



# 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 is pleased to announce new facilitators in the Campaign:

**Dick Kean**, Director of the Wyoming Partnership for Civic Education at the University of Wyoming, brings decades of experience as a teacher, administrator, and advocate for civic learning and engagement. Kean, former Director of the national Youth for Justice Program, assumed the position of facilitator on February 1, 2009. The Center thanks former facilitator Matt Strannigan for his leadership in that position for the past five years.

**Sean T. O'Brien**, Executive Director of the Center for the Constitution at Montpelier, comes to the Campaign with his own constitutional scholarship and extensive experience working with state political leaders. Before joining James Madison's Montpelier, O'Brien led the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia. O'Brien is a native of Virginia and graduate of UVA (B.A. and Ph.D.); he also served on the Virginia Commission on Civics Education. The Center thanks Stephen Bragaw and Barbara Perry of Sweet Briar College for their work in Virginia to further civic education policy.

**Beth Ratway**, Consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, joins the Campaign as a nationally recognized expert in professional development and curricular programs. Ratway, a We the People mentor and former civics teacher, is a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and assumed the position of facilitator on February 10, 2009. The Center thanks Dee Runaas for her efforts in Wisconsin leading the Campaign since 2003.

## Guest Columnist: William Hatcher

### Is there a Clear Target for Civic Education?

*William Hatcher currently serves on the board of directors of the Center for Civic Education. He is the retired superintendent of the Kern High School District, the largest high school district in California, serving over 38,000 students in a 3,000 square mile area in the central valley. Mr. Hatcher taught high school government for sixteen years. Along with his wife, Carol, he currently operates an international consulting firm focused on civic education.*



**The archer has at least two ways to address his target.** One is to fix his desired location and then attempt to shoot arrows into it. The other is to first shoot arrows into the wall and then draw the target around it. As a government teacher, principal, and school superintendent, I have seen both approaches used during the past five decades in determining the curricular bulls-eye for civic education.

Development of the required senior government course in California seems to have relied upon the second approach. Several entities with varying agendas have taken their own target practice with this course. These include textbook (*cont. p. 3*)

## Upcoming Meeting Report Dialogue

The Center for Civic Education will release a report in June 2009 on the current status of civic education and issue policy recommendations to improve civic learning and practice. To frame that report, the Campaign will hold a working session for state facilitators attending the We the People Mentors and Institute Directors meeting on March 7, 2009. All facilitators will be asked to provide input via email and telephone on the upcoming Campaign report in early March.

## Campaign to Promote Civic Education Welcomes Obama Administration and the 111th Congress

The Center for Civic Education would like to extend a warm welcome to the Obama-Biden administration and the freshman members of the 111th Congress. The Center looks forward to informing both the White House and Congress about the work of the Campaign to Promote Civic Education and its mission to create a more enlightened citizenry. The goal of education in civics is informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. Their effective and responsible participation requires the acquisition of a body of knowledge and of intellectual and participatory skills. Effective and responsible participation also is furthered by development of certain dispositions or traits of character that enhance the individual's capacity to participate in the political process and contribute to the healthy functioning of the political system and improvement of society. While we look to our elected leaders to tackle America's problems, we must also look to the solution in responsible citizens around the United States.

## Recent State Campaign Events

December 2008 - February 2009

### Illinois: Facilitator Pat Feichter

The McCormick-Tribune Foundation sponsored the first Illinois statewide Civic Education conference on February 8–10. The conference was titled “Education for Democracy: Creating a Blueprint for Illinois.” Among the presenters were The Honorable Diane Wood of the Seventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, Diana Hess of the University of Wisconsin, Mike Lawrence of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, and Jesse Ruiz, Chairman, Illinois State Board of Education. Presentations were given on a wide variety of subjects including We the People: the Citizen and the Constitution. Representatives from every major civic education organization in Illinois attended and the end product of the conference will be the publication of the “Civic Blueprint for Civic Education in Illinois.” The Center for Civic Education was a co-sponsor of the conference.

### Maryland: Facilitator Marcie Taylor-Thoma

The Maryland Civic Literacy Commission met on December 15, 2008, in Annapolis, Maryland. Notable attendees included: Maryland State Senator Allan Kittleman; Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools; and Marcie Taylor-Thoma, Director of Social Studies, Maryland State Department of Education. Taylor-Thoma, the Campaign Facilitator, provided a general overview of the state of civic literacy in Maryland and shared achievements and challenges in improving civic education policy. The importance of sustainable civic education policy and enrichment programs, like the Center's We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, have proved to be vital to the livelihood of civic competency in Maryland. The Civic Literacy Commission also met on Monday, February 2, 2009, providing commissioners with an opportunity to see successful civic education programs in action. The commission reviewed proposals for committees and selected membership for future action. The next meeting will take place in June 2009.

*If you would like us to showcase an event or accomplishment in your state, please email [campaign@civiced.org](mailto:campaign@civiced.org) or call Liza and Justin at 202-861-8800.*

*(Hatcher, continued from page 1)*

publishers, the State Board of Education (standards), the Governor's Office (Secretary of Education), the State Legislature (financial/legal), the Superintendent of Public Instruction (State Department of Education), the Secretary of State (mock elections/voting), the College Board (AP exams), the University of California (college prep course approval), and local boards of trustees (curricular infusions such as community service requirements for graduation/alternative courses). State curriculum commissions are nominated by these bodies and therefore have been highly politicized. Lacking mandatory statewide assessment of civic learning in California, course content varies from district to district, school to school, and even from class to class within the same hallways of local campuses.

Consensus on how the course is to be taught is even cloudier. Variances in teacher training for civic education instructors could occupy another article. There is no general professional knowledge or acceptance of the six promising civic education instructional practices outlined by in the Carnegie CIRCLE Report, "The Civic Mission of Schools, 2001." Also unfamiliar to many educators are the results of the 2005 California Survey of Civic Education conducted by Professor Joseph Kahne of Mills College. This study of over 2,000 California seniors—all of whom had completed a U.S. government course—is critical in understanding the impact of pedagogy on subsequent student involvement in the political process. Both documents should be required reading for all senior government teachers and their principals. Delaine Eastin, former California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, put these studies in perspective when she quipped, "Increased knowledge cannot be the only outcome of civic education. It must include skills and dispositions. Even the Unibomber could have passed a test on content. Surely that is not the only criterion we should use for insuring an enlightened citizenry."

School districts may hesitate to encourage students to actually practice the skills and dispositions of active citizenship when it comes to controversial issues. I recently served as an expert witness for a school district in a suit by the American Civil Liberties Union and the student editors of the school newspaper over a First Amendment case involving their freedom of the press. Recent student demonstrations on other constitutional guarantees

have given schools more news coverage than administrators might desire.

Many were thrilled by the upswing of youth involvement in the most recent elections. Was this a result of improved civic education or in spite of it? We hope the latter; however, a mock election sponsored by California Secretary of State Debra Bowen gives us data to ponder. Ms. Bowen, a strong advocate of the school's role in promoting civic involvement, invited all California middle and high schools to participate in this mock election of national and state candidates. State propositions were also listed on the student ballot. Teachers and administrators were provided study guides as well as assistance in tallying student votes. Yet sixty percent of our public schools failed to participate, thus denying their students access—and possibly increased efficacy—to a fundamental democratic responsibility.

Conversely, there are positive signs regarding improved civic education programs. In November, I observed a Project Citizen showcase featuring twenty-two high schools in the greater Manila area of the Philippines. Student proposals were community-based, addressing such issues as traffic hazards, school safety, and infrastructure improvement. I have seen similar showcases in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Jordan. These kids were petitioning their government leaders to change or effectively enforce public policy. I have volunteered in government classes in California for more than twenty years to assist incredibly talented teachers in preparing students for participation in *We the People: The Citizen and The Constitution*. Follow up studies of these students show a direct positive relationship between participation in the program and civic involvement in later life.

The political world as we knew it has changed. Young people were instrumental in electing the forty-fourth president of the United States. The Barack Obama organization reportedly has a database of 13 million Americans whom they can summon on a moment's notice. This has been used not only to impact the financing of the election but also in bringing assistance to communities in need. What opportunities will technology bring us in the near future? Will our children be able to "hologram" themselves (as was done on CNN election night) into various venues to affect public policy? This gives a different perspective to the framers view of classical republicanism and civic virtue, doesn't it?

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The future demands that our target for civic education not be disjointed or without focus. That is why the Center for Civic Education's Campaign to Promote Civic Education is so essential: it provides strategic direction on the cornerstones of civic education reform, improved time and policy curricular requirements for civics and government, clear and challenging standards, greater investment in teacher preparation, and more authentic assessment of students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The survival of our children and our democracy depends on where we aim our collective arrows. By aiming the bow at these critical areas we will be truly working to restore the civic mission of our schools.

### **Federal Update: Serve America Act**

**January 16, 2009**

As one of the first pieces of proposed legislation in the 111th Congress, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) introduced amendments to the Serve America Act in Senate Bill 277. Cosponsors of the bill include a bipartisan coalition of twenty senators. Amendments to the Serve America Act call for the creation of two new service learning programs including a "Youth Engagement Zone to Strengthen Communities providing competitive grants to partnerships between local educational agencies that serve high-need, low-income communities" and "a Campus of Service program" with funding available for universities. Among other initiatives, the legislation includes government incorporation of a Civic Health Index "enabling states and communities to assess their civic health," which is a project currently managed by the National Conference on Citizenship ([www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net)). To read the proposed legislation in its entirety, visit [www.thomas.gov](http://www.thomas.gov) and under the "Search Bill Summary & Status" type: S277.

For more information on the Campaign to Promote Civic Education, please contact:

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