

Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to strengthen Civic Learning
Proposals from the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools Coalition

SUMMARY

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools offers these recommendations to restore the historic civic mission of our schools, and to improve and strengthen civic learning to prepare students for the *three* crucial “C’s” of education, preparation for college, career and citizenship.

- 1) Fund civic learning at the level of approximately \$2 per student through competitive grants to develop innovative, scalable approaches to teaching civic education (compared to 2007 levels of \$25.64 for reading and \$19.45 for STEM).
- 2) Increase the frequency of National Assessments in Educational Progress (NAEPs) in civics, history, economics and geography, and provide disaggregated data from NAEPs in civics and history.
- 3) Include data from student achievement and growth in civics and history in state accountability data systems.

“The better educated our citizens are, the better equipped they will be to preserve the system of government we have. And we have to start with the education of our nation’s young people. Knowledge about our government is not handed down through the gene pool. Every generation has to learn it, and we have some work to do.”

—Justice Sandra Day O’Connor

“The loss of quality civic education from so many of our classrooms has left too many young Americans without the most basic knowledge of who our forefathers are, or what they did, or the significance of the founding documents that bear their names. Too many children are ignorant of the sheer effort, the risks and sacrifices made by previous generations, to ensure that this country survived war and depression; through the great struggles for civil, and social, and worker's rights. It is up to us, then, to teach them.”

—President Barack Obama

The Civic Mission of America's Schools

From Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to Barack Obama and Sandra Day O'Connor, America's leaders have recognized that for democracy to endure, each generation of Americans must be educated about its constitutional heritage, the rights and duties of enlightened citizenship, and the practices of engaged citizens.

Public schools were created in the United States with a primary purpose of preparing children to participate constructively as adult citizens in our democracy. In recent years, this historic, central function of the American schools has increasingly diminished. More emphasis has been placed on preparing students for career and college, at the expense of preparing students to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools offers the following recommendations to restore the historic civic mission of our schools and to improve and strengthen civic learning.

1) Fund civic education and learning at the level of approximately \$2 per student through competitive grants to develop innovative, scalable approaches to teaching civic education.

Because state-level funding for curricular innovation and improvement is severely limited, the Federal government has emerged as the funder of education innovation. We strongly encourage increased funding and a new competitive grant program to:

- Provide *high quality, research-based* civic learning opportunities for the Nation's diverse school population, and professional development opportunities for civic learning teachers.
- Increase the *quality and diversity* of civic learning initiatives through competitive grant funding and assessment.
- Increase the *number and capacity* of civic learning initiatives through greater funding for local, state, and national-level proposals.

A new competitive grant program to be administered by the US Department of Education should give priority to applications that demonstrate:

- *Equity* through access to funding and program benefits for students who have historically been underserved.
- *Innovation* through design, settings, and modes of delivery.
- *Scalability* through cost-effective methods of implementation and wide spread adoption and use.
- *Accountability* through independent assessment and identification of best practice models.

We strongly recommend that a new competitive grant program for civic learning be initially funded in FY2011 in the amount of \$40 million, and that eligible applicants be non-profit organizations of demonstrated effectiveness in providing civic learning and civic

education programs. We recommend that this competitive grant program be codified in the ESEA with an authorized appropriation of \$100 million for each subsequent fiscal year. We support inclusion of this competitive grant program in the Administration's proposed 'Teaching and Learning for a Well Rounded Education' Program.

Currently, federal funding for civic education is far below other academic subjects. The federal government spends approximately \$0.50 per K–12 student on civic education in the US (and only \$2.44 on history) as compared to \$25.64 per student on reading and \$19.45 per student for science, technology and math (STEM). (US Department of Education 2007 data.) We believe increasing funding to approximately \$2 per student, or \$100 million per year, is an important first step in restoring the civic mission of our schools.

2) Increase the frequency of NAEPs in Civics & History and provide disaggregated data from NAEPs in Civics and History.

The results of civics and other social studies assessments from the National Assessments of Educational Progress are currently the only national means of measuring American students' civic competency. The states need to be given data from the NAEPs in order to adequately assess for themselves whether they are meeting the historic civic mission of schools. Moreover, a growing body of research suggests a civic achievement gap between white and minority students and between upper- and lower-income students. This civic achievement gap needs to be quantified through data from the NAEPs in order to design effective remedies.

Therefore, we strongly urge that the NAEPs in Civics & Government, History, Economics and Geography be strengthened by empowering the National Assessment Governing Board to administer the NAEPs in each of the subjects once every four years. In that way, with one subject tested per year, each of the four subjects will be tested once every four years.

We also strongly recommend that the National Assessment Governing Board be empowered to collect and disseminate disaggregated data of student performance on the NAEPs in Civics & Government and History. The number of students tested in each state should be increased to permit disaggregating results in these subjects at the same level as is possible in other NAEP-tested subjects.

3) Include data from student achievement and growth in civics and history in state accountability data systems.

We strongly support the Administration's call for the states to utilize data from measures of student achievement and growth in subjects beyond math and literacy -- such as civics and history -- in their systems of accountability and rewards. We urge the Administration and Congress to ensure that measurements of student achievement in civics and history are included as an option for the states in the ESEA reauthorization's accountability provisions.

Other ESEA Recommendations:

- Because current standardized tests are not well suited to accurately assess much more than factual knowledge, we recommend allowing states to use multiple means to measure civic knowledge and skills. Additional means could include performance assessment, classroom based-assessment, portfolio assessment and service learning-related assessments.
- Maintain eligibility granted under current law to use Title II teacher professional development funds for civics & government and history. These subjects are currently identified as part of the core curriculum and are therefore eligible for Title II activities. This eligibility should be maintained in the reauthorization.
- Strengthen teacher training and professional development in social studies, civics and content-based reading. Make additional funding available for pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional development to improve teaching in social studies, history, civics, and community-based civic learning, and to prepare teachers of reading and literature to include historical and civic-related material.
- Create incentives to integrate civic learning and social studies content into reading and writing tests to ensure that students are able to think critically and debate questions of public significance. This will further develop skills indispensable to participation in a democracy premised on citizen deliberation.

A note on nomenclature: the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools uses the term Civic Learning to convey the necessary elements of effective civic education. These elements include classroom instruction in civics & government, history, economics, law and geography; service learning linked to classroom learning; experiential learning; learning through participation in models and simulations of democratic processes; guided classroom discussion of current issues and events, and meaningful participation in school governance.

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