

*“Democracy must be reborn in each generation and education is its midwife”*

*John Dewey*

*20<sup>th</sup> Century Education Reformer*

### **Educating All Students for Democracy -- and Life**

A healthy democracy requires the informed and active participation of its citizens. For self-governance to work, citizens must understand and actively engage in the process. Gaining civic knowledge and skills doesn't just happen. People must be taught – how their government and the political system work as well as their rights, role, and responsibilities. Since the earliest days of our republic, schools have had the twin missions of educating students for the workplace and for active and informed citizenship; the latter mission is the civic mission of our schools.

### **Education for Democracy in Decline**

School remains the one universal experience all citizens have to gain the knowledge and skills for informed and engaged citizenship. Unfortunately, far too few students today are receiving a well rounded civic learning experience, which includes opportunities to learn in the classroom and through service learning and experiential learning opportunities that makes civic learning more interesting and engaging.

The results of the most recent national measurement of how our schools are meeting their civic mission, the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress on Civics, were shocking. Less than 25% of students in the sample could demonstrate a proficient understanding of this area so vital for our nation's future! This lack of basic civic knowledge imperils our democracy by effectively disempowering its citizens. With the decline in civic education over the past decades, it is no surprise that citizens are becoming cynical and failing to vote, read newspapers, and engage in their communities.

There are a variety of reasons for the decline in civic learning. The most notable are a lack of adequate standards and assessments in civic learning, a lack of adequate curricular requirements, a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers, a lack of implementation of proven teaching strategies that include service and experiential learning and discussion of current events, and a lack of inclusion in student testing which emphasize a few subjects over all others.

### **The Civic Mission of Schools Report**

Recognizing the danger to our nation of a continued decline of civic learning in our schools, over forty national education, civic engagement, business, and professional organizations participated in a landmark study entitled *The Civic Mission of Schools Report*, published in 2003. This Report, published by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, calls on policymakers and educators to strengthen civic learning through an integrated approach that includes six elements: (1) instruction in government, history, law and democracy; (2) guided discussion of current events; (3) community and service learning programs linked to the curriculum; (4) extracurricular activities in the school and community; (5) simulations of democratic processes and procedures, and (6) student participation in school governance. The Report and its recommendations may be found at: [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org).

## **The Civic Mission of Schools Campaign**

To reverse the decline in civic learning the signatories to the *Civic Mission of Schools Report*, joined by prominent organizations and citizens from many walks of life, have launched a campaign to restore the civic mission of schools. The Campaign has a simple and straightforward goal – to strengthen every school’s capacity, commitment and performance in educating America’s young people as citizens of our democracy. The Campaign is focused on producing real change in education policies and, most importantly, in changing classroom practice and student civic dispositions by raising awareness about the importance of civic learning, promoting policies that strengthen civic learning at the federal, state and school district levels, distributing high quality civic materials, assessment tools and research and providing assistance to a network of campaigns in each state.

Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, former Governor Roy Romer and former Congressman Lee Hamilton co-chair a National Advisory Committee of prominent citizens who guide the Campaign’s work and promote the importance of civic learning.

Among the organizations represented on the Campaign’s Steering Committee are: The National Education Association, the League of Woman Voters of the United States, the Committee for Economic Development, the National School Boards Association, the Education Commission of the States, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Council for the Social Studies, the American Bar Association the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the Public Education Network.

The Campaign has affiliate campaign organizations in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. These campaigns have been very active in passing legislation, establishing official state commissions on civic education and working with policymakers to strengthen civic learning policies.

### **Campaign Resources**

On the Campaign website, [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org), you will find our Civic Learning Online database of innovative examples of curricular programs, practice examples and professional development opportunities that illustrate each of the *Civic Mission of Schools Report*’s six promising practices. You will also find school-wide and district programs, examples and strategies for using civic learning integrated into reading, math, science and other curricular areas as well as tools for civic learning assessment. The examples and programs contained in the Civic Learning On-Line database are ready for school use and for policymakers who want to see what high quality civic learning looks like.

In addition to Civic Learning Online, [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org) also provides contact information for each affiliated state campaign, the latest research and news on civic learning, examples of effective civic learning policies, and toolkits for schools, policymakers and civic learning advocates.

The Campaign is taking the lead in advocating for strengthening civic learning policy at the Federal level, including the provisions of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act scheduled for reauthorization over the next year and for more frequent and meaningful national assessments in the social studies.

*For more information, please visit [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org) or contact Ted McConnell, Executive Director of the Campaign, at [ted@ncss.org](mailto:ted@ncss.org) or (301) 588-1800.*