CHS, House of Students representatives meet for at least one hour on a weekly basis.

Stage Four: We the School in Action

Step One: Draft a bill.

A bill forms when either a member of the House of Students or the Faculty Senate has an idea that addresses a need or concern in the school community. This person serves as the sponsor of the bill and completes the *Bill Template Form*. See [Appendix D](#).

When completing the Bill Template Form, the sponsor (or sponsors) first needs to name the bill. For example, a bill may be called Dress Code HS 1-2012. This numbering system indicates that the bill originated in the House of Students (HS) and that it was the first bill introduced in the House of Students in 2012. If it had originated in the Faculty Senate, it would be called FS 1-2012.

Once a sponsor completes the Bill Template Form, he or she may introduce the bill at any time during the academic year by placing it in a box located outside of the principal’s office. The Secretary of We the School, who is nominated by the President and approved by the House of Students, is responsible for distributing copies of the bill to members of both the House of Students and the Faculty Senate.

Step Two: Review the bill.

In the United States Congress, a specific committee (such as the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs) reviews a bill before it heads to the floor of the House of Representatives or the Senate. Since the We the School model does not mandate the use of committees but can form issue-specific subgroups, a bill begins its review in the chamber where it originates. If a student sponsors a bill, it begins review in the House of Students; if a teacher sponsors a bill, it begins review in the Faculty Senate.

**Helpful Hints:
Writing a Bill**

- Consider tackling a smaller issue when composing the first bill.
- Remember that it is important for everyone to become comfortable with the legislative process. Holding conversations with students and faculty about the merits and limitations of a bill can help foster this comfort.
- Communication is extremely important during the drafting of new legislation because once a bill becomes law it must be enforced in order to work successfully. Be sure that representatives consult school and district policies, hold town hall meetings to keep citizens informed, engage in direct conversation with school leadership, and negotiate as needed.

Let's say that a student sponsors a bill and begins the review process in the House of Students. The student sponsor will first summarize the reasons for the bill and its intended outcomes. After the student's presentation, student representatives have the opportunity to ask questions and offer constructive criticism. Once the bill has been thoroughly vetted, student representatives vote on whether to pass it. If a majority of members (more than 50 percent) approve the bill, it proceeds to the Faculty Senate for review.

The Faculty Senate then follows the same process for reviewing the proposed bill. But, since the bill originated in the House of Students, the Senate leader provides a brief overview of the bill. Members of the Senate have the opportunity to ask questions and offer constructive criticism of the bill before voting on it. If a majority of senators vote in favor of the bill, it proceeds to the School President for review. This process remains the same when the bill originates in the Faculty Senate.

Step Three: Send the bill to the President for review.

If both chambers pass a bill, it is sent to the President for final review. Bear in mind that the President (a student) works closely with the school principal, meaning that the two need to be in agreement about key decisions. In the instances that the principal and the student body President do not agree, the bill is sent back to the Congress for revisions or the bill is considered vetoed.

The School President has three options:

1. He or she can sign the bill. If this happens, the bill becomes school law.
2. He or she can veto the bill, noting his or her objections. If this happens, the bill is sent back to the House of Students and the Faculty Senate for further review and a second vote. It can still become a law as long as 2/3 of the House and 2/3 of the Senate vote for the bill.
3. He or she can "sit on" the bill, meaning neither sign it nor veto it. After ten days, the bill becomes law.

Step Four: Inform members of the school community about the new law.

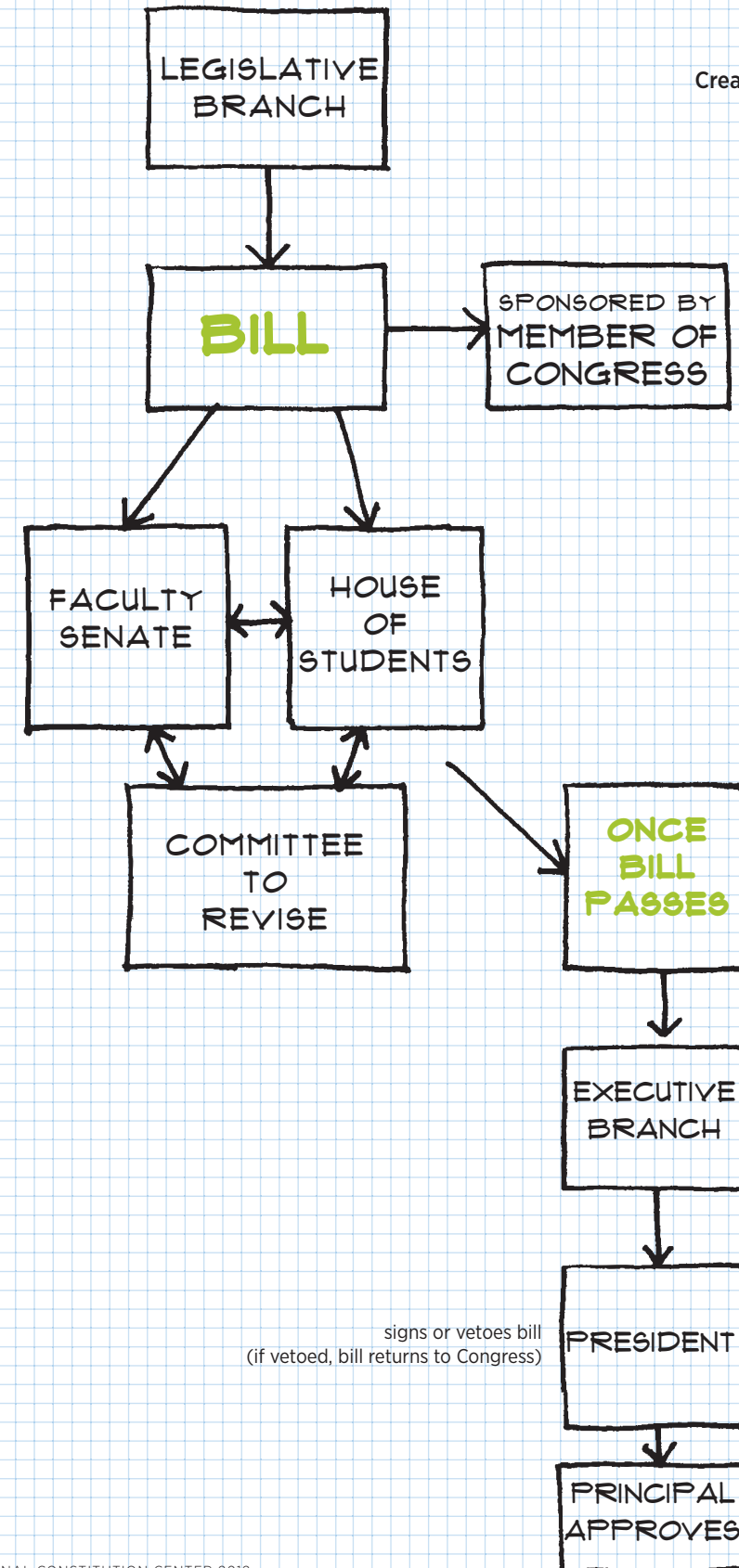
Once a bill becomes a law, members of the House of Students and Faculty Senate should explain it to their constituents (other students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.). Copies of the new law should be posted on the We the School Information Headquarters. The principal also may send a letter home to parents, informing them about how the bill will impact the school community.

Step Five: Implement the bill.

After a bill becomes a school law, it is important to establish oversight. Laws also can include a "sunset clause" for policies that might need further review.

At CHS, members of the executive branch meet weekly to stay updated on all programs. In addition, the Student President meets weekly with the school principal to keep lines of communication open and programs transparent. Some bills at CHS have also necessitated the formation of committees to allocate funds to student groups. Each of these committees has a chair, who is responsible for reporting to the House of Students. Committee membership is open to the entire school population.

Chart 02: Creating and Passing a Bill



case study 02 / Popularity Contest Contested

by Marc Brasof

A popular student runs for student-body President and wins more than 80 percent of the vote—not an uncommon situation in high schools today. The day after the election, the administration discovers that the newly elected President was unqualified to run for office. In a typical high school, administrators would remove the student from office. But at Constitution High School, removing the student without due process would be unconstitutional.

This was the case in CHS's 2007 Presidential election. During our school-wide Constitutional Convention, students and staff agreed that elected officials should have good disciplinary records—after all, they are being charged with the weighty responsibility of creating and evaluating school policy. In this case, the elected student had gotten into trouble too many times, yet the behavior record had not been made available to the government advisors before the election.

Upholding the election would damage our school democracy by undermining the qualifications for office. To make matters worse, the student hadn't yet served in office, so CHS couldn't hold an impeachment trial as outlined in our Constitution. We had the first constitutional crisis in our mini-democracy.

In the United States, when the Constitution needs further interpretation, citizens petition the Supreme Court. So that's what we did. The principal petitioned our school's Supreme Court, which is comprised of seven students and two faculty members appointed using a similar process as the U.S. judicial branch.

Both the plaintiff and defendant presented their cases to the judges. The court opinion, co-authored by a faculty and student judge, concluded that a large mandate from the student body does not overrule the school's social contract established through the CHS Constitution. Students were then surveyed, and more than 60 percent of the school agreed with the court's decision. A peaceful transition of power occurred with another election, and our mini-democracy was successful.

Excerpted from "Living Democracy: How Constitution High School Molds Better Citizens," *Social Education* (2009), Volume 73, Issue 5.

For a We the School case study on school lunch policy, read "Student Input Improves Behavior, Fosters Leadership," *Kappan* (2011), Volume 93, Issue 2.

Teaching Resources

National Constitution Center educational resources
constitutioncenter.org/education

Key constitutional concepts video and accompanying lesson plans from Sunnylands Classroom
sunnylandsclassroom.org

Annenberg Classroom civic education resources
annenbergclassroom.org

iCivics
icivics.org

Textbooks and supplementary materials
Government Alive! Power, Politics, and You,
through TCI
teachtci.com

We the Students: Supreme Court Cases for and about Students from the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project
wcl.american.edu/marshallbrennan

School Constitution Template

This template serves as a model for a School Constitution. Because each school community is different, students, teachers and administrators will need to think about how to adapt this model so that it works for their particular needs and goals. Sections of the School Constitution that will likely vary from school to school are indicated in **blue type**.

Throughout the template, sidebars also offer suggestions on everything from how often the House of Students should meet to how to determine what qualifications students need in order to run for office.

School Name Constitution

We, the faculty and students of **School Name**, in order to form a more perfect learning environment, have drafted this document to serve as our School Constitution. It is based on our belief that the school's governance structure should be based on the democratic principles outlined in the United States Constitution.

Article. I **The Legislative Branch**

SECTION 1. Bicameral Legislature

The School Congress will be a bicameral legislature, made up of the following two bodies: the House of Students and the Faculty Senate. The legislature shall meet on a regular basis, as outlined in Sections 4 and 5.

SECTION 2. House of Students

The House of Students shall be comprised of **Insert number** members from each **homeroom/social studies class**. All students enrolled at **School Name** who are in good academic standing may serve as representatives. At **School Name**, good academic standing is defined as:

Insert criteria

Because each school community is different, students, teachers and administrators will need to think about how to adapt this model so that it works for their particular needs and goals.

School Constitution Template (cont.)

Students who would like to be elected as representatives will have **insert number of weeks** to campaign according to **School Name's** campaigning guidelines. As part of campaigning, candidates will outline the reasons why they would like to serve as representatives in the House of Students.

Elections will be held on **insert date**. Each student will be able to cast one vote for a representative from his or her **homeroom/social studies class**. A representative's term will be one year, from **insert date to insert date**. If, for any reason, vacancies occur, the President shall designate a time for new elections to be held.

Once elected, members of the House of Students will elect a Speaker of the House, who will also serve a one-year term.

SECTION 3. Responsibilities of Student Representatives Student representatives will:

1. Attend all House of Students meetings. These meetings will take place every **insert number of weeks**. If a representative cannot attend a meeting, he or she should fill out a Missed Meeting Form and give it to the Speaker of the House at least 24 hours before the meeting. If a member habitually misses meetings, he or she may lose his or her office. Attendance rules shall be set by the House at its first meeting following the school general election.
2. Make a monthly report on the actions of the House to his or her **homeroom/social studies class**.
3. Maintain good academic standing and continue to meet the qualifications for holding office, as defined in Section 2.

The Speaker of the House will:

1. Draft agendas for and facilitate House of Students meetings. These agendas will include upcoming bills and business that needs to be addressed.
2. Maintain a We the School Information Headquarters, which will list upcoming events, provide information about pending bills, and communicate ideas and concerns discussed by the House.
3. Create a suggestion box in a central location that gives students an opportunity to submit concerns or suggestions to the House of Students.
4. Deliver all bills passed by both chambers to the President for a signature or veto.

Suggested Qualifications for Student Representatives:

- Must maintain a specific GPA with no failing grades
- Must maintain good behavior
- Must maintain an excellent attendance record
- Must have few or no violations of the student code of conduct (i.e. detentions, suspensions, etc.)
- Must not hold an office in either the executive or judicial branch

SECTION 4. Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate shall be comprised of all teachers at **School Name** who choose to serve as senators. At the first meeting of the term, teachers will select a Senate Leader.

SECTION 5. Responsibilities of Faculty Senators

Faculty senators will:

1. Attend all Faculty Senate meetings. These meetings will take place every **insert number weeks**. If a member cannot attend a meeting, he or she should fill out a Missed Meeting Form and give it to the Senate Leader at least 24 hours before the meeting. If a member habitually misses meetings, he or she may lose his or her office. Attendance rules shall be set by the Senate at its first meeting following the school general election.

The Senate Leader will:

1. Draft agendas for and facilitate Faculty Senate meetings. These agendas will include upcoming bills and business that needs to be addressed.
2. Maintain a We the School Information Headquarters, which will list upcoming events, provide information about pending bills, and communicate ideas and concerns discussed by the Senate.
3. Create a suggestion box located in the faculty room that gives teachers and other staff members an opportunity to submit concerns or suggestions to the Faculty Senate.

SECTION 6. Meeting Requirements

1. All meetings of the House of Students and Faculty Senate shall be open to any member of the school community. Only members of each body may speak and vote at the meetings, unless otherwise designated by the leader of the House of Students or Faculty Senate.
2. The Speaker of the House and the Senate Leader will communicate and make known meeting times and locations at least two days prior to a meeting.
3. The House and Senate shall have the ability to set their own calendar and designate meeting times and locations. The President shall have the ability to call emergency sessions of both the House and Senate with one-day notice to all members.
4. All meetings require a quorum, which shall be at least one-

School Constitution Template (cont.)

half of all members present, to hold a meeting. If a quorum is not present, no votes may be taken.

SECTION 7. The Legislative Process

A member of either the House or Senate can introduce a bill at any time during the academic year by placing it in the “hopper,” a box located outside of the principal’s office. Members of the House and Senate do not need permission to introduce/ sponsor a bill. The drafted bill must include the following:

1. The name of the chamber (House or Senate) where the bill originated.
2. The title of the bill.
3. The name and signature of the sponsor(s). If more than one person sponsors a bill, the names and signatures of all sponsors must be included. This ensures that the sponsor(s) created and approved the bill before bringing it to the floor for discussion.
4. Executive Summary. The sponsors should include a written summary that outlines the objectives of the bill and answers the following questions:
 - Why is the bill needed?
 - What does the sponsor believe the bill will achieve?
 - What is the historical context or precedent for the bill?
 - What are the bill’s key components?
 - How will the bill positively impact the school community?

See Appendix for the Bill Template.

Once a bill is introduced, it can be passed if any of the following happens:

1. A majority of members of both chambers passes the bill, and the President also approves the bill, signing it into law.
2. The President fails to note his or her objections to the bill and return it to the chamber in which it originated within 10 days of the bill’s passage.

If the President vetoes a bill:

The House of Students and the Faculty Senate have the right to override a Presidential veto if two-thirds of the members of each chamber vote again to approve the bill.

Article. II The Executive Branch

SECTION 1. Executive Cabinet

The Executive Cabinet shall be comprised of the following positions: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Each member of the Executive Cabinet will serve a one-year term and communicate the ideas and concerns generated at Executive Cabinet meetings to their respective colleagues or constituents.

SECTION 2. President: Qualifications and Responsibilities

A student will serve as the President of **School Name**. All students enrolled at **School Name** who are in good academic standing may run for President. At **School Name**, good academic standing is defined as:

Insert Criteria

Students who would like to run for President will have **insert number of weeks** to campaign according to **School Name’s** campaigning guidelines. As part of campaigning, candidates will give speeches outlining the reasons why they would like to serve as President. These speeches will occur on **insert date**.

Elections will be held on **Insert Date**. Each student will be able to cast one vote for President. A President’s term will be one year, from **insert date to insert date**. If, for any reason, a vacancy or impeachment occurs, the principal shall designate a time for a new election to be held.

The President of **School Name** will:

1. Deliver a **State of the School** address by **select date**.
2. Lead Executive Cabinet meetings.
3. Attend House of Students meetings as a non-voting, observing member.
4. Decide whether to sign bills into laws or veto them.

All of the above responsibilities are subject to final approval of **School Name’s principal.**

Suggested Qualifications for President

- Must maintain a specific GPA with no failing grades (consider creating a higher GPA minimum than that required of student representatives)
- Must maintain excellent behavior
- Must maintain an excellent attendance record
- Must have no violations of the student code of conduct (i.e. detentions, suspensions, etc.)
- Must have demonstrated leadership skills
- Must not hold an office in either the legislative or judicial branch

School Constitution Template (cont.)

SECTION 3. Vice President: Qualifications and Responsibilities

The student government advisor of **School Name** will serve as the Vice President. A Vice President's term will be one year, from **insert date** to **insert date**.

The Vice President will:

1. Attend Executive Cabinet meetings.
2. Advise the President.
3. Attend Faculty Senate meetings as a non-voting, observing member.
4. Oversee election procedures as the ranking member of the Election Commission. This includes:
 - Distributing detailed information about election dates and campaign guidelines.
 - Ensuring that candidates know and follow election rules and procedures.
 - Informing all students about their opportunity to vote in elections.
 - Overseeing voting on Election Day.

SECTION 4. Secretary: Qualifications and Responsibilities

The President will nominate a student to serve as Secretary. The President's nominee must not hold an office in either the legislative or judicial branch. Upon approval of two-thirds of the House of Students, the student will begin serving a one-year term as Secretary, from **insert date to insert date**.

The Secretary will:

1. Serve on the Executive Cabinet.
2. Record meeting attendance at all Executive Cabinet and House of Students meetings.
3. Take minutes during Executive Cabinet and House of Students meetings and distribute copies to each **homeroom/ social studies class** so that members of the school community can review them.

SECTION 5. Treasurer: Qualifications and Responsibilities

The President will nominate a student to serve as Treasurer. The President's nominee must not hold an office in either the legislative or judicial branch. Upon approval of two-thirds of the House of Students, the student will begin serving a one-year

term as Treasurer, from **insert date to insert date**.

The Treasurer will:

1. Serve on the Executive Cabinet.
2. With the President's approval, allocate funds for school events.

Article. III

The Judicial Branch

SECTION 1. The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of **School Name** will be a single judicial body comprised of nine Justices who are responsible for interpreting the laws and determining the constitutionality of issues that arise at **School Name**.

SECTION 2. Justices: Qualifications and Responsibilities

The President of **School Name** will select two teachers to serve as faculty Justices on the Supreme Court. These nominations must be approved by a two-thirds vote of both the House of Students and the Faculty Senate.

Once confirmed, the two faculty Justices will select the remaining seven student Justices.

All students enrolled at **School Name** who are in good academic standing may be considered by the faculty Justices to serve as student Justices. At **School Name**, good academic standing is defined as:

Insert criteria

The two faculty Justices will conduct interviews with all qualified and interested students during which students must demonstrate a core understanding of the judicial process and a capacity to analyze hypothetical legal scenarios. This interview serves as a confirmation process for all student Justices.

If, for any reason, vacancies occur, the President shall select a new faculty Justice or the faculty Justices shall select a new student Justice.

Once selected, the nine Justices will serve one-year terms

Suggested Qualifications for Student Justices

- Must maintain a specific GPA with no failing grades (consider creating a higher GPA minimum than that required of student representatives)
- Must maintain excellent behavior
- Must maintain an excellent attendance record with few or no absences or latenesses
- Must have no violations of the student code of conduct (i.e. detentions, suspensions, etc.)
- Must have demonstrated the ability to think objectively
- Must not hold an office in either the legislative or executive branch

School Constitution Template (cont.)

from **insert date to insert date**. They will:

1. Review all cases brought before the Supreme Court.
2. Provide guidance for how issues should be resolved based upon their interpretation of **School Name's** Constitution.
3. Establish judicial precedent for **School Name** based upon their rulings.

Article IV. Impeachment

SECTION 1. Impeachment Process

1. A member of the Executive Cabinet (President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer) may be impeached for violating any of the qualifications of office, neglecting to attend meetings or failing to fulfill his or her responsibilities.
2. In order to begin the impeachment process, a bill must be introduced in the House of Students or the Faculty Senate.
3. Members of both chambers must approve a removal from office with a two-thirds vote.
4. Before a final vote in both chambers occurs, a member facing removal from office has the right to speak in his or her own defense.

Article V. Amendments

SECTION 1. Amendments

This Constitution may be amended if the following occurs:

1. Two-thirds of the House of Students and two-thirds of the Faculty Senate vote in favor of the proposed amendment;
 2. Three-fourths of the school community votes in favor of the proposed amendment;
- and
3. The amendment does not violate any school, school district, state, or federal rules or regulations.

Article VI. Ratification

SECTION 1. Ratification

This Constitution shall be ratified by a three-fourths vote of the school community, which includes the principal, faculty, staff, students, parents, and any other members of the community at **School Name**.

Candidate Profile Sheet

Students must fill out a candidate profile sheet before they run for office. This ensures that students have reflected on the reasons why they would like to run for office as well as what they hope to accomplish by serving in School Government.

Name: _____

Homeroom/Social Studies Class: _____

Why would you like to run for office? _____

Please list your qualifications for this office. What kind of experience have you had that you think would help you with this position?

Members of School Government are representatives of the student body. Please list three concerns or challenges you think the school faces. What, specifically, should be done about these?

Concern #1: _____

Steps that should be taken: _____

Concern #2: _____

Steps that should be taken: _____

Concern #3: _____

Steps that should be taken: _____

Candidate Profile Sheet: SAMPLE

Name: James Smith

Social Studies Class: Mr. Roberts, Room 125, 2nd Period

Why would you like to run for office?

I would like to run for office because I feel that I understand the needs of this school and would like to participate in a student organization that is trying to meet those needs.

Please list your qualifications for this office. What kind of experience have you had that you think would help you with this position?

I served on Student Council last year. I also volunteer at a local hospital.

Members of School Government are representatives of the student body. Please list three concerns or challenges you think the school faces. Why do you think these are challenges or concerns? What, specifically should be done about these?

Concern #1:

I do not think students should have to ask to use the bathroom.

Steps that should be taken:

We should have a bathroom pass that is available for our use during class. As long as students do not abuse this privilege, they should be able to use the bathroom without asking.

Concern #2:

The snack machines do not have healthy snacks.

Steps that should be taken:

I would work with School Government to pass a bill so that we can have healthier options in the snack machine.

Concern #3:

Students cannot use the library for research during free periods.

Steps that should be taken:

School Government should work with the librarian and principal to find a way that students can use the library during their free periods.

Bill Template

Students and faculty should use this template for writing bills. This ensures uniformity and consistency between the two chambers.

Each bill has a name that includes an initialing system. For example, a bill may be called Dress Code Bill HS 1-2012. The letter portion indicates where the bill originated. If the bill originates in the House of Students, circle HS. If it originates in the Faculty Senate, circle FS. The number portion indicates when the bill originated. For example, HS 1-2012 means that the bill is the first bill to originate in the House of Students in 2012.

Title of Bill _____

HS/FS (Circle one) No. _____

Name of Sponsor(s) _____

Signature of Sponsor(s) _____

Proposed (Date) _____

Executive Summary (*Why is the bill needed? What will the bill achieve? What is the historical context or precedent for the bill? What are the bill's key components? How will the bill positively impact the school community?*):

Plan of Action:

Methods of Enforcement:

Sample Bill

HS 1-2012

Sponsors: Joe Smith & Jane Jones

Resolution to Change School Hours at Constitution High

Presently, school hours at Constitution High School are 8:20 AM to 3:24 PM. This petition is written to persuade the teachers and faculty at Constitution High School to reconsider the school hours presently in place. We are asking that hours be changed to an earlier time such as 7:50 AM to 2:54 PM. The number of hours students are in school would not change; the school day would remain 7 hours and 7 minutes long. By changing the hours, there would be a great increase in student participation across the whole school because the students' parents would allow them to attend such activities and not have to worry about it being dark outside when they leave. The students would be able to complete their extracurricular activity and still have time to do homework and other activities outside of school within a reasonable time.

Extracurricular activities are a huge part of any school. Student involvement in these types of activities is greatly encouraged and very rewarding. Many of our students would like to stay after school and participate in activities. However, the students cannot because of the present hours. During the winter months, students who participate in extracurricular activities might not get out of school until it is dark. Some of the students' parents will not allow them to participate in activities because of this, or because the students get home too late or live too far away. By changing the hours, there would be a great increase in student participation across the whole school because the students' parents would allow them to attend such activities, not have to worry about it being dark outside when they leave, and the students will be able to complete their extracurricular activity and still have time to do homework and other activities outside of school within a reasonable time.

In addition to this, some students also have jobs that they maintain. Every student comes from a different background, and some may struggle with money, causing them to have to work. Getting out later from school will possibly make it harder to obtain a job, or to keep the one that the student already holds. Though school is very important, a job to some students is just as important.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, most high school students are dismissed between 2:15 PM and 3:00 PM. Our students would be able to complete their assignments earlier, thus being able to participate in sports and other extracurricular and social activities. Constitution High School is one of the only schools that follows this 8:20 AM to 3:24 PM schedule. For example, the students at George Washington High School are required to be in at 7:45. They leave the school at 2:30. If the George Washington High School teachers and students are able to get up and make it to school at 7:45, then the students, teachers and faculty at Constitution High School can arrive by 7:50. By allowing our students to enter and leave earlier, this grants them more free time at the end of the day for anything they feel is necessary to do.

WHEREFORE, the students at Constitution High School are proposing that the faculty and students allow the hours to be amended in the furtherance of their academic, athletic, and social balance and consider this proposal as a great opportunity to increase student achievement and participation.

Acknowledgements

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The National Constitution Center is the first and only nonprofit, nonpartisan institution devoted to the most powerful vision of freedom ever expressed: the U.S. Constitution. Located on Independence Mall in Historic Philadelphia, the birthplace of American freedom, the Center illuminates constitutional ideals and inspires active citizenship as an interactive museum and a national town hall. The Center also houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, the national headquarters for constitutional education, which offers cutting-edge civic learning resources both at the museum and in the classroom. Freedom is calling. Answer it at the National Constitution Center.

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Constitution High School is Philadelphia's only public school focused on law, democracy, and history. Opened in 2006, CHS was born of a groundbreaking partnership between the National Constitution Center and the School District of Philadelphia, supported by the Annenberg Foundation, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and Ballard Spahr LLP. A block from Philadelphia's Independence Mall, the school capitalizes on the unparalleled historical resources of the city to deliver a program that emphasizes the study of social sciences through the American experience.

Constitution High School
18 S. 7th St
Philadelphia, PA 19106

★ *Freedom is Calling* ★

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