

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

For Immediate Release
November 16, 2005

Contact: Lisa Cleri Reale
(323) 938-6170

NEW SURVEY SHOWS ALARMING TRENDS IN STUDENT CIVIC KNOWLEDGE **The California Survey of Civic Education polled over 2,000 high school students**

Los Angeles, CA..... The California Survey of Civic Education was released today. The survey is one of the components of *Educating for Democracy: The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of the Schools*, a statewide project of Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) in collaboration with the Center for Civic Education and the Alliance for Representative Democracy. Convened by CRF and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Annenberg Foundation and the W.R. Hearst Foundation. The California Campaign represents concerned individuals and organizations seeking to enlist support of government, education, business, law, parent, labor and service groups to renew civic education in California.

The Campaign commissioned Professor Joseph Kahne of Mills College to construct and administer a survey to examine the civic knowledge, skills and commitments of graduating high school seniors throughout the state and to assess the prevalence and impact of various educational practices cited in *The Civic Mission of Schools* report previously released by the Carnegie Corporation. In 2005, the survey was conducted among 2,366 students who had completed a U.S. Government course. Participating schools represented different geographic areas and were selected for a range of demographic and academic performance factors.

Some of the key findings of the survey are as follows:

- Students are not well prepared for effective citizenship.
- Although a high percentage of students reported that they intended to vote, they were less likely to say they were informed enough to vote.
- Student confidence declined further when asked about specific issues: Iraq, the economy, taxes, education, health care, and the like.
- One half of students surveyed could not correctly identify the function of the Supreme Court.
- 33 percent could not correctly identify even one of California's two senators from among a list of options.
- There is much schools can do to significantly improve students' civic capacities.
- Access to school-based opportunities to develop civic commitments and capacities are uneven. Those intending to go to four-year colleges have significantly more access to these opportunities than others.
- Young people have a strong desire to help their communities as evidenced by their involvement as volunteers and their commitment to charity work.

Some of the report's recommendations:

- All California schools should be encouraged to assess their current civic education practices and identify ways to strengthen them.
- A state-funded teacher professional development program for civic education should be developed and implemented.
- Further research should be conducted.

As stated in the report, "a primary mission of this country's public education system has been the civic education of young people to prepare them to be informed, committed and participatory citizens. In recent years, this mission has received increasingly less attention from school districts; yet, the need for civic education is as great as ever."

"The future of democracy in California depends on knowledgeable and engaged citizens. It is the goal of the California Campaign to draw attention to this need and make sure that every student in our state receives a quality civic education so that they understand their constitutional heritage and the rights and responsibilities of effective citizenship," states Todd Clark, Executive Director of CRF.

For more information about *Educating for Democracy: The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools*, and to view a complete copy of the survey, please visit our website at www.cms-ca.org