

# EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

## California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

### **Policy Considerations for the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools**

By Gary F. Dei Rossi, Ed.D

*“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.”* Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General

The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools takes Secretary Annan’s statement to heart in its efforts to improve civic education in California. In 2004 a group of concerned California individuals and organizations convened by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, in collaboration with the Center for Civic Education (both California non-partisan, non-profit educational organizations), met to discuss how they could strengthen civic education in California schools.

During the early days of this effort, the Campaign organized committees to focus on key areas: Policy, Best Practices, School Demonstration Sites, Youth Voice and Research, and Outreach.

The Policy Committee established seven broad goals: 1) seek written support for the Campaign’s mission from various key educational institutions/associations and community groups, 2) secure a joint legislative resolution endorsing the importance of the Campaign and the six recommendations of the Carnegie/CIRCLE Civic Mission of Schools report, 3) seek a state appropriation of funds to create a civic education staff development program, 4) seek language in the K-8 Reading/Language Arts/English Language Development textbook adoption criteria that supported the using of expository text that highlighted history-social science (emphasis on civics), 5) create a statewide incentive program to recognize/reward programs of excellence, 6) suggest ways to incorporate more history-social science (emphasis on civics) in the re-authorization of NCLB, and 7) propose four regional legislative hearings on “Are we preparing California youth to be engaged citizens?”

#### **GOAL ONE — ENDORSEMENTS**

Early in the Campaign, the Co-Chairs; Gary Hart (former State Senator and Secretary of Education), David Gordon (Superintendent of Sacramento County Office of Education) and Darline Robles (Superintendent of Los Angeles County Office of Education) and the Steering Committee sought endorsements from many educational institutions/associations, individuals and community groups. The first endorsement was from Jack O’Connell the current California Superintendent for Public Instruction. As a former government teacher he hardily signed on as a strong supporter of the Campaign. In addition many other groups including the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association,

California PTA, California School Boards Association, the Association of California School Administrators, and the California Council of the Social Studies have endorsed the campaign.

### **GOAL TWO — LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS**

The second goal was to secure a joint legislative resolution endorsing the importance of the Campaign and the six recommendations of the Carnegie/CIRCLE Civic Mission of Schools Report. This would increase understanding of the need, help identify supporters of the Campaign, and broaden awareness. Once draft, circulated, revised and approved by the Campaign coalition, Michael Hulsizer (who handles legislative matters at the Kern County Office of Education) recruited Kevin McCarthy (Assemblyman from 32<sup>nd</sup> District--Bakersfield) as the sponsor. Due to their efforts, the legislature adopted and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Assembly Concurrent Resolution # 30 in July 2005. See Figure 1 for the complete text of the resolution.

Currently many school districts, county offices of education, and various organizations have passed similar resolutions. To see local examples, please visit the Policy section on the California Campaign's website: [www.cms-ca.org/policy.htm](http://www.cms-ca.org/policy.htm).

### **GOAL THREE — PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As a third goal, the Campaign decided to seek a state appropriation of funds to create a civic education staff development initiative in the form of a grants program managed by the California Department of Education through its History-Social Science office. As envisioned, grants would be awarded to prepare teachers/administrators to implement the six recommended practices identified from research by the Carnegie/CIRCLE Civic Mission of Schools report. Eligible applicant agencies/organizations would include local education agencies, community-based non-profit organizations, and academic institutions. Applications would be submitted by a lead agency and require at least two partner organizations for grants of a maximum of three years. In addition to costs for staff development, an appropriate portion of each grant would be used to conduct a formal evaluation of the program. Ongoing discussions with the Secretary of Education's Office and the State Legislature are continuing.

### **GOAL FOUR — INTEGRATING AN EMPHASIS ON CIVICS**

The fourth goal focused on inserting language in the K-8 Reading/Language Arts/English Language Development textbook adoption criteria that supported the using of expository texts highlighting history/social science content and methods with an emphasis on civics. This would encourage textbook publishers to incorporate stories and reading that illustrated important historical events and our civic values. For example, a reading might focus on a courageous person who shaped our country. The reading would describe his or her struggles and drive to create a democratic nation, but also the real civic issues faced in doing so. The final language was not as strong as many in the Campaign would have liked, but there was an acknowledgment in the criteria to pursue this approach.

### **GOAL FIVE — RECOGNITION FOR SCHOOLS**

In addition to providing policy and financial support for civic education statewide, the Campaign opted for an initiative to provide incentives for schools to strengthen their own civics offerings at the site level. To accomplish, this goal, the campaign is launching an awards and recognition program for schools, which assess current civic education programs and implement plans for strengthening them. The program will premiere in 2008. For more information regarding this topic please refer to the corresponding article in this issue.

## GOAL SIX — NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Clearly, efforts to improve civic education in California must take into account national realities. Thus, the Campaign is working to suggest ways for incorporating more history-social science and civics into the re-authorization of NCLB. Below are excerpt of some of the comments and recommendations made by Todd Clark, the Campaign's director at the April 11, 2006 NCLB Commission hearing in Los Angeles.

- The future of America and of our democratic government depends on effective teachers who provide each new generation with knowledge of our history and government, the skills needed to make informed decisions about complicated public issues, and attitudes that support democracy and a commitment to engage in civic life.
- Public schools were created in America to prepare the young to be participating citizens. In the nineteenth century, there were high levels of civic participation. Over the decades since that time, civic engagement has decreased dramatically. Trust in government has declined and interest in public affairs has fallen. Sadly, American young people are increasingly willing to help their neighbors, but are less willing to take part in civic life.
- In recent years, we have become the most diverse nation in the world. New arrivals often come from societies with weak democratic institutions and they have little or no experience with self-government. While all citizens need to understand our government and the role of the citizen, these new arrivals are at a tragic disadvantage. They are often fearful of the representatives of government and do not seek their help when it is needed. Their children often become their only source of information about our institutions. As a result, education about our government is vital for these families, and to the well being our democracy!
- In 2003 The Carnegie Corporation of New York published a report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*. After reviewing research on the impact of school-based efforts to prepare young people to be engaged citizens, the report identified six promising approaches to civic education that our schools can implement.
- With funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a broad coalition of California education and community organizations was created in 2004 to encourage the implementation of those suggestions in our schools. The early efforts of this campaign are encouraging.
- However, to effectively implement the Carnegie recommendations in California classrooms, teachers need opportunities to learn more about our government as well as how to present what they learn to their students. They need access to experienced guides and stimulating materials. There is no better way to strengthen our schools' preparation of young people for engaged citizenship than by deepening the preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers in this important area of the curriculum.
- The No Child Left Behind Act, approved by Congress and the President and implemented nationally for the past five years, has undertaken the laudable task of improving and standardizing the education of American young people particularly in two areas of the core curriculum – reading and mathematics. The Act has had an important effect aligning instruction and state standards, and stimulating the more effective use of test data, according to a report recently released by the Washington, D.C. based Center on Education Policy.
- Unfortunately, this report also found that in many schools, instructional time has been reduced in at least one other subject to make more time for English and mathematics

- the subjects tested for use in NCLB reporting. According to the report, history, geography and civics were the most heavily cut areas of the curriculum.
- History, geography, and civics became part of the American school curriculum as a means to meet our schools’ responsibility to prepare youth to become knowledgeable and skilled citizens committed to engagement in civic life.
- NCLB should be modified to support both the integration of vital skills and the acquisition of knowledge from a broad array of subject areas. Of special importance to the health of our democratic institution, is to be sure we adequately prepare both teachers and young people to participate effectively as citizens. Therefore, our campaign strongly supports strengthening and featuring the elements in the curriculum that are vital to our civic life – history, geography, and civics.

### **GOAL SEVEN — PUBLIC HEARINGS**

While still in early planning, the Campaign is promoting the idea of conducting four regional legislative hearings throughout the state on the following topic: “Are we preparing California youth to be engaged citizens?” As currently conceived, public hearings would be held in Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Sacramento, and the San Francisco Bay Area. The purpose of the hearings would be to provide an overview of the present state of civic education in California and suggest ways in which action might be effectively taken to increase civic engagement and support for the democratic institutions.

So how can you get involved? Here are a few suggestions:

- Endorse the recommendations of the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and their implementation in California.
- Join the Campaign and lend your support to our efforts to implement policies to make civic education an important part of the curriculum in California schools.
- Work with your local schools and communities to assure that every student has the opportunity for a quality civic education.

Working together we can achieve civic renewal in California. By doing so, we can make sure our democracy evolves and thrives.

### **Assembly Concurrent Resolution #30**

WHEREAS, Preparing each generation to understand and support democratic principles is the responsibility of all of our institutions and was a primary reason for the creation of public schools;

WHEREAS, Our citizens have overwhelmingly agreed over the course of 33 years of Gallup polling that “education young people for responsible citizenship” should be the primary purpose of our schools;

WHEREAS, Research demonstrates that our schools are an effective place to provide systematic and sustained instruction in and opportunities for the application of democratic principles and that early adolescence is a particularly critical time for civic education;

WHEREAS, The democratic principles that underlie our society, the structure and functions of government, and the rights, responsibilities and participation of citizens should be a continual and meaningful part of instruction throughout every child’s education;

WHEREAS, The importance of student’s grasp of the concepts of civic responsibility and respect for others cannot be underestimate;

WHEREAS, The history-social science framework goals now guiding California schools call for the integration of knowledge and cultural understanding, democratic understanding, and civic value and skills attainment and social participation at every grade;

WHEREAS, State law requires that secondary students complete only a single semester-long course in government/civics; now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring,* That the Legislature urges the State Board of Education and all local school governing bodies to examine current practice and develop plans to increase and broaden emphasis on principles and practices of democracy in the school of this state; and be it further

*Resolved,* That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the State Board of Education and to the author for distribution.

Figure 1 – Text of Assembly Concurrent Resolution #30