

Campaign to Promote Civic Education

ABOUT US

The Campaign to Promote Civic Education effort is a fifty state campaign (including the District of Columbia) aimed at restoring the civic mission of our nation's schools by encouraging states and school districts to devote sustained and systematic attention to civic education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This monthly newsletter is part of a new initiative to provide a forum for information exchange in the civic education community and is administered by the Center for Civic Education (Center). The Center's Campaign to Promote Civic Education is cooperating with the Civic Mission of the Schools Campaign (CMS) to help promote our common goal of improving civic education policy and practice.



The Center for Civic Education's Campaign to Promote Civic Education has contributed to concrete policy improvements in civics and government. Each month, we hope to showcase the outstanding work of our state facilitators as they seek to restore the civic mission of our schools. This October, we thank Annette Boyd Pitts of the Florida Law Related Education Association (FLREA) for sharing the accomplishment of establishing a state middle-school civics requirement. We also thank FLREA for sharing a specific technical assistance model currently being implemented. Last month, Arlene Gardner of New Jersey shared a model agenda and ideas on holding a stakeholders meeting to advance the goals of your campaign. If you would like to showcase a specific effort or activity in your state, please contact Liza (prendergast@civiced.org) or Justin (rydstrom@civiced.org).

Guest Commentary: The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. Models of Change in Florida's Middle School Civics Curriculum

State campaigns to promote civic education and restore the civic mission of our schools have catapulted into successful public policy initiatives in many states since the initial Congressional Conference was sponsored by the Alliance for Representative Democracy composed of the Center for Civic Education, the Center on Congress at Indiana University, and the National Conference of State Legislatures in 2003. The collaborative model brought together teams of policymakers and gatekeepers annually in Washington, D.C., to spearhead state-level planning and campaigns. The ultimate goal was to raise this valuable instructional area to its rightful status in the curriculum. This dynamic series of conferences, which ended in 2006, was instrumental in creating the synergy to explore new territory and develop new alliances for civic education.

"The conferences provided the impetus for groups to collaborate and determine the best strategies to advance civic education in our own states," commented Annette Boyd Pitts, campaign facilitator for Florida and executive director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. "They created alliances and revitalized interest in a subject that was losing its visibility in an era of high stakes testing and a focus on testing core subjects," Pitts continued. Florida's campaign has brought together legislators, advocacy groups, government officials, school district administrators and a wide range of interested entities.

The Florida campaign began making headway in 2005 when The Florida Bar polled adult Floridians to determine public knowledge of basic democratic principles. The survey results were dismal. Following the poll, FLREA

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(“Models of Change,” cont. from previous page)

surveyed school districts to determine the status of civic education in every county in the state. Armed with this data, Bar President Alan Bookman met with every major media outlet in the state and initiated a call for action.

Newspapers throughout Florida carried stories and the media helped focus public attention on the topic at a critical time—prior to legislative session. FLREA worked closely with The Florida Bar, the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and other interested entities to make the public aware of the survey results and to encourage change.

Former representatives who had attended the Congressional Conferences also became involved. Survey results of school districts were analyzed to find that only ten percent of districts statewide offered a middle school civics course. Middle school reform was on the state legislative agenda and the timing was right to secure a new state mandate for civics at the middle school level. In 2006, Representative Curtis Richardson introduced legislation that eventually led to the passage of a state requirement for students to take a semester of civics prior to exiting eighth grade.

The mandate has created an increased need for training, curricular materials, and innovative classroom practices. This summer, FLREA conducted eleven summer institutes and multiple one-day trainings to help pave the way for implementation of the new mandate. FLREA has worked with the Leon County Public Schools to design a yearlong required middle school course and curriculum to prepare every middle school civics teacher to begin teaching the program this fall. Teachers and FLREA staff worked to design a graphic organizer with thirteen separate units. A resource notebook filled with lessons and resources for each unit has been provided to each school. Additionally, each school has received We the People training and curriculum materials. FLREA works monthly with teachers from each of the middle schools to provide support, best practices, and technical assistance throughout the year. Other counties including Volusia, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach have created unique middle school civics models as well. To review these models, visit the FLREA website at www.flrea.org and look under the Civic Education Campaign for model courses.

Other initiatives have contributed to institutionalizing civic education in the curriculum since the passage of the mandate in Florida. A multi-year state standards project is underway to draft new standards for the social studies for state adoption. FLREA has served on the framing and writing committees and has attended every single meeting held by the Department of Education. Civics and government is being incorporated at every grade level from kindergarten through high school. Civics and government benchmarks are targeted for particular emphasis in grades 5, 7, and 12.

Assessment is the next major public policy hurdle in Florida. Many new groups have introduced civics initiatives in Florida with the passage of the new legislation in 2005 and have jumped into the legislative arena. Unfortunately no progress has been made to date after several attempts to secure the inclusion of social studies on the state FCAT assessment.

There is much still to be done but Florida has benefited greatly from the congressional conferences held by the Center and the Alliance for Representative Democracy. The state campaigns have built infrastructures to advance civic education in a way never before realized throughout the United States.

The FLREA has provided a graphic organizer of the middle school course designed in partnership with Leon County, Florida (attached to the emailed version of this newsletter). Leon County is using the document for the mandated yearlong middle school course. FLREA and Florida State Facilitator Annette Boyd Pitts are providing technical assistance throughout the school year.

A Message from Charles N. Quigley
Executive Director, Center for Civic Education

The Center is conducting a survey of the status of civic education and the progress of the civic education campaigns in each state and the District of Columbia. Liza Prendergast and Justin Rydstrom, co-managers of the Center's national Campaign, will be contacting each facilitator to gather information on progress and identify what assistance the Center can provide to help them improve civic education in their states. We hope this survey will provide us a clear picture of the status of civic education in each state that will enable us to more effectively provide both technical and financial assistance to further our mutual goal of improving civic education.

The American Civic Education Teacher Awards (ACETA) recognize teachers for their exemplary work preparing young people to become informed and engaged citizens. This year's recipients include Cheryl Cook-Kallio of Irvington High School in Fremont, California; Julie Kuhnhein of Highlands High School in Fort Thomas, Kentucky; and Sally Broughton of Monforton Elementary School in Bozeman, Montana. These outstanding teachers were honored in a video documentary on October 10, 2008, at the annual Project Citizen conference. ACETA is a project of the National Education Association, the Center on Congress at Indiana University, and the Center for Civic Education. For more information about the organizations supporting this award, visit the following websites:

<http://www.nea.org>

<http://www.centeroncongress.org>

<http://www.civiced.org>

An Interview Conducted by the Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT): For a clear presentation of many activities supporting civic literacy in the United States, read an interview with Robert Leming, program director of the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution program. Leming reflects on the general underpinnings of civic education and provides specific examples of professional development opportunities, success stories, and lessons learned in his career in the field. To read the full interview, visit:

http://www.ait.net/technos/e-zine/interviews/robert_leming.php

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), a member of the Alliance for Representative Democracy, contracted with Turcotte Public Administration Consulting and Training, LLC (TPACT) to conduct a controlled study—in Louisiana and Wyoming—of the effects of the Legislators Back to School Program, an initiative directed by NCSL. TPACT devised a study to test students' knowledge and appreciation of representative democracy before and after a legislator's visit to the classroom. In these "intervention" groups, an observer watched the presentation and kept track of how the legislator used the messages and resource materials offered through the program. TPACT also gave the tests to control classrooms that did not experience a legislator's visit.

The TPACT evaluation shows that the America's Legislators Back to School program results in significantly higher levels of understanding and appreciation of representative democracy among middle school students. These higher levels of achievement and appreciation are possible when legislators and teachers use the recommended lesson types and materials, and address the intended program objectives. You can view a summary of the report or link to the full report at <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/BTSPEvalSummary.htm>

Working Paper:**The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)**

In the online prelude to CIRCLE Working Paper 59, “Democracy for Some—The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School,” coauthors Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh stated that “in our study of high school civic opportunities, we found that a student’s race and academic track, and a school’s average socioeconomic status (SES), determines the availability of the school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement. High school students attending higher SES schools, those who are college-bound, and white students get more of these opportunities than low-income students, those not heading to college, and students of color.” To read the working paper in its entirety, please visit: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=278>

Center Launches We the People Initiative for High-Needs Students

In the summer of 2008, the Center for Civic Education launched a comprehensive outreach effort to assist schools in the United States with significant numbers of high-needs students. While the We the People programs are currently available to every elementary and secondary school that wishes to participate, the initiative seeks to take an extra step to reach schools that serve high percentages of socio-economically disadvantaged students and those experiencing school attendance or truancy problems. The goal of this long-term project is to provide program assistance to schools in all fifty states at the upper elementary, middle, and high school levels. The initiative will provide free curricular materials, professional development services, and technical assistance. Currently, We the People state coordinators are identifying three high-needs schools at each level to receive assistance. The first professional development seminar for middle schools is scheduled for February 13–16 in Manhattan Beach, California.

The Center is launching the initiative as a backdrop to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the landmark “A Nation At Risk” report. The report sounded a national alarm that the “educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.” Remembering the clarion call of that landmark report, the Center thinks that all educational institutions need to assess the current state of education among our youth and make an extra effort to assist those experiencing the least success in schools. The high-needs initiative takes its lead from effective schools research that notes that all children are educable regardless of background and that schools can make a difference in the educational performance of every child. If you are interested in reading the 1983 report, please visit: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>

For more information on the We the People High-Needs Initiative, call Robert Leming or Maria Gallo at 818-591-9321, or Mark Molli at 202-861-8800.

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