

# GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

12 Littleville Road Huntington, MA 01050

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Photo Caption: (top) Gateway 7<sup>th</sup> grader Sarah Loomis awaits her immigration processing during a mock reenactment at the Middle School held May 14. (bottom) Students traveled to Ellis Island in New York City on Thursday, May 16.*

## Students simulate Ellis Island

**Huntington** - Sitting in the New York Harbor, Ellis Island has been an integral part of the United States' immigration history since its initial opening in 1892. For 62 years, the site served as an immigration station; an estimated 12 million individuals would pass through Ellis Island to start a life in the "New World". Today, historians estimate that 40% of United States' citizens can trace their lineage to at least one Ellis Island immigrant. Despite its great importance, Ellis Island also carries some notoriety for its mistreatment of immigrants. On Tuesday, May 14, Gateway's seventh grade students and staff simulated the experience which so many endured.

Leading up to the event, students selected names from a ship's manifest and created their own immigration documents.

Starting at 7:20 a.m., students and staff members stood in the cold mist corralled in front of the school building. Passersby watched while stern teachers patrolled the premises, using only their facial expression as communication. Huntington police officer Aaron Hawley surveyed the scene, to later accompany students from legal detainment. It wasn't until approximately 8:00 a.m. when students found themselves going through the process of having their "documents" handled. However, it was no simple task. Teacher Mary-Ann Shipman and student Sofia De La Cruz communicated in Spanish and finger-points as other staff members spoke gibberish. Due to the severe language barrier, several misunderstandings sprouted amongst the group. Some were sent to quarantine rooms, others were sorted into legal detainment. In both cases, most students were not able to even understand the directions or the accusations coming from staff. For those who were lucky to make it past the detainment and quarantine, the problems still continued at the money exchange. Using mock currency, students handed a certain amount over, but one dollar would be reserved for the official, one dollar going back to the student. This practice, unfortunately, was found to happen at times in the real Ellis Island. When Teddy Roosevelt took office in 1901, he conducted a full-fledged investigation into the corruption of inspectors and officers on Ellis Island, ultimately firing 8-9 individuals.

When the experience came to an end at 9:30, staff finally broke character and gathered with the students to discuss how the simulation affected them overall. Several described the experience as confusing, angering, and making them feel hopeless. For individuals who underwent the process one hundred years ago, they might've spent days in the legal detainment or quarantine.

Students also said that they did not know why they had been separated into quarantine or legal detainment areas. Unbeknownst to them, the ship's manifest also contained records of prior criminal activities or health concerns, which the ship's captain turned over to officials upon arrival at Ellis Island.

The following week, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade class took a field trip to Ellis Island. Teachers had a goal of having every student attend and had secured funds from the Gateway Education Foundation to help achieve that goal. There were still a few students who were unable to attend the field trip; however, they were able to “visit” Ellis Island using the virtual reality goggles purchased by the Gateway Education Foundation last year.

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