



# Center for Civic Education

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May 21, 2008

The Honorable Mark Leno  
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol  
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Dear Assemblymember Leno:

I write to you on behalf of the Center for Civic Education in support of AB 2544. We believe that all young people in California should be prepared to be active and responsible citizens. The evidence from many sources, including the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics, makes clear that California's youth are not civically knowledgeable and sufficiently engaged in politics and government. Unfortunately, the most recent research reports only confirm that sad state of affairs and indeed indicate that schools are not providing equal access to civic education opportunities.

For instance, in the research report *Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School*, Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh of Mills College show that wealthier students were twice as likely to report studying how laws are made than students from poor families. Without such fundamental insights into the workings of our democracy as knowing how legislation is enacted, these poorer students are "civically at-risk" and lacking the potential for effective citizenship. Furthermore, 25% of college bound students were able to participate in simulations of the democratic process and other relevant role-playing exercises, as compared with 17% of those planning on attending Vocational Education, and only 10% with no post high school educational plans.

We must not leave the poorest of our students behind in their opportunities to learn about their government, because we know that civic education has an effect on civic involvement after these students have graduated. We know that young people who don't attend college vote at far lower rates than those who do. But even those who attend college vote at far lower rates than they should.

We need to improve the civic education of our youth on a broad scale, and AB 2544 is a reasonable step towards accomplishing that goal. The California legislature has already endorsed the goal in passing ACR 30. Let's build on that resolution and take a solid step forward. Thus we urge you to take action on increasing civic opportunities for all students and vote for AB 2544.

Sincerely,

Charles N. Quigley