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REGIONAL PLAN

Students share ideas for tackling growth

Talk about forward thinking. For fresh ideas for the future of the state's most-crowded counties, a regional planning group sought out those people who could be sitting in Chicago-area traffic jams in 2040. Now in grades 4 through 12, those future residents and commuters brainstormed about how they want their slice of the world to look when they're the adults.

As part of a public outreach process, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) initiated a pilot program at three schools — Carpenter Elementary in Park Ridge and Pulaski Fine Arts Academy and Whitney Young Magnet High School in Chicago — that asked students for their vision of the year 2040.

"They care strongly about [the future]," says Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of CMAP. "They care about the environment and what's happening in the environment, and their transportation and how it works, and where their jobs are going to be."

Hundreds of students got involved, creating original videos, poems, songs, one-act plays, drawings and three-dimensional models. Some of the best projects were awarded a $100 prize and are posted on YouTube (see link at www.goto2040.org).

In the fall, Blankenhorn says his organization is beginning another program aimed at finding the next generation of planners. CMAP staff will spend the summer reviewing nominations from teachers to choose 45 students from seven counties for a program called FLIP, Future Leaders in Planning. CMAP will bring the group together over eight months for a series of seminars on the major issues facing the region.

Blankenhorn says the planning agency wants to learn what the high-schoolers think and to encourage them to be leaders who will talk about the issues in their schools and among their friends, and even at home with their parents "to get them thinking about what the future ought to be."

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