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State Showcase Press Release 12/10/07

Students propose policies at State Capitol

Students from across Nebraska traveled to the State Capitol today to present their public policy proposals for a program called Project Citizen. Administered by the Nebraska Legislature's Clerk's Office, Project Citizen promotes competent participation in local and state government and enables young people to monitor and influence public policy. Project Citizen involves teams of fifth through eighth grade students who present portfolios they've developed about a public policy issue they think should be addressed.

In their presentations, the students explained why they believed their issue was important. They examined various policy alternatives to address the issue and how they would proceed in having their chosen policy implemented. This year ten teams from seven schools participated in the showcase, representing all three congressional districts. The state winner advances to the national showcase next summer, sponsored by the Center for Civic Education. The winners of the event are as follows:

1st Place: Johnson-Brock Middle School, Johnson-Brock
Topic: Recycling
Teacher: Lori Broady

2nd Place: Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School, Omaha
Topic: Childhood Obesity
Teachers: Laura David and Julie Cusack

3rd Place: Saints Peter & Paul Elementary, Omaha
Topic: Graffiti
Teacher: Cassandra Veneck

A second team from Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School presented on recycling. Lewis & Clark Middle School focused on the problem of homeless youth in their community. One-R students discussed careless driving and school violence. Chapman presented on child abuse and Seward Middle School students looked at the issue of premature infants. A second team of students from Saints Peter & Paul examined after school programs. While not presenting, students toured the Capitol Building and were hosted for lunch in the Governor's Residence.

The finalists were judged by Sen. Bill Avery of Lincoln, Sen. Gwen Howard of Omaha, and Sen. Rich Pahls of Omaha. Other judges included legislative staffers Christine Abraham, Craig Breunig, Martha Carter,

Josh Eickmeier, Doug Gibbs, Doug Koebernick, Tony Perkins, Jeffery Santema, Sean Schmeits, and Brittany Sill.

“These students exemplify civic education in action,” said Kate Heltzel, Project Citizen coordinator for the Nebraska Legislature. “They’re learning how to make a real difference in their communities.”

The Nebraska Legislature is currently accepting registrations for schools to participate in next year’s showcase. To learn more about Project Citizen, visit www.nebraskalegislature.gov/web/public/pc.