

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

Civic Education in California: Policy Recommendations

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CIVIC EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

California requires and deserves world-class standards in civic education. In the coming years, California students will assume roles as engaged citizens, political leaders, and contributors to the workforce of the state, the nation, and beyond. With a diverse population that is approximately one-quarter foreign-born, California is challenged to educate students of all backgrounds in the fundamentals of democracy and civic skills. This requires ongoing attention and fidelity to the standards of high-quality civic education. California cannot afford to shortchange the education of these students nor risk the consequences of a civic-education curriculum that is left to chance. The political, economic, and social well-being of the state and the nation is entirely dependent upon the preparation and education of our young people.

The Status of Civic-Education Policy in California

The current *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (California Department of Education, Sacramento, 2001) includes a set of 12 strands that support “the Goal of Democratic Understanding and Civic Values.” The strands include goals by which students will understand “National Identity,” “Constitutional Heritage,” and “Civic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities.” While the introduction to the framework does an admirable job of describing these strands, there appears to be only incidental follow-through within the grade-level standards.

In the current History-Social Science standards, there is an absence of civic-education content in general. There is a severe deficit of cognitive skill development and a lack of specificity regarding participatory skill development. The standards lack continuity from one grade level to the next in content, skills, and concepts. Those standards that partially address civic education are often vague and rely far too much on teacher interpretation for implementation of civic-education standards, assessment, and instructional practice.

California today faces many of the same circumstances that have eroded civic-education programs across the nation. These issues include:

- Reduction of instructional time for adequate history-social science instruction.
- Lack of acknowledgement of civic education as a core subject and a central mission of education today.
- Inadequate understanding of the depth and breadth of civic education.
- Lack of time and resources for class discussion and projects that teach about political developments, public policy, constitutional democracy, the interrelationship of the branches of government, and current events.
- Inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient time for professional development in civic education.

Research verifies that civic education is most effectively delivered when the following curriculum foundations are in place:

- A clear and specific set of civic-education curriculum standards and objectives, identifying both knowledge and skills, building from each grade level to the next.
- A curriculum that supports powerful civic-education standards through explicit instruction in civic knowledge, cognitive skills, participatory skills, civic attitudes and dispositions, real-life applications, and transferability of foundational concepts of democracy.
- Instructors and teachers who are well-versed in the foundational principles of democracy, history, and government.
- Appropriate and detailed civic-education assessments directly related to the standards.

Recommendations For Revision of the *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*

The revision of the *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools* (California Department of Education, Sacramento, 2001) should:

- Include specific civic-education content outlined as strands in the preface and introductory chapters at each grade level.
- Reflect current research such as the effective practices identified by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE Report, 2002).
- Include in each course the developmental skills, instructional strategies, and activities that support high-quality civic education.
- Link to clear and specific standards at each grade level with appropriate assessments, applications of knowledge and skills, and opportunities for students to demonstrate in-depth understanding of community, civic responsibilities, and the foundations of democracy;
- Refer to *Education for Democracy: California Civic Education Scope & Sequence*, a joint project of the Center for Civic Education and the California Department of Education (Center for Civic Education, 2003), for guidance and suggestions on embedded civic-education concepts and skills at each grade level.

Recommendations for California State Policy in Civic Education

- California should implement a systemic review of state curricula (i.e., standards, frameworks, assessment, accountability) that allows for input from the field, evaluation of program effectiveness, and opportunities for review, revision, and ongoing improvement. A review and possible revision of the California History-Social Science academic content standards should include a clear set of objectives and goals that build from one grade level to the next, with particular attention paid to civic knowledge, participatory skills, cognitive skills, and attitudes and dispositions of civic education.
- The California State Testing and Assessment system should include stand-alone assessments in civic education at a minimum of three grade levels (upper elementary, middle school, and high school) or assessment data in civic education that can be disaggregated from other testing scores such as history, economics, geography, and language arts.

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- California should encourage and support opportunities for specific and intentional professional development in civic education, the principles of democracy, and the civic mission of schools.
- Pre-service teachers should be required to show proficiency in understanding the basic tenets of high-quality civic education through passage of a one-semester course in the theory and practice of civic education as a standing requirement of state teaching credentials.
- California should develop a system of certification in civic education.
- Attention must be given to adequate resource allocation that will ensure a high-quality civic-education delivery system that includes appropriate funding for high-quality curricular materials, professional development, professional collaboration, and multiple measures of assessment.

APPENDIX – The Essential Elements of High-Quality Civic Education

Research-based recommendations of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE Report, 2002) for effective learning strategies of civic education have identified the following strategies as promising and important:

- Instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.
- Discussion of current events.
- Service learning linked to the curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities.
- Student voice in governance.
- Simulations of democratic processes such as mock trials, mock congressional hearings, debates, and other participatory activities.

Scholarship in civic-education curriculum development and applied research has yielded criteria for the development and implementation of high-quality civic education. Components of high-quality civic education are as follows:

Civic knowledge

- Historical content
- Understanding of government and how it works
- The philosophical and political foundations of democracy
- The connections between democracy and socio-economic principles
- Current events

Participatory skills

- Speaking and listening skills
- Working in groups
- Consensus building
- Debate and discussion

- Gathering information and multiple perspectives
- Compromise
- Civil discourse

Cognitive skills

- Recalling and recognizing foundational content knowledge
- Understanding and applying concepts
- Analyzing information
- Evaluating ideas
- Drawing logical conclusions
- Defending a position through fact-finding and reasoning
- Synthesizing knowledge and content from related fields through cause and effect, identification of key variables, and mitigating/intensifying factors

Civic attitudes and dispositions

- Democratic values and principles
- Reasoned commitment
- Informed decision-making
- Civic engagement
- Civic virtue and responsibility
- A sense of community
- Legitimate authority
- The rule of law

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