

STUDENTS TAKE ACTION

PROJECT Citizen



Educating the Public

Byrd Community Academy was located in an old building in a poor area of Chicago. Because the school had no lunchroom, students ate in the hallways. Its many problems included a leaky roof, missing doors in the bathrooms, and a broken heating system. Project Citizen students in teacher Brian Schultz's class decided it was time to act.

Community Connection The students discovered that several years earlier the local school board had promised to build the school an entirely new campus. However, the funds earmarked for Byrd were used to rebuild a different worn-out school.

Taking Action The students wanted the school board to fulfill its promise. They researched and developed an 11-point action plan for achieving their goal. To generate public support, they took pictures of the building, produced a documentary video showing its problems, and wrote to government officials. The vice president of the United States, a U.S. senator, a U.S. representative, and an independent presidential candidate all expressed support for the plan. Donations poured in from private citizens. However, the school had low enrollment, and district resources were scarce. The school board made an economic choice to use the money it would cost to rebuild the school for other uses benefiting more students. Byrd Academy closed, and its students were moved to another school. Although the students did not achieve their goal, they attracted national attention to the issue of how a school's physical environment can affect student learning.



Ralph Nader visits with students at the Byrd Community Academy in Chicago.

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KEYWORD: SZ7 CH21

SERVICE LEARNING

1. What inspired the Byrd students to follow up on the school board's past plan to rebuild the school?
2. How was the students' project successful, even though their school eventually closed?