

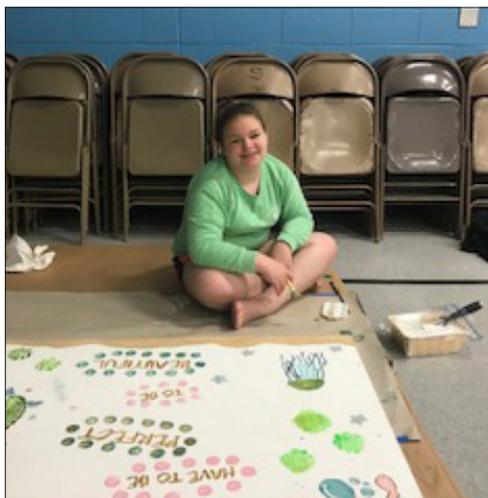
## Leading positive change through civic action

### G.I.R.L. Agenda inspires Girl Scouts to advocate for their causes

When Wolfeboro, NH, Girl Scouts discovered there was no usable community center for their town, they went to work researching a solution and then proposing that Wolfeboro repurpose an unused building for that purpose.

The girls conducted a thorough survey of the town's desires, then presented a detailed budget and feasibility report from an architect. They designed a large meeting space with ADA-compliant restrooms, a recreation room, a commercial kitchen, classroom space, rooftop garden, and outdoor classroom. It prompted one selectman to say "The future is in good hands" about these civically engaged Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts of the USA has formalized the public advocacy focus of our mission by creating the **G.I.R.L. Agenda**, a nonpartisan initiative to inspire, prepare, and mobilize girls and those who care about them to lead positive change through civic action.



Girl Scouts in Arlington, VT, painted inspirational sayings in their school bathrooms to combat bullying. (Courtesy Photo).



Troop 58756 of Wolfeboro, NH, also known as the Electric Llamas, a FIRST Lego League robotics team, present their plans to the Wolfeboro Board of Selectmen on November 6, 2019. They plan to repurpose an unused town building into a community center. (Granite State News Photo)

The G.I.R.L. Agenda is a guide for girls and leaders to introduce them to advocacy and civic engagement, as well as a blueprint for how we, as Girl Scouts young and old, can advance policies that foster girls' leadership development.

#### Civic Action Toolkits: Inspire, Prepare, Mobilize

As the world's premier organization dedicated to developing the female leadership pipeline, our work invariably results in girls learning to raise their voices and advocate for the issues and ideas that are important to them. Every Girl Scout is encouraged to form her own ideas, opinions, beliefs, and political ideology.

It is imperative that we, as an organization, Girl Scout alumnae, volunteers,

staff, leaders, and mentors, support girls in these efforts, guiding them to be effective advocates in the public sphere. Girl Scouts USA has developed, as part of its G.I.R.L. Agenda, Civic Action Toolkits designed to lead girls through three phases of public advocacy learning and training: inspiration, preparation, and mobilization. These toolkits are designed for grades K through 5, middle school, and high school.

*Get Inspired:* Girls are introduced to public policy and advocacy through the "Step Up, Stand Up, and Get Involved" curriculum. The Get Inspired toolkit takes girls on an empowering step-by-step journey through which they identify an issue or a problem in their

*Continued on Page 2*

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## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To donate to Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains, visit: [girlscoutsgwm.org/donate](http://girlscoutsgwm.org/donate).

To learn more, contact the Advancement office by emailing [advancement@girlscoutsgwm.org](mailto:advancement@girlscoutsgwm.org) or calling 888-474-9686.

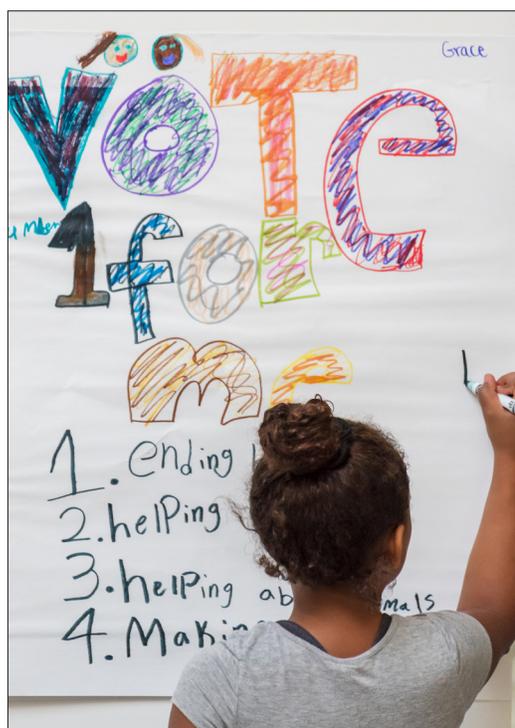
# **Girl Scouts inspired to advocate for change**

*Continued from Page 1*

community about which they are passionate and are inspired to make change.

With an issue identified and a fire in their bellies, girls are then taught how knowledge is power. They are taught how to arm themselves with information so that they can begin their advocacy work from a position of well-informed strength. Girls then get moving, identifying ways in which they can take positive and meaningful action.

*Get Prepared:* The Get Prepared toolkits break down the nuts and bolts of how to move from passion to action. Younger girls are taught to Take a Stand through approachable, age appropriate, and meaningful actions that will allow them to highlight the issues that matter to them in the public sphere, such as creating signs to be displayed in their neighborhood or writing letters to a local newspaper.



At Learn to Lead Days in New Hampshire and Vermont, Girl Scouts learn about government and hold mock campaigns. (Richardson Photography)

*Get Mobilized:* Having taken steps to get inspired and get prepared, much like other Girl Scout Take Action projects, girls then take concrete steps to become advocates of change for those issues that matter most to them.

The G.I.R.L. Agenda also comprises important civic action toolkits for adults who want to introduce the advocacy concepts of inspiration, preparation, and mobilization to girls in their troops and communities. As with the toolkits created for girls, adult volunteers are inspired through examples of positive civic engagement done by other Girl Scout communities, are prepared with resources for every Girl Scout level on how to talk to girls and increase their understanding of how to get involved in advocacy, and they are then mobilized through concrete ideas of how to put boots on the ground and take action in their communities, with girls taking the lead.

At Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains, we encourage, embrace, and celebrate positive civic engagement among our membership. You'll read in this edition of the Trailblazer about local alumnae like Cassie Levesque and Katherine Levasseur, who serve as powerful examples of Girl Scouts in the public sphere working to create meaningful change. You'll read about the Girls Rock the Capitol Program, which has received national recognition for its empowering impacts on participants who have gone on to advocate for legislation that they themselves have written under the mentorship of current female legislators in New Hampshire and Vermont.

For more about the G.I.R.L. Agenda, visit [girlscouts.org/girlagenda](http://girlscouts.org/girlagenda), call 888-474-9686, or email [customercare@girlscoutsgwm.org](mailto:customercare@girlscoutsgwm.org).

# Girl Scouting brings democracy alive



Dear friends,

Since our founding, Girl Scouting has tied community service and civics education together through our unique hands-on programming. As our program changes to meet the needs of our world today and our girls' interests, maintaining that connection to both is essential to our mission of building girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make our world a better place.

Recent research has uncovered concerning statistics: in 2019, only 39% of Americans could name all 3 branches of government, and 22% could not name any branch! In 2018, only 30% of surveyed people in the US knew that the Senate controlled Supreme Court confirmations, and in 2017, 37% of Americans could not name any rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to our Constitution. For someone who loves history, law and civics as much as I do, this worries me.

Girl Scouting is working hard to ensure our members understand the importance of civics. We know that engaged youth make more engaged adults and, as you'll read in this issue, this is exemplified in our Girl Scout alums. We provide programs and tools which bring democracy alive, preparing our girls for a lifetime of leadership.

Throughout this Trailblazer, stories, facts and statistics will jump out highlighting our amazing accomplishments and program. We are excited to prepare the next generation of girls to find their voices and change our world.

Thank you for your support and leadership. We could not achieve our success without your partnership.

Yours in Girl Scouting,

*Tricia*

Patricia K. Mellor  
Chief Executive Officer  
Gold Award Girl Scout

## Girl Scout civic badges, Journeys, and patches

Girl Scouts have a wide variety of choices when deciding to become an engaged citizen, from Daisy through Ambassador.

**Journeys**

Journeys like *It's Your World*, *Change It* and *It's Your Planet, Love It* allow girls to choose a sustainable Take Action project at each grade level and discover what it means to be a leader who makes a difference in the world.

**Daisy**



**Good Neighbor** – Daisies are asked to explore their school and city or town, and find out what makes their state special.

**Brownie**



**Celebrating Community** – Brownies explore community symbols, sing, follow a parade, become a landmark detective, and join a ceremony or celebration.

**Junior**



**Inside Government** – Juniors decide what being an active citizen means to them, go inside government, look into laws, report on issues, and get involved in government.

**Cadette**



**Finding Common Ground** – Cadettes find out how people in governments make trade-offs, giving up some things they favor to gain support for others.

**Senior**



**Behind the Ballot** – Seniors learn about the importance of voting and find out about the electoral process in the United States and around the world.

**Ambassador**



**Public Policy** – Ambassadors gain the knowledge they need to speak up about and act on issues that are crucial in their world.

**All Levels**



**Advocacy** – Thanks to Gold Award Girl Scout Cassandra Levesque, Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains also offers the Advocacy patch, where girls discover how to step up, speak out, and be the voice for an issue they believe in.

# Girl Scouts learn to lead as Girls Rock the Capitol offers a unique advocacy experience

Girls interested in making the world a better place can find many opportunities to do just that through Girl Scouts, and those interested in advocacy through politics and the law can learn about government through Girls Rock the Capitol. This six-month-long internship program offered by Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains pairs high school girls with female legislators in both Vermont and New Hampshire. Participants attend committee meetings and full House sessions, and hear the discussions and debates on bills and laws. They acquire the skills to express their concerns to people in positions of power and create positive change in their states.

Hannah Cawley of Colchester, VT, is one such intern, who took advantage of the program to get real life experience in government, learning how people make connections and influence votes. She's also been a page at the Vermont State House.

"I'm personally invested in Vermont dual enrollment," she said, explaining that Vermont high schoolers can take



Girl Scouts taking part in Girls Rock the Capitol gathered for a photo at the New Hampshire State House. (GSGWM photo)

two free college classes for credit, but that this experience is not available to those attending religious schools. "My parents pay taxes, but I'm not allowed to participate in this program." Cawley has her sights set on being a prosecutor.

Others are newcomers to America, learning about our government first hand. Maryam Alchaderchi came from Iraq two years ago, and watched the Vermont House as they noted National Service Recognition Day on April 2. Also observing was Hafso Ali, from Somalia. Her mother is a U.S. citizen.

Harley Miller of Montpelier, VT, has been participating in Girls Rock the Capitol for three years. She has an interest in economics, as well as government. Ginger Knight, 18, also from Montpelier, was working with a representative on climate change and making net metering possible.

Girl Scouts in both states got a peek at how the government and Girls Rock the Capitol works in the fall of 2018. Forty-one Girl Scouts took part in the Learn to Lead days at the New Hampshire State

House, and 16 visited the Vermont State house, where they toured the building, participated in workshops on voting and elections, and talked with legislators.

Cora Nicoll, an Ambassador Girl Scout and Girls Rock the Capitol intern at the time, participated in the New Hampshire workshops. The homeschooled 12th grader from Freedom told the girls the greatest part of her internship was being able to sit in and hear the stories of local legislators, and especially talking to the women in government.

Gold Award Girl Scout Cassandra Levesque, now 20, of Barrington, NH, helped the Girl Scouts understand how our government works by sharing her experience with getting New Hampshire to raise the minimum age for marriage to 16.

Girls Rock the Capitol is part of the G.I.R.L. (Go-getter, Innovator, Risk-taker, Leader)<sup>TM</sup> initiative for Girl Scouts to inspire, prepare, and mobilize girls and those who care about them to lead positive change through civic action.



Hafso Ali, left, and Maryam Alchaderchi are immigrants who participated in Girls Rock the Capitol at the Vermont State House in April. (GSGWM photo)

# Alum Profile: Katherine Levasseur, political advisor

Advocating for the rights of girls and women has been central to Katherine Levasseur's life since she was young, and her participation in Girls Rock the Capitol – a Girl Scout program that gives girls an inside look at how government works through internships – was “transformational” for her.

Levasseur is the chief of staff at the Office of the Speaker of the House for the Vermont General Assembly.

“I’m the chief policy and political advisor for the Speaker,” she said, “which includes assisting in the development and messaging of House priorities, the session schedule, and parliamentary protocol. My responsibilities range from serving as a liaison between the executive branch agencies, Governor’s office and Senate, and our office, to coordinating the Speaker’s schedule. I also am the point person for media inquiries, oversee our internship program, and assist with oversight of the [legislative] branch of government.”



Katherine Levasseur (Courtesy Photo)

Levasseur was crowned Miss Vermont in 2011, and represented Vermont in the 2012 Miss America competition.

“My social impact initiative was focused on youth civic and political engagement, namely in increasing awareness of the voting rights changes, which were going to be law for the next election in 2012,” she said. “I traveled across the state advocating for community involvement and registering young voters.”

It took four years for Levasseur and her partners - Ellie Beckett and Courtney Mattison - to see this constitutional amendment to completion. She also credits the senators who took up the proposal and the Secretary of State for paving the way and showing them how to be successful.

“This experience was transformational for me and changed the trajectory of my professional life” she said. “I entered the GRTC program as a senior in high school who was interested in civics and state politics but who was plan-

ning to pursue a career in a medical profession. I left this experience with a passion for public service after seeing the change that one person can set in motion. I’ve always aspired to pave the way for the next generation and my experience with the amendment showed me how that could be possible in politics.”

Levasseur also credits Girl Scouts with helping her to grow personally and professionally.

“I always reflect fondly on my time as a Girl Scout because it was a safe space for me to learn, develop, and make mistakes,” she said. “The ability to develop my skills in public speaking, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication in an environment of positive support and encouragement was critical for me. As a reserved young woman terrified of making mistakes or disappointing my mentors, I needed that space to grow. Girl Scouts gave me that opportunity.”

This experience led Levasseur to focus on youth civic and political engagement, especially voting rights.

“Civic engagement is critical,” she said, “because, in the words of former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin, ‘If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.’ Young women must engage in their communities.”

To anyone facing an obstacle or challenge, she says “Persevere. I often pause before addressing a challenge and pose the question ‘What is the worst thing that can happen?’ to myself. This reminds me that my fears and mental obstacles are often inflating the reality of the difficulties that my actions or decisions will create.”

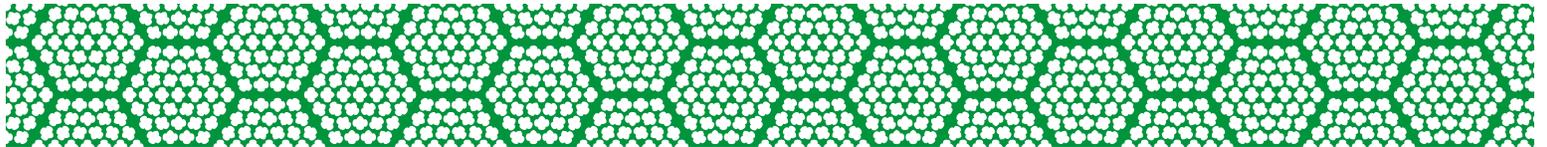
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***“I left this experience (in Girls Rock the Capitol) with a passion for public service after seeing the change that one person can set in motion. I’ve always aspired to pave the way for the next generation, and my experience with the amendment showed me how that could be possible in politics.”***

Katherine Levasseur

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She was a Girl Scout from third grade to sixth grade, and rejoined Girl Scouts to take part in Girls Rock the Capitol, where she worked on a constitutional amendment to allow 17-year-olds to vote in the presidential primary if they would turn 18 in time for the general election.



# Cassandra Levesque – Gold Award Girl Scout continues fight to protect girls from child marriage

Changing the world for the better is no simple catch phrase for Gold Award Girl Scout Cassandra Levesque. She has worked tirelessly for several years to raise the minimum age for marriage in New Hampshire, successfully getting it moved from 13 for girls and 14 for boys to 16 for both as of June 2018. The legislative action was undertaken as her Gold Award project and continued even after earning Girl Scouting's capstone achievement as she saw three related bills through to completion.

The experience of working to advocate for young women and becoming informed about how the state legislature works prompted Levesque to run for state representative for her hometown of Barrington, winning the seat at the age of just 19.

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***“For a 17-year-old girl who is marrying willingly and for all the right reasons, waiting a few months to marry is at worst an inconvenience.”***

Cassandra Levesque

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Today Levesque continues her mission to outlaw child marriage, saying that the age should be raised to her original request of 18 for both males and females. Arguments have been made to allow those in the military to marry earlier, but Levesque told The Concord Monitor last February that the proposed change is worth it.

“Levesque said one issue that could affect military couples is that a girlfriend or boyfriend of a service member might

not be guaranteed living arrangements with them on the base where they are serving. But Levesque said 16 or 17-year-olds should be able to wait until they are of age before they decide to make that commitment and move in,” according to that story. “For a 17-year-old girl who is marrying willingly and for all the right reasons, waiting a few months to marry is at worst an inconvenience,” she said.

One of the arguments for a military exception was for survivor benefits, but she found that such benefits can still be provided without marriage.

Having a history of child marriage in her own family made Levesque particularly sensitive to the dangers.

“When a child is forced to marry, the perpetrator is almost always the parents,” she told the Monitor. “Having the parents involved in no way protects a child from a forced marriage.”

Levesque's first year as a New Hampshire state representative was also her first year at college, attending Southern New Hampshire University through its online programs – a benefit extended to her free from the university in recognition of her advocacy.

She has also been shepherding a bill through the legislative process that will allow New Hampshire residents to buy a license plate decal that will benefit Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains. The fate of the bill should be determined by March, she said.

Levesque has continued her involvement with Girl Scouts despite being a busy state representative and college student, leading a Daisy/Brownie troop in Lee. She is also available to talk to



Cassandra Levesque (Courtesy Photo)

and work with girls interested in advocacy. She's already worked with Girls Rock the Capitol and New Futures to help teach girls the importance of being the needed future change.

“I know when I was going for my Gold Award, reaching out to adults was the most intimidating part and I really would like the girls to know that I understand and if they ever want to talk I am absolutely willing to be there for them,” she said.

Girl Scouts who are interested in advocating for change through legislation can learn how to do that through the Advocacy patch program designed by Levesque as part of her Gold Award project and offered through the council. Her patch program teaches Girl Scouts about taking action to change something in a girl's community, how to form alliances, and about advocates like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malala Yousefzai.

# Amherst Girl Scout's Gold Award project focused on citizenship

## Emma Pyles worked to educate the public in basic civics information

At a time when political awareness is at an all-time high, one Girl Scout has made the effort to be sure people are well-informed on basic civics. Girl Scout Ambassador Emma Pyles has earned the Girl Scout Gold Award for her project, Equalizing Citizenship. The Girl Scout Gold Award is the capstone achievement of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

This is one of many ways Girl Scouts are engaging in advocacy, along with earning new badges for activities like being a good neighbor, public speaking, the importance of voting, and public policy.

When Pyles, 17, a senior at The Derryfield School in Manchester, NH, found out that one third of natural-born U.S. citizens could not pass the test given to immigrants applying for citizenship, she knew she had to do something.

“When I led a presentation at a Cadette troop meeting,” she said, “I was struck by some of the answers the girls did not know. It made me feel good to be able to share the correct information with them. I felt like I made a difference. Similarly, some of the presentations I made to adults in my community rein-



Emma Pyles helped the citizens of Amherst learn about civics with her table on the town square during Independence Day activities. (Courtesy photo)

forced the need for this project. I think those adults may be inspired by my project to learn more about U.S. civics.”

Some of the questions asked on the U.S. citizenship test include why some states have more representatives than others, who was president during World War I, and why the colonists fought the British. You can test your knowledge at <https://my.uscis.gov/en/prep/test/civics/view>.

Pyles created a curriculum for middle school students that she shared with the National Education Association, hosted an informational booth in Amherst on the Fourth of July, and visited assisted living facilities in Bedford and Milford to share her information.

She also visited Girl Scout troops and played a computer game she created on the Kahoot app that allows interactive play when asked questions. To round out her project, Pyles held a coat drive to assist new immigrants, and created a website about her project.

The Girl Scout Ambassador also learned a lot through her work and gained useful skills for the future. Pyles is looking forward to attending college next fall, with an eye toward business or political science. Her work will be sustained through her curriculum and website, <https://20epyles.wixsite.com/gsga>. She has already awakened a desire to be better educated in many in her community.

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***“Through this project, I learned how passionate I am about being an engaged citizen. I enjoyed learning more about the nation while connecting with my local community.”***

Emma Pyles

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# Girl Scouts has a long history in civic engagement

In 1912, when Juliette Gordon Low called her cousin and local educator Nina Pape with news that she had decided to bring Girl Guides to America, her sentiment perfectly captured the spirit of the Progressive Era in which she lived: "I've got something for the girls of Savannah, and all America, and all the world." Our founder had faith in the power of leadership programs for girls, knowing that their impact would not be constrained to the girls themselves, but that the inevitable consequences of empowering girls would mean them finding their voices and getting involved to change the world around them for the better.

There are endless examples of Girl Scouts embodying active and positive civic engagement throughout some of America's most defining moments and biggest challenges. During World War I, Girl Scouts were involved selling war bonds and starting "war gardens" to support their country. In 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution allowing women to vote was ratified, Girl Scouts were at the forefront of the movement to support women's suffrage.

Girl Scouts didn't slow down in the



Liliane Gordon of Hinesburg, VT, campaigns in a mock election at the Vermont State House during a Learn to Lead Day. (Richardson Photography)



A Girl Scout cares for a baby while the baby's mother votes in 1921. (GSUSA Photo)

1930s when the country was grappling with the economic devastation of the Great Depression. During World War II, it is no surprise that the Girl Scouts stepped up yet again and took action by operating bicycle courier services, collecting rubber for tires, nylons and rags for parachutes, scrap metal by the ton, planting victory gardens, and much more. After the war, Girl Scouts used funds from the Juliette Low World Friendship Fund to lend a helping hand to war-torn European countries. In 1970, Girl Scouts participated in the first Earth Day celebrations and demonstrated their desire for long-term change by creating Eco-Action, a nationwide program to bring attention to environmental issues.

Today, Girl Scouts in our council are making the world a better place. Gold Award Girl Scouts this past year took on the issues of homelessness, pollinator education, recycling, negative messages in social media, hunger, citizenship, and more. Silver Award Girl Scouts have taken on projects like building a footbridge for a park, creating a musical sensory garden for a special needs school, writing a book to

encourage children to have fun and be safe while adventuring outdoors, and more. Girl Scout troops everywhere are leading the way with many service projects to benefit their communities.

Girl Scouts of the USA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office, in partnership with all 111 Girl Scout councils, has prioritized and published the following public policy goals for the 116th Congress:

- Promote economic opportunities for girls and build the nation's workforce pipeline by increasing girls' involvement in STEM and strengthening their financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills.
- Encourage girls to embrace a healthy lifestyle by expanding their access to outdoor activities, preventing bullying/relational aggression, and promoting healthy relationships.
- Foster global citizenship and a global voice for girls.
- Uphold a strong nonprofit community that supports the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

The Girl Scouting tradition of civic engagement is one we are tremendously proud of. Inherent in this tradition is the imperative that girls need public policies that champion support for all-girl and girl-led safe spaces that honor the unique developmental needs of girls in relation to extracurricular activities like scouting. Girls need programs and initiatives that allow them to grow up healthy and strong, develop skills that will enable them to excel in an ever-changing workforce, and make a positive change in their communities and the world.