



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, February 3, 2022

CONTACT: Morgan Kelly, ACLU of Delaware communications director, Email: mkelly@aclu-de.org

Student Service Projects Spotlight Civic Engagement Program Led by ACLU of Delaware at Charter School of New Castle

NEW CASTLE — A plan to combat social media challenges and \$1,000 raised to help people experiencing homelessness might sound like the work of community activist groups, not grade school students. But a community event at the Charter School of New Castle on Tuesday revealed that elementary and middle school students are, indeed, the ones behind these incredible accomplishments.

Scholars Engaged for Action (SEFA), an after-school engagement program that aims to mobilize students as leaders who understand, interpret, and help in developing a school-wide culture that fosters civic engagement and community problem-solving.

“When students become part of solutions in their communities, the results can be innovative and impressive,” said Shannon Griffin, senior policy advocate at ACLU of Delaware. “Students that are involved in their larger communities through school programs often feel a sense of inclusion and belonging in their own school communities, leading to better education outcomes and a path of civic engagement that can last far beyond their grade school years.”

The SEFA program is just one piece of a larger Equity in Education campaign championed by the ACLU of Delaware. The campaign is a comprehensive initiative designed to support educators, engage parents and caregivers, and empower students.

SEFA is a program designed by ACLU-DE’s [Shannon Griffin](#), who partnered with Melva L. Ware, Ph.D., an education advocate, to find a way to bring civic engagement to students in Delaware’s schools. The program is built to support and strengthen core academic skills in literacy and numeracy, while inspiring self confidence, efficacy and civic engagement.

Rachel Valentin M.Ed. MPA, CSNC, executive director of the charter school’s elementary grades, said “Instead of an isolated focus on reading, writing and mathematics proficiency, for example, SEFA students, working in clubs or teams, use reading, writing, research, data collection, data analysis, critical thinking and public speaking skills to identify, plan and take actions that address community and social justice issues about which they are passionate.”

A big piece of the SEFA program centers around the students identifying, planning, and implementing a service project on a nine-week timetable. The Charter School of New Castle’s first cohort of SEFA students have completed their service projects with overwhelming success — and presented their work at a community event hosted by the school on Tuesday night.



The students, divided between two groups: upper elementary and middle school, were tasked with identifying, organizing, and implementing a project that would tackle an issue that affects their schools or communities.

The upper elementary student project was focused on helping people who are experiencing homelessness. Students in 4th grade saw a need for supplies to help the homeless in New Castle County, and organized a fundraiser to gather those supplies — and raised over \$1,000! Over 100 essential care packages will be donated to [the Hope Center](#) in New Castle, DE. In addition, students will make “snack packs” for children at the shelter’s after-school program.

The middle school project was focused on addressing negative social media challenges by creating positive messaging through art within the schools and organizing a cleaning schedule and hanging art murals in student bathrooms. This project was led by students in grades 5 - 7. The student-designed murals have been installed throughout the school, creating a greater sense of stewardship and school pride.

If you’re a student, parent, or educator who is interested in bringing the Equity in Education campaign to your school, please reach out to Shannon Griffin at sgriffin@aclu-de.org.

To learn more about the SEFA program, visit: <https://www.aclu-de.org/en/news/scholars-engaged-action-student-program-spotlight>.

###

This press release is available online here: <https://www.aclu-de.org/en/press-releases/student-service-projects-spotlight-civic-engagement-program-led-aclu-delaware-charter>

The ACLU of Delaware would like to extend a special thank you to our partners on the Charter School of New Castle’s SEFA program:

- LaRetha Odumosu, PhD, CSNC Executive Director, Middle School
- Rachel Valentin M.Ed. MPA, CSNC Executive Director, Elementary School
- Melva L. Ware, Ph.D., Lead Curriculum / Evaluation Developer
- Keia Briscoe, 5th Grade Educator, Lead Staff Support
- Nicole Esdaile, Lead Parent Advisor / Academic Equity Coordinator
- Michelle Johnson, 4th Grade Educator, Staff Support
- Shania Trammell, Academic Equity Coordinator