



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

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Assistant Superintendent  
Community Partnerships & Well-Being

February 5, 2020

Dear Members of the School Committee,

In September, 2019, Mr. John Aloisi, Social Sciences teacher at Shrewsbury High School, collaborated with Shrewsbury Town Manager, Mr. Kevin Mizikar, Assistant Town Manager, Ms. Kristen Las, and me to create a Project-Based Learning (PBL) opportunity aimed to deepen student knowledge and understanding of local government and municipalities.

## **Background**

Research on PBL indicates that when students engage in high quality experiences, they demonstrate deep, long-lasting learning outcomes. This educational endeavor included 21 students in Mr. Aloisi's American Government class, an elective offered at SHS. The learning objectives consisted of the following:

1. Explain the purpose and operation of various local government departments.
2. Explain the legal and fiscal relationship between state and local government.

Mr. Aloisi focused teaching and learning on the Edgemere Development Project. Mr. Mizikar and Ms. Las facilitated in-class learning experiences where students learned invaluable lessons regarding the full scope of a building project, from start to finish. Students also developed in-depth knowledge of the steps involved from the purchase of property to building occupancy.

## **Action Steps**

Students learned about the scope and timeline of the Edgemere Development Project, including the involvement of municipal and local government, by focusing on one town department. Students successfully completed the following tasks:

- Select a department of interest.
- Construct a series of research questions relating to the impact this project has on that department.
- Schedule face-to-face interviews (groups of three) with a representative from that department to discuss the impact that the project has on the department.
- Following your meeting, present detailed information to your classmates and share the significance of the department on the Edgemere Development project.
- Write an essay explaining the educational benefit of meeting with a town official, making a connection to another aspect(s) of your life, and creating a written reflection.
- Send a thank you note to each of the officials with whom you met.
- Reflect on your experience by answering a series of questions.

## **Results**

Students learned valuable life lessons as a result of this learning experience, including the complexities involved when scheduling meetings with busy town officials. They were reminded of the importance of preparing thoughtful questions, listening intently, asking meaningful questions, and reflecting on life experiences to better understand the world around us. The summative essays demonstrated that the students valued the opportunity to engage in real life learning experiences. Excerpts from some of student essays are provided below.

### **Excerpt 1**

"I was surprised to find out that our water main system is from 1905 and that we recently spent 2 million dollars to improve it which currently pumps out 3 million gallons a day. I am intrigued to learn of the significance of just one department involved in a local project but there are so many other sections from our local government which are also involved."

### **Excerpt 2**

"This project drew a lot of connections with other aspects of my life. I'm applying to colleges to be an environmental engineer, so talking to a woman with a job similar to what I'll be doing eventually was very informative. One interesting thing I learned about solar energy is that SELCO limits the percentage of power you can get from solar energy, which I heavily disagree with. This kind of knowledge is highly applicable to my field and my meeting with Patty Sheehan almost renewed my excitement for environmental engineering."

### **Excerpt 3**

"What I now understand better is the function of local government. In the beginning, I barely understood what local government was, that's why I took this class. However, after learning about the Edgemere Project and meeting with the officials in charge of it, I realize that it's more than just mayors and councilmen. My group was assigned life safety and building codes and when we sat down with the officials in charge of that department to discuss their involvement in the project, I was amazed and confused at how much actually goes into local government and how a plan becomes a building."

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to sharing more at your upcoming meeting on Wednesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>.