



CAMPAIGN  
TO PROMOTE  
CIVIC EDUCATION

# 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 quarterly newsletter is part of an initiative to provide a forum for information exchange in the civic education community and is administered by the Center for Civic Education (Center). For more information on the Campaign to Promote Civic Education, please contact:

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## Guest Columnist: Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick

*Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland's state superintendent of education, is nationally known for her strong focus on student achievement, teacher quality, parent involvement, public school funding, and early childhood education. Under Dr. Grasmick's leadership, Maryland is nationally recognized for its many achievements. In January 2009, Education Week ranked Maryland's public school system first in the nation and wrote that Maryland is the country's most consistently high-performing state. Dr. Grasmick is currently the longest serving appointed schools chief in the United States.*



## Building Civic Efficacy: Both the Formal and Informal Responsibilities of Citizenship

Many institutions, from religious congregations to universities, play crucial roles in civic education. But our public schools were founded with a special civic mission to reach students during their formative years. A body of rigorous research shows that schools have significant and lasting effects on their graduates' civic participation and civic knowledge—not only through courses on social studies, history, law, and government, but also through extracurricular activities and partnerships with community organizations.

From a national curricular perspective, the term *civic education* refers to courses in American government — national, state, and local — as well as curricula that focus on both the formal and informal responsibilities of citizenship. In recent years, civic education has expanded to include active participation in school governance and service learning.

There are no comparative rankings of civic *knowledge* by state, but throughout the nation, students know too little about politics and social issues. Therefore, the State of Maryland has taken steps to enhance civic education in schools. After a three-year development process, the Maryland State Board of Education recently adopted the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC), Pre-K through eighth grade and high school Government. Included in the VSC are standards for civic literacy. In high school, Government/Civics, United States History, and Modern World History are required courses and all Maryland students must pass the Government High School Assessment. In addition, MSDE recently completed the VSC in Social Studies.

This formal curriculum shows great promise; however, our main challenges lie outside of the formal high school curriculum. In Maryland, our greatest concerns are social studies in our elementary schools, opportunities for teachers to learn about civics and democracy, the quality of our students' service opportunities, and the availability of extracurricular activities.

The future of the State of Maryland depends on *how well* we prepare our young people to be active, responsible, competent citizens. We need our youth to contribute to our democracy while they are students and throughout their lives. In Maryland, parents and community members join with teachers to work with the students to study and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in simulated congressional hearings through the Center for Civic Education's We the People program. More than 80 elementary, middle, and high schools, 400 teachers, 6,000 students, 580 judges, and countless members of their community are involved with Maryland's simulated congressional hearings this year.

The goals of programs such as We the People align with the content of our Social Studies VSC, and they are to help students develop an increased understanding of

the institutions of constitutional democracy and the fundamental principles and values upon which they are founded – the skills necessary to participate as effective and responsible citizens, and the willingness to use democratic procedures for making decisions and managing conflict.

Civic education programs also help students engage with others of differing views. Debates, simulated congressional hearings, and mock trials in the classroom demand that students consider the arguments on both sides of an issue. The process of deliberation that leads to reasoned conclusions is not only a vital skill for students' own development, but it is at the heart of the process of self-government.

Active citizenship demands far more than spending a few minutes in a voting booth each November. To determine the health of our democracy, we need to ask more of our young people. Are they reading the newspaper? Are they discussing politics and public policy with friends and family? Are they engaged in local politics? Are they participating in community service?

The answer to these questions is “not enough.” Two-thirds of students scored below proficient on the federal government's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics, administered in 2006. Less than a third of eighth graders surveyed could identify the historical purpose of the Declaration of Independence, and less than a fifth of high school seniors could explain how citizen participation benefits democracy.

These findings are not surprising, given that civic education has been in steady decline over the past generation. With an emphasis on literacy and math dominating school reform discussions, schools are offering fewer civics classes. As a result, too many young people do not understand how our political system works, and therefore lack the tools to improve our communities and the nation through political engagement.

The other untold story of increasing youth turnout is the widening civic achievement gap. The NAEP results also reveal the extent of the gap. African-American and Hispanic students are twice as likely as their White counterparts to score below proficient on

national civics assessments, and a similar gap exists based on a student's socio-economic status.

The civic achievement gap represents not only differences in civic knowledge, but also differences in attitude toward government and the political process. A citizen's race and class is a key determinant of their trust in government and trust in each other, resulting in vast differences in political participation based on racial and socio-economic status.

The low participation rates of certain demographic groups mean that their priorities are the first to be neglected. The young people most likely to be directly affected by government policy – from the war in Iraq to the housing crunch to the lack of affordable healthcare – are also the least prepared to speak up.

This widening chasm is a significant threat to democratic ideals and practice, since we are failing to empower the poor, minority, and immigrant individuals most in need of high quality civic education. Without giving every citizen the tools to make their voice heard, how can we expect our national discourse to represent the values of the entirety of “We the People”?

We need more – and better – classes to impart the knowledge of government, history, law, and current events that students need to understand and participate in a democracy. To infuse civic virtue in our youngest citizens, civic learning should be incorporated throughout our students' academic careers.

Schools, districts, states, and the federal government must work together to restore the civic mission of schools. Only through partnerships among the stakeholders will schools have the funding, flexibility, and institutional support necessary for effective civic learning to take place.

Civic education is essential to our representative democracy and for our public to be informed and engaged, our schools must be involved in that education. The stakes are too high to allow us to be satisfied with a small increase in youth turnout. Our commitment to civic learning will determine whether we sustain a healthy democracy well beyond each November's election. Only through effective civic learning for every child can we create the type of informed and engaged citizens that will preserve a dynamic democracy for generations to come.



**Report: Center on Education Policy** On Wednesday, June 17, 2009, the Center on Education Policy released a report on achievement since the enactment of No Child Left Behind entitled, “State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08: Part I. Is the Emphasis on ‘Proficiency’ Shortchanging Higher- and Lower-Achieving Students?” In brief, CEP describes the findings: “This report is the first in a series of reports describing results from CEP's third annual analysis of state testing data. The report provides an update on student performance at the proficient level of achievement, and for the first time, includes data about student performance at the advanced and basic levels. Also included are profiles for each state that show trends in reading and math for basic, proficient, and advanced levels in elementary, middle, and high school. The study provides an in-depth look at the full range of student performance in order to better understand whether the No Child Left Behind Act's focus on proficiency has caused teachers to shortchange students at either end of the academic spectrum.” The full report is available here: [http://www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=document\\_ext.showDocumentByID&nodeID=1&DocumentID=280](http://www.cep-dc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=document_ext.showDocumentByID&nodeID=1&DocumentID=280)

## **A State Perspective: Millie Aulbur** **Director of Citizenship Education, The Missouri Bar**

### **Why the Federal Government Should Support a National Program of Significance in Civic Education**

As the director of the We the People Programs in Missouri, I have seen a renaissance of civic education in our schools. Through consistent and equitable funding provided by the Education for Democracy Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Sections 2341-2346), both public and private schools in my state receive the benefit of the nationally acclaimed We the People civic education programs that equip students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be engaged and thoughtful citizens.

### **The Education for Democracy Act**

The We the People Programs are administered nationally by the Center for Civic Education and funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the Education for Democracy Act passed by the U.S. Congress. The Center created the We the People curricular programs that are provided to each state and coordinates the nationwide implementation of the programs in public and private schools in every state and congressional district. Each congressional district is provided the same level of support and curricular materials.

Since 1987, directed funding from the Education for Democracy Act and its legislative predecessors has ensured that more than 30 million students across the nation have been taught the principles of American constitutional democracy through the We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution and We the People: Project Citizen programs. In my state of Missouri alone, 180,232 students have benefited from the reach of these programs over the past three years. We the People is a federally funded program that works—and works well.

This year, surprisingly, the U.S. Department of Education's budget submission proposed elimination of this directed funding to support the We the People Programs and other effective civic education programs in favor of a competitive grant program that would fund numerous smaller initiatives. This proposal would make it impossible to continue this 22-year, federally funded investment in a national program of proven, effective civic education.

Congress has long recognized that directed funding is essential for certain large-scale projects of national significance. That is why Congress has maintained support for the Education for Democracy Act since 1987 and restored it to the budget during years when past administrations placed it on the elimination list in their executive budget submissions to Congress. Each time, Congress has rejected those recommendations. For example, the Education for Democracy Act was eliminated in the first two years of the Clinton administration. Then, when the administration's senior

staff realized the value of this small but effective federal program, they supported it and increased its funding for the next six years of the administration's term in office.

**A National Grassroots Delivery System** The improvement of civic education in the United States requires the establishment of extensive national implementation networks supported by highly skilled, experienced, and dedicated people. It would be highly inefficient and extremely difficult to attempt to achieve the goals of such a program through a number of relatively small and uncoordinated grants with two- to five-year timelines. Although such an approach may be well intended, it should not be offered as a replacement for proven programs of national significance, such as the We the People Programs, which have undergone multiple authorizations and annual appropriations by Congress.

### **Equitable Assistance for Every State and Congressional District**

The Missouri Bar has worked with other national civic education programs and they all have their strengths. From time to time, we have received small amounts of funding from some of the other national programs. However, *none* of them has the Center's systematic and equitable approach to funding. The continued support we received under the Center's programs enable us each year to predict the support we will receive and plan accordingly to promise our teachers high-quality, sustainable programs in which they can participate year after year. Missouri schools can be confident about adopting the We the People and Project Citizen programs and receiving continued support for their implementation. The Center provides 35 classroom sets of outstanding free textbooks every year to teachers in every congressional district. One of the Missouri Bar's roles is to make sure that these books reach a broad spectrum of schools and teachers in each congressional district. We have been successful in doing so; the statistics prove this point.

Missouri's teachers and students have benefited greatly from these programs. From 2004 to 2008, the Missouri We the People program received and distributed more than 35,000 textbooks to more than 300 schools. Approximately 450 teachers received civic education training during this period through well-designed professional development programs that improved their mastery of the subject matter and their methodology. From 2004 to 2008, the Missouri Project Citizen program received more than 13,500 textbooks that were distributed to more than 150 schools. Approximately 200 teachers benefited from professional development programs linked to the curriculum. Total support for both programs included approximately 50,000 textbooks distributed to 500 schools. Tens of thousands of Missouri students benefited and continue to benefit from these programs at the cost of \$7.20 per student, far less than the retail cost of one history or civics textbook. (*Aulbur, continued page 3*)

### We the People Programs Validated by Research

With dollars for education in short supply in our states and school districts, we need to make sure that we target scarce resources on programs that work. The We the People Programs have been independently proven effective. Evaluations by the Educational Testing Service, Stanford University, RMC Research Corporation, and others have shown that the We the People Programs have had statistically significant positive effects on student knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors (see [www.civiced.org/research](http://www.civiced.org/research)). The most recent survey, conducted in 2007, revealed that We the People students scored 30% higher than their peers and 36% higher than college students on a comprehensive test of political knowledge. The We the People program is the most prominent and successful curricular program based entirely on constitutional principles and history. Simulated congressional hearings are an educational innovation that works. There is no other civic education competition in the world like We the People.

#### Your Feedback Requested:

I would be interested to know what you think. Please email your comments to me at [milliea@mobar.org](mailto:milliea@mobar.org).



### Campaign Event: Arizona, Facilitator Jeff Schrade

On Friday, June 12, the Arizona Civics Coalition convened their inaugural Arizona Civic Education Summit in partnership with ASU's Center for Civic Education and Leadership and the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education. The focus of the state summit was to review results of the 2009 Study of Civic Education in Arizona and make policy recommendations to improve civic education. The event brought together more than 50 stakeholders from around the state, from classroom teachers to elected officials. Notable participants included Representative Cecil Ash (AZ-18), and Jason Williams, a candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction. The keynote speaker at the event was State Superintendent

Tom Horne, who also fielded questions from the participants. Among some of the recommendations coming out of the meeting were (1) Developing a rigorous statewide student council system modeled after the Arizona legislature; (2) Increasing the U.S. government requirement in high school to one credit/year-long course; and (3) Increased professional development opportunities for teaching civics and service-learning across the curriculum. All of the recommendations will be included in the updated report from the Arizona Civics Coalition; the current version of the study is available at [http://ccel.asu.edu/assets/documents/AZ\\_Civics\\_Study.pdf](http://ccel.asu.edu/assets/documents/AZ_Civics_Study.pdf). The lead organizers of the summit were Nancy Haas and Jeffrey Schrade.



### Campaign Event: Illinois, Facilitator Pat Feichter

The McCormick Freedom Museum, in partnership with the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, released the Civic Blueprint for Illinois High Schools at a press conference in the Illinois State Capitol Rotunda. The Blueprint is the direct result of the Educating for Democracy Conference held last February and attended by educational policy stakeholders. You will find the blueprint at <http://campaign.civiced.org> under "Resources."

### Campaign Event: Virginia, Facilitator Sean O'Brien

Thanks to the successful efforts of the Virginia Consortium of Social Studies Specialists and College Educators (VCSSSCE) led by President Ken Bassett, the Virginia Board of Education abandoned their proposal to eliminate statewide social studies testing in the third grade. On May 28, Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Patricia Wright proposed eliminating the third grade social studies assessment exam, which tests students on content from kindergarten to third grade. Elimination of this exam would have followed a national trend of eliminating assessments in subjects other than those mandated by NCLB. With current studies suggesting "if it is not tested it is not taught," the social studies community began a statewide campaign to convince the Virginia Board of Education to keep the assessment in place. Letters from educators, social studies specialists, nonprofit organizations, and historic sites flooded the Virginia Board of Education, the office of Governor Tim Kaine, and the Virginia General Assembly. The House

Committee on Education and the Senate Appropriations Committee agreed with the outpouring of support for civic education and held special committee meetings to discuss the proposed testing change. With bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, the legislators urged Superintendent Wright and the Virginia Board of Education to reconsider the proposal. On Friday, June 20, the efforts of the social studies community succeeded and Superintendent Wright withdrew the original proposal from the table. Thanks to Delegate Robert Tata and former Delegate Jim Dillard, both former members of Virginia's delegation to the Congressional Conference on Civic Education, who continue their steadfast support for civic education in Virginia's General Assembly. We would also like to recognize Kelly Carmichael of the Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier for speaking out on behalf of the Campaign to Promote Civic Education during the public comment period. A copy of the Center's letter to members of the Virginia Board of Education can be found at <http://campaign.civiced.org> under "Resources."