

# EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

## California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

### **The Right Stuff: Civic Education Resources Teachers Can Use Today**

*By*

Keri Doggett and Michelle Herczog, Co-Chairs

Practice Committee for the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

We all know that if you want to be successful in shifting educational paradigms, institutionalizing new programs, or changing school cultures, it takes a concerted effort to engage constituents on *all* fronts: at the state legislature and state board of education, at county offices of education and district offices, with community partners and parent groups, and most importantly in classrooms with teachers and students.

The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools has sought to engage the full spectrum of educational entities to energize schools to fulfill their historic mission of creating an informed, responsible citizenry. And like any successful initiative, the Campaign continues to work where the only real change takes place – in schools and classrooms with real teachers and real students.

The goal of the Practice Committee is to provide information to classroom teachers about **practical applications of the research**, opportunities for **professional development**, and **resources** to support each of the Six Promising Approaches to Civic Education.

#### **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF RECENT RESEARCH**

The civic mission of schools is to educate for an informed and engaged citizenry. The researchers based the national Civic Mission of Schools (CMS, 2003) report on the premise that effective, informed, and engaged citizens possess certain civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. (Figure 1) With this in mind, think of the CMS report as a compilation of research with some overarching findings about what works in civic education.

There are several findings that have direct application to what goes on in classrooms between teachers and students. First, the compilation of research revealed six promising approaches for building civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. (Figure 2) It is important to note that each of the promising approaches elicits different outcomes. The more an individual student is exposed to **all** of the approaches, the better. In fact, the best civic education instruction uses multiple approaches simultaneously. This may sound daunting, but when teachers examine what takes place during an interactive, rich history-social science lesson, chances are, at least two of the promising approaches are in play. For example, many history-social science teachers have students make analogies between historic and present-day issues or events. Ensuring that students take an active role in identifying, analyzing, and discussing these analogies could support Promising Approach #1 and #2 at the same time.

An excellent resource for teachers to learn more about the approaches is *Promising Approaches for Strengthening Civic Education* by Dr. Mary Kirlin (2005) published on the Campaign's website. Kirlin provides a briefing sheet for each of the approaches and includes definitions, examples of what each looks like in the classroom, and caveats about implementation and expected outcomes.

What happens in the home matters too. The national report, as well as new research conducted here in California (Kahne, et al, 2002 and 2005), found that interaction between parents and children around civic topics increases civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Dinnertime conversations about current events, families that watch the news together, and civil conversations about politics all have a positive impact on the development of engaged and informed citizens. Parents who talk about their own civic engagement increase the chance that their children will also be participatory citizens. Based on

asking over 100 teachers who have participated in Teaching American History projects how they first became interested in history-social science, we suspect that it is not only parents, but also other adult family members and positive role models in the lives of students who can make a difference in civic learning. When asked the question, "*When did you first realize knowing something about history is important?*," over half of the teachers have responded that parents or other adult relatives, the parents of their childhood friends, or other adult role models outside of school influenced their interests. In many cases, the teachers explained that it was the adult's engagement in civic activities (politics, discussing current events, activism) that greatly influenced them.

Teachers can play a role in encouraging students to interact with parents and other caring adults. Think about providing assignments that require students to seek out adults to discuss a civic issue or current event. The Campaign has created a list of "10 Things Parents Can Do to Raise Engaged, Informed and Responsible Citizens." Endorsed by the state Parent Teacher Association, these suggested activities are based on the Promising Approaches, as well as new research. Teachers can use the list as a starting point to create assignments, as well as distribute

### **Goals of Civic Education**

Civic education should help young people acquire and learn to use knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.

Competent and informed citizens...

1. Are informed and thoughtful; have a grasp and appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy; have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; and have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter into dialogue among others with different perspectives.
2. Participate in their communities through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs.
3. Act politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning and protesting, and voting.
4. Have moral and civic virtues such as concern for

the list for students to take home. This list can be accessed on the Campaign’s Website: [http://www.cms-ca.org/parents\\_10ideas.pdf](http://www.cms-ca.org/parents_10ideas.pdf).

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

An ultimate goal of the Campaign is to establish a statewide professional development program specific to civic education and the Civic Mission of Schools. In the meantime, we have found some excellent opportunities to integrate CMS into existing professional development programming.

For example, there are 40 Teaching American History (TAH) projects currently running in California state. These projects are funded by the U.S. Department of Education and focus on providing professional development to raise teacher knowledge about “traditional American history”, the content of which is perfectly suited to Promising Approach 1: Formal instruction in history, law, government and the principles of democracy. Simply discussing with teachers, “why is it important for students to know about these topics” can lead to the conclusion that, indeed, schools do have a civic mission.

The federal Department of Education’s TAH office is providing additional research and guidance on effective history instruction and professional development. In 2002, several of the major history organizations met with the Department’s TAH staff and created *Benchmarks for Professional Development of Teaching History as a Discipline* (Stearns, et al, 2003). These *Benchmarks* are intended to provide guidance in the design and delivery of professional development, thereby increasing both teacher and student capacities. Among the recommendations for effective professional development of history teachers:

*Presenters need to introduce active methods as part of the variety of methods presented.*

*Presenters need to model active learning techniques that go beyond lectures and discussion—group activities, role-playing, simulations, and debates, etc.  
Presenters must show the intimate relationship between these activities and in-depth historical content.*

The *Benchmarks*, particularly those listed in the Pedagogy and Historical Thinking sections, and the CMS Promising Approaches are mutually supportive. Within the context of TAH professional development, teachers can be introduced to the civic mission of schools and explicit connections to the promising approaches can be made and demonstrated through high-quality history lessons.

The new federal mandate to commemorate Constitution Day in schools provides another excellent opportunity to provide professional development featuring the promising approaches.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Civic Mission of Schools</b> <b>Six Promising Approaches to Civic Education</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.</li><li>2. Classroom discussion of current events.</li><li>3. Civic-based service learning.</li><li>4. Extracurricular activities.</li><li>5. Student voice in school/classroom governance.</li><li>6. Simulations of democratic processes.</li></ol>
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For the last two years, the Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Los Angeles Unified School District have partnered with Constitutional Rights Foundation and Center for Civic Education to provide professional development events to put resources in the hands of teachers for Constitution Day. Other County Offices of Education, including Alameda COE, also offered professional development events for Constitution Day, and several TAH projects did the same. The Campaign will continue to post such events on its website, and teachers should check with their district and county offices in August and September to see if events are planned.

Of course, the whole reason for professional development is to impact students, and one of the most exciting activities of the Campaign involved over five thousand students statewide in the *2006 Capitol Constitution Display*. Teachers provided classroom lessons that culminated in the students creating 5”x 5” panels expressing through art and/or writing their thoughts about why the Constitution is important. Display boards were created with the students’ work and exhibited in the state Capitol building. The students’ work has also been displayed at the National Council of Social Studies conference and at the 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional Conference on Civic Education in Washington, D.C. and is currently displayed on board the U.S. Midway museum in San Diego, in the California Department of Education building, and in a dozen county offices of education around the state.

### **CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN RESOURCE DIRECTORY FOR SCHOOLS**

The Campaign has created an on-line resource directory to for teachers, live on the Campaign web site, [www.cms-ca.org](http://www.cms-ca.org). It offers high quality on-the-ground materials, lesson plans and ideas for teachers in all types of classroom settings, Kindergarten through Grade 12 to help students become effective citizens.

Users are invited to access the site by grade level or category to find programs, strategies, and organizations to support the six promising approaches identified in the Civic Mission of Schools Report. (See Figure 2)

One of the most exciting features of the Resource Directory is the web site’s capacity to invite educators, organizations, and community members to submit their own ideas and programs to the Directory. Look for the Submission Form button to download a Submission Form. Submissions that pass the review process are uploaded to the site. If you or your colleagues are looking for the best one-stop-shop to find high quality materials and resources to support your civic education program *OR* you have a valuable resource to add to the site, don’t hesitate to click on [www.cms-ca.org](http://www.cms-ca.org) today.

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