

CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS



*Educating for Democracy*

# Advancing the Civic Mission of Schools

WHAT SCHOOLS, DISTRICTS, AND STATE AND FEDERAL LEADERS CAN DO

DEVELOPED BY THE  
Academy for Educational Development

FOR THE  
Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools

November 2004

*The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools is funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.*

AED •

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The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools works with coalition partners to implement state, local, and national policies that foster students' civic learning. The Campaign is managed by the Center for Democracy & Citizenship at the Council for Excellence in Government, in partnership with the Academy for Educational Development. The Campaign is funded primarily by grants from private foundations, led by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

For more information about the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, visit [www.civicismionofschools.org](http://www.civicismionofschools.org)

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# Introduction

Because they reach almost every young person in the nation, schools are best positioned to prepare the next generation of Americans for active citizenship. The public increasingly recognizes that students' civic learning is important to maintaining our representative democracy, and parents are calling for schools to help prepare young people for civic and political participation.

However, over the last several decades public schools have become increasingly less attentive to their civic purpose. Many public schools have drastically reduced opportunities for students to participate in civic-related instruction and extracurricular activities like service, school newspapers, and government. At the same time, young people's civic and political participation outside of school has declined.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools is working with advocates from across the political spectrum to dramatically elevate civic learning as an educational priority. The Campaign needs leadership at all levels and in all sectors to restore civic purpose to American schools. Political and school district leaders have particular and significant opportunities to change public education policy.

This guide reflects the wisdom of a variety of experts and citizen activists consulted by the Campaign.<sup>1</sup> It identifies six challenges to civic learning, including:

- **MAKING** students' civic learning a priority in school reform
- **INTEGRATING** civic learning into the curriculum
- **IMPLEMENTING** sound civic education standards
- **DEVELOPING** better assessment methods to evaluate students' civic learning and to make schools accountable for civic education
- **IMPROVING** teachers' and administrators' training for civic education
- **INCREASING** collaboration between schools and communities

The guide discusses these challenges and articulates clear action steps that schools, districts, and state and federal leaders can take to meet them. All other advocates can use their influence to persuade political and district leaders to pursue these actions.

**SCHOOL REFORM AND EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY.** In the last few decades, public schools have shifted attention from students' civic learning to workplace and career preparation. Influenced by concerns of the business community, as well as those of parents, that students learn the skills they need to be members of a changing global work force, public schools have increasingly focused on math and reading. Many educators and policymakers have come to see students' civic learning as a less pressing priority and often decrease resources for civic education.<sup>2</sup>

During the same period that the public has been calling for stronger public schools, fewer Americans have been demonstrating an interest in public issues, political discussions, and elections.<sup>3</sup> In response to these trends, leaders from across many sectors of society have identified the urgent need to reinvigorate democracy.

Although these two discussions—one expressing concern for public schools, the other expressing concern for civic engagement—are occurring simultaneously, people often fail to connect them. Few people link education reform with democracy, even though public school improvement and the vitality of our nation are interdependent.

In fact, students' civic learning not only provides what students need to participate in a democracy, but also teaches the skills and dispositions essential to students' social and working lives: team building, working across differences, collaboration, listening, and negotiating. What's more, core academic subjects should not be seen as competing with civic learning—literacy and math are certainly required for active citizenship, and high-quality civic education can be used to good effect across disciplines.

#### ELEVATE "EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY" AS A PRIORITY

Civic education is vital to improving schools and strengthening democracy. Education leaders and policymakers must link these priorities.

**MOVING FORWARD.** District, state, and federal leaders play critical roles in providing a vision of schools that links education reform with civic learning. For district leaders, including school district superintendents, their senior education colleagues, and local school boards, this can entail actions as simple as writing a civic mission statement, or actions as complex as using the media to proclaim the importance of civic education or helping to fund civic education projects.

#### DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:

- Write and issue a civic mission statement, including an expanded definition of civic education to include civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions;
- Seek new funding or new uses of current funding for varied civic education approaches;
- Use op-eds, media interviews, the school district website, and state-of-the-school addresses to proclaim civic learning as a fundamental education priority and feature exemplary civic education practice. Messages must be explicit, consistent, and frequent enough to make civic learning a key theme in public conversation.

State and federal leaders, including chief state school officers, state legislators, members of Congress, state- and federal-level department of education officials, and candidates for public office, have a similar role to that of district leaders in legitimizing and advocating for the civic mission of schools.

#### STATE LEADERS AND FEDERAL LEADERS CAN:

- Establish a commission to hold public hearings on civic education and investigate opportunities to advance the civic mission of schools within state and federal education policy;
- Host public forums on civic education with key opinion-leaders and special interest groups;
- Incorporate statements about civic education in election campaigning;
- Showcase exemplary school or district civic education approaches; and
- Incorporate civic education as a priority in federal education reform initiatives.

**HIGH-STAKES TESTS AND NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND.** As federal policy requirements and high-stakes tests increasingly claim school time, attention, and resources, the available space for civic learning is shrinking. School curriculum is devoted to the subjects tested, and in many cases class time is spent on test preparation. Without an exclusive place in the curriculum, civic learning is diminishing in grades K-12; elementary schools have been particularly hard hit.<sup>4</sup> The federal No Child Left Behind policy (NCLB) has accelerated this trend, mandating that every student become proficient in math and reading by 2014 and requiring that public schools demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” until 100 per cent proficiency is reached. Under threat of dissolution or takeover if they do not meet federal benchmarks, many public schools are directing their already tight resources to programs and services likely to increase students’ achievement in math and reading.<sup>5</sup>

High stakes tests also take a toll on teachers’ opportunities to incorporate civic learning across other disciplines. Many teachers lament that pressure to boost students’ test scores limits time they might spend on other priorities and thwarts the types of interactive and engaging teaching methods that civic learning encourages.

### **SIX PROMISING APPROACHES TO CIVIC LEARNING**

The *Civic Mission of Schools* report identifies six promising approaches to civic learning:

- Instruction in history, law and government
- Guided discussion of civic and social issues
- Active learning experiences such as service-learning
- Civic-related extracurricular activities
- Simulations of democratic practices and procedures
- Participation in school governance

**MOVING FORWARD.** To increase the time, space, and resources devoted to students’ civic learning in today’s policy climate, civic education approaches must complement or enhance students’ grasp of “high-stakes” subjects. Based on research about what works, the *Civic Mission of Schools* report identifies six such promising approaches to civic learning (see box), which can be implemented throughout the school—both inside and outside the classroom.<sup>6</sup> School leaders play a central role in determining where civic education can be effectively adopted so that young people have plenty of opportunities to learn and practice civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills.

### **SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:**

- Develop a school improvement plan and budget that incorporates structures and mechanisms to ensure civic education;
- Analyze curricula in light of the *Civic Mission of Schools*’ six promising approaches, assessing where civic learning can be best integrated (for instance, through choice of texts with civic content in reading instruction, service-learning, and other strategies);
- Hire, provide training for, and assign teachers with interest or expertise in promoting students’ civic learning, and support all teachers in facilitating classroom conversations about civic issues and politics;
- Create age-appropriate student leadership opportunities in both classroom and school governance, and devote resources to extracurricular activities that develop students’ participation skills (for instance, student government, school newspapers, volunteer service, and other active learning experiences); and
- Protect subject areas rich in civic content from cuts in instructional time and staffing assignments.

### **To advocate for civic education in the larger community, SCHOOL LEADERS CAN ALSO:**

- Engage parents and community members in conversations about the school’s civic expectations, practices and principles and explore how parents and community members can help support the school’s civic mission;

- Adopt accountability measures monitoring student progress toward meeting civic objectives and report results to the school and community; and
- Honor and showcase exemplary teacher practice and student work in civic education both in the school and the community at large.

**To help integrate civic education into the curriculum, DISTRICT LEADERS** must think and plan holistically, incorporating civic education throughout curricular frameworks, assessments, and accountability systems.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:**

- Implement a K-12 civic learning scope and sequence;
- Elevate civic education priorities (for instance, by creating stand-alone civics courses, strengthening civic components within social studies, particularly in the elementary grades, and integrating civic education into other disciplines when feasible) and foster links between academic learning and community problem-solving and service-learning opportunities (for example, by adopting a district-wide policy);
- Identify and supply curriculum materials and resources to incorporate civic education, either in individual subjects or thematically across disciplines;
- Alert schools to teachable moments for civic education (for instance, the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education or the Kennedy Moon Challenge) and help schools make use of natural learning opportunities by suggesting resources, sample materials, outside speakers, and related supports;
- Mandate civic engagement activities at the elementary level and promotion and graduation requirements at the secondary level;
- Provide professional development for school administrators and teachers to enhance their familiarity with effective citizenship education and programs;
- Issue statements that encourage schools to engage in guided classroom discussions of civic issues and encourage school boards to do the same; and
- Allocate sufficient resources for district staff to adopt, monitor, support, and enhance civic education approaches.

**In addition to the above strategies, STATE LEADERS CAN:**

- Create statewide networks of education leaders and teachers to share strategies and research identifying pedagogies, curricula, and school-community collaborations shown to improve students' civic competencies;
- Require accounting for students' civic learning as part of a district's annual yearly progress report;
- Showcase effective civic education to encourage districts to adopt high-quality practices;
- In local control states, institute policies to safeguard space for civic learning.

**FEDERAL LEADERS CAN:**

- Include civic education in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to give civic learning equal footing with math and reading;
- Expand the definition of civic education to include civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions and promote research about young people's development of these capacities;
- Urge states to safeguard time and money for civic education curricular and co-curricular activities;
- Showcase and disseminate effective civic education policy and practice at the district and school levels;
- Fund development and evaluation of system-wide models of civic learning; and
- Increase funding for the Learn and Serve America service-learning program, which has been funded at \$43 million since its inception over a decade ago.



## Challenge #3 | IMPLEMENT SOUND CIVIC EDUCATION STANDARDS

Standards-based instruction has become an important school reform strategy as a means for ensuring that all students have equal opportunity to learn. Over 40 states now cite civic learning in their educational statutes and policies, specifying themes, concepts, and topics students should master.<sup>7</sup>

Some state standards call for students to take courses in government; others mandate civics courses to advance from one grade to another; a handful require students to pass a civics exit exam to graduate. But many state standards are weak or impractical, providing either too much or too little detail, failing to prioritize among topics and calling on teachers to cover more than is possible in a school year.<sup>8</sup> More troubling still, few states have concrete mechanisms to turn standards rhetoric into reality.

**A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.** Interpreting state standards offers an opportunity for district and school leaders to work with the community on the kinds of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that fit best with community values and beliefs. Schools and districts have a unique opportunity to engage community partners in this process, inviting them to join with schools in crafting responsible and active roles for young people. The very process of a school-community deliberation about civic education standards reflects democratic practices.

### CIVIC EDUCATION STANDARDS SHOULD:

- State clear expectations for the civic content, skills, and dispositions students must master, based on understandings of children's social and conceptual development
- Link overarching ideas, themes, and questions so that students can draw connections across subjects
- Encourage active forms of student learning
- Apply to all students, regardless of their academic strengths and needs
- Adopt a complementary K-12 scope and sequence

**ENCOURAGING PRODUCTIVE DEBATE.** Educating students for democracy is unnecessarily limited when school administrators and teachers shy away from exploring issues that may cause conflict. Civic education standards should also encourage schools to address dynamic and debatable public issues with students. Indeed, in their personal, professional, and civic lives, students will need to be able to think critically, analyze information, express their point of view, and listen to the opinion of others. Understanding complex issues, negotiating controversy, and knowing how to work toward mutually beneficial solutions are critical skills for students to learn and practice. Research also suggests that complex civic conversations—for instance, those that search for root causes of social problems and debate options for resolving them—help pique young people's curiosity and increase their commitment to civic affairs.

The community must be confident about how schools handle controversial topics and trust that diverse opinions will be aired. Equipping teachers with the skills to manage heated dialogue can foster support among community members and help them view classroom discussions of controversial public issues as a positive civic and academic exercise.

**MOVING FORWARD.** Civic education standards should be ambitious yet feasible, and they should state clear expectations for the civic content, skills, and dispositions students must master. They should also link overarching ideas, themes, and questions so that students can draw connections across subjects. Lastly, these standards should apply to all students, regardless of their particular academic strengths and needs. To translate abstract principles into concrete practice, schools and districts need a complementary K-12 “scope and sequence,” which lays out goals, instructional guidelines, and classroom resources appropriate to students' age and abilities.<sup>9</sup>

District leadership can play a vital role in developing or adapting existing standards that incorporate civic education and mandate it districtwide, while also advocating for civic education at the state level.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:**

- Develop new standards or assess existing ones in light of the six promising approaches recommended in the *Civic Mission of Schools* report (see box on page 3) and invite stakeholders from the schools, civic groups, business and community leaders, and parents, to participate in this process;
- Advocate through state organizations for these new/ revised civic education standards, as well as for school accountability for students' civic learning;
- Guide schools in following the new/ revised state civic education standards about civic education and require them to complete an annual school-based performance index that includes civic indicators; and
- Showcase innovative and promising standards-driven reform with strong civic education components.

State leaders play a crucial role in developing civic education standards and ensuring that district leaders implement them.

**STATE LEADERS CAN:**

- Invite stakeholders from K-12 and higher education, civic groups, business leaders, and parents to participate in the development and/or review of civic education standards;
- Consider integrating civics education standards into specific disciplines (like social studies) as well as infusing them across subject areas and extracurricular activities;
- Allocate substantial time and funding for developing a K-12 scope and sequence to translate standards into practice;
- Coordinate work undertaken by discrete civic education working groups and committees so that documents eventually produced are coherent and recommendations feasible; and
- Devise district-level monitoring and accountability procedures and provide support to district leadership to monitor high-quality adoption of standards.

Without knowing the status of students' civic learning, states cannot improve civic education effectively. Fewer than half of all states include civic learning within their accountability systems. In an educational climate characterized by high-stakes tests, if civic learning is not part of a school assessment and accountability system, states are unlikely to create incentives for civic education and continue to give it short shrift.

**PROVIDING A NATIONAL AND STATE-BY-STATE PICTURE.** Authorized and funded by Congress, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses students in grades 4, 8, and 12 across a variety of subjects. Known as the nation's report card, NAEP assesses reading and math every two years, providing a national picture of students' achievement as well as a state-by-state analysis so that policymakers can make comparisons. But NAEP assesses student civic knowledge infrequently and does not provide state-by-state analyses.<sup>10</sup> One way to help policymakers and educators see how their students measure up is to increase the frequency of NAEP civic assessment, both on the national and state level.

**STRENGTHENING ASSESSMENT TOOLS OF ALL KINDS.** Good and informative assessment tools for civic learning are hard to come by. Assessments (including NAEP) often test students' civic content knowledge but give short shrift to their civic skills and dispositions. Many states rely on tests of simple civic facts (like how many representatives there are) but fail to explore more complex civic issues or to use a variety of approaches to gauge students' civic learning. Assessment measures are also often poorly designed and insufficiently linked to state standards. Identifying and/or developing high-quality civic assessments of all kinds would enhance accountability for students' civic learning and motivate states to refine and strengthen their civic standards.

**MOVING FORWARD.** There is legitimate disagreement on whether schools or students should bear the consequences for high-stakes tests. While being careful not to increase testing burdens, civic education experts agree on the importance of holding schools, districts, and states accountable for meeting their civic mission. This can entail developing multifaceted measures to gauge student engagement and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; providing incentives for schools to monitor civic indicators; helping teachers understand and use high-quality civic assessments; allocating funds to administer the NAEP civics component more often; and expanding the NAEP framework to include civic thinking and participation skills.

#### SCHOOLS CAN SHOW ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENTS' CIVIC LEARNING BY:

- Identifying specific student competencies by grade level
- Measuring students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions
- Preparing teachers to understand and administer assessments of all kinds
- Involving parents and community members in conversation about the school's civic mission

#### DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:

- Require schools to complete an annual school-based performance index that includes civic indicators;
- Sponsor forums for school and community stakeholders to discuss desired civic outcomes and articulate how civic learning can reinforce student academic achievement;
- Establish criteria for gauging the overall civic health of a school (for example, by assessing the quality of a student newspaper or opportunities for meaningful student leadership);
- Develop district-wide civic engagement measures (for example, by monitoring voting patterns of graduating high school students or taking inventory of civic internship opportunities at community agencies); and
- Train teachers in how to use measures that assess civic skills and dispositions.

**STATE LEADERS CAN:**

- Include civic items on existing statewide assessments;
- Encourage districts to measure their schools' civic health and to collect and report on voting data for young adults as an indicator of community civic health;
- Adopt valid and high-quality assessments of all kinds linked to standards;
- Provide incentives for schools to monitor civic indicators; and
- Fund teacher training in using performance assessment and other measures.

**FEDERAL LEADERS CAN:**

- Allocate funds to administer the NAEP civics component more frequently;
- Administer NAEP to appropriate samples so it is possible to analyze and compare students' civic learning state-by-state;
- Support research and development for devising robust measurement tools to more fully explore students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; and
- Support research for rigorous qualitative and quantitative studies about effective civic education practice.

**PRE-SERVICE: LACK OF ATTENTION AND NARROW FOCUS.** Teacher preparation programs seldom help aspiring teachers learn to foster students' civic learning: they offer few courses in civic education, and existing courses focus more on content knowledge than on civic dispositions and skills, even though all three are equally important parts of students' civic preparation. What's more, teacher education programs rarely demonstrate interactive teaching strategies that encourage students' participation, although these dynamic approaches are known to engage students' interest,<sup>11</sup> and few programs provide strategies to help teachers manage classroom conversations about important civic matters. Those programs that do deal with civic education place it within particular subject areas (like social studies or government), although promising approaches can be applied across the curriculum.

**IN-SERVICE: PIECES AND PARTS, PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS.** Teachers in the field need ongoing professional development to strengthen and hone their teaching. Networks of civic education providers offer high-quality, short-term training in various civic education topics across the country. Unfortunately, school and district administrators rarely point teachers in the direction of such in-service civic education—professional development funds more often go toward helping teachers hone their math and reading instructional skills. Also, while teachers who participate in in-service trainings surely benefit, continuing education programs that take place far from the classroom can only do so much. To successfully incorporate new knowledge and skills, teachers typically need on-site guidance and feedback.<sup>12</sup>

**MOVING FORWARD.** Improving teacher education and ongoing professional development in civic education requires efforts at the school, district, state, and federal levels, as well as within schools of education. Schools of education must expand their vision, course offerings, and requirements to include civic education, and professional development organizations must be better supported to provide continuing learning opportunities for teachers already in the field. District, state, and federal leaders must support these efforts with policies and funds to make civic education a reality in the schools.

#### **TEACHER EDUCATION SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS CAN:**

- Develop and require civic education courses in undergraduate education and graduate programs for teacher certification, and engage prospective teachers in civic engagement experiences;
- Develop and require civic-related training programs for principals, superintendents, and other administrative leaders;
- Expand course scope and offerings to cover civic content, skills, and dispositions;
- Strengthen links with university faculty and departments so that scholars in relevant fields can enhance prospective teachers' content knowledge; and
- Train teacher candidates in subject-specific and integrated civic education approaches, as well as in assessing student civic learning, handling controversial issues, and creating school-community collaborations.

#### **SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS MUST:**

- Expand course scope and offerings to cover civic content, skills, and dispositions
- Develop and require civic-related education courses for teacher certification, as well as training programs for administrators
- Train teacher candidates in subject-specific and integrated civic education approaches, as well as in assessing students' civic learning
- Strengthen links with university faculty and departments so that scholars in relevant fields can enhance prospective teachers' content knowledge

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GROUPS, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS,  
AND AGENCIES THAT ACCREDIT TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS CAN:**

- Institute standards relating to civic education in teacher accreditation programs;
- Expand the scope of course offerings;
- Assist teachers and administrators in linking civic lessons to standards and accountability expectations; and
- Provide on-site observation, guidance and follow-up.

**SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:**

- Seek partnerships with high-quality civic education providers who can provide ongoing on-site training and support and allocate a portion of a school's annual professional development for in-service training in civic education content, skills, and dispositions;
- Incorporate civic preparation and support for school staff in school improvement plans;
- Encourage teachers to bring in outside resource speakers on important civic issues to augment their own content-area expertise; and
- Develop continual learning mechanisms (for instance, common teacher prep times, staff-wide discussion of relevant books or articles, and mentoring) to strengthen teachers' knowledge of effective approaches and students' developmental needs.

**DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:**

- Establish criteria for comprehensive civic education training and mandate K-12 professional development time for this training for both teachers and school administrators;
- Create district staff positions to train, monitor, and support the professional development of teachers and administrators in civic education;
- Seek grants and allocate appropriate federal, state and local funds for civics-related professional development;
- Provide incentives for teachers to continue civic education preparation (for instance, by providing recognition awards, continuing education credits, or substitute coverage for teachers who participate in training); and
- Pursue district-wide partnerships with high-quality civic education providers to broaden in-service trainings and provide on-site support.

**STATE LEADERS CAN:**

- Urge colleges and graduate schools of education to increase pre-service civic education coursework;
- Increase funding for pre-service and in-service teacher education (for example, through innovative grants linking colleges and universities to school districts for the purposes of teacher education);
- Add civic education to certification requirements for teachers; and
- Provide incentives and awards for the professional development of teachers and administrators in civic education.

**FEDERAL LEADERS CAN:**

- Fund teachers to participate in professional conferences to strengthen their civic knowledge base;
- Expand funding for competitive Teaching American History grants to school districts and not-for-profit civic education providers;
- Increase and enlarge the pool of providers of in-service civic education for teachers;
- Devote more Learn and Serve America federal dollars for teacher professional development in civic education.

## Challenge #6 | INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Young people do not grow up only in school; they also grow up in families and communities, which share responsibility for their civic learning. Students should be able to extend what they learn inside schools, applying analytic skills and knowledge to their outside-school experiences and bringing knowledge gained beyond the school into the classroom. Unfortunately, states and school districts often lack the staff, expertise, and scheduling flexibility to devise meaningful approaches to link schools with families and the broader community.

Preparing young people for civic involvement requires that learning be continuous across formal and informal educational settings.<sup>13</sup> Activities linking schools with communities, like volunteering and service-learning, can develop students' academic and civic skills while also meeting genuine community needs. Bringing guest speakers on civic issues into the classroom can provide teachers with new information and help students grapple with different perspectives. Visits to and from local policymakers enrich students' understanding of government and suggest ways to participate in their communities.

### **SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CIVIC LEARNING.**

#### **ACTIVITIES LINKING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES INCLUDE:**

- Service-learning and community service
- Bringing community activists, legal experts, and others into the classroom to speak about civic issues
- Visits from local policymakers and to civic institutions
- Coordinating programs and resources with youth-serving community-based organizations

**MOVING FORWARD.** By drawing upon one another's resources, schools and communities can mutually strengthen one another, as well as fully prepare American youth to help solve community problems and see themselves as part of a greater civic whole.

#### **SCHOOL LEADERS CAN:**

- Adopt civic education approaches that address genuine community needs and issues, such as service-learning;
- Apprise parents and community stakeholders of civic learning opportunities and offer them the chance to contribute;
- Allow flexible scheduling to enable out-of-school learning experiences;
- Encourage teachers to invite outside speakers into the classroom, particularly those working on contentious civic issues; and
- Invite politicians and candidates to meet with students in and out of election season to discuss government and politics and how and why young people can be involved in civic and political life.

#### **DISTRICT LEADERS CAN:**

- Assign staff to foster school-community collaborations and partnerships;
- Seek, identify, and encourage student civic internships with community agencies and public offices;
- Identify and encourage community speakers and school visits;
- Guide schools in instituting flexible scheduling to enable service-learning and community service opportunities; and
- Encourage community partner involvement.

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Public schools have always had a civic mission. Indeed, our early schools were created, in part, to prepare students to participate as citizens, thus protecting our democracy and ensuring that it would flourish. Neglecting the civic mission of schools compromises young people's civic learning and weakens the link between many American citizens—particularly those who are least empowered—and the American system of democracy.

All young people, regardless of social class or privilege, should have opportunities for civic learning and participation. That is the promise of our schools and our democracy. For rhetoric to become reality, however, policymakers, education leaders, and public stakeholders must act swiftly, strategically, and with sustained effort. America's youth—and America's future—deserve nothing less.



<sup>1</sup> Melinda Fine, Ed.D., conducted the interviews, literature review, and analysis for this guide and is lead author. Review, feedback, and editing labors were shared by a team of staff and CMS Campaign Steering Committee members. Led by Kelly Nuxoll, this group included Elayne Archer, Deborah Both, Kenneth Holdzman, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, Betsey McGee, Jeff Miller, Terry Pickeral, Richard Russo, and David Skaggs. Interviewees who contributed their insights and wisdom are Peggy Altoff, Lisa Bardwell, Sheldon Berman, Todd Clark, William Galston, Susan Griffin, Diana Hess, Kenneth Holdzman, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, Vince Meldrum, and Terry Pickeral. Cynthia Gibson of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Lisa Versaci of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation deserve thanks for their commitment to the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

<sup>2</sup> Over the past several decades, civic education courses have been diminished in both time allocation and focus. In the 1960s, high school students typically took up to three courses on civics, democracy, and government, and these courses often addressed the rights, responsibilities, and actions of citizens. Today, high school students are typically required to take only a single government course, and the curriculum is more traditional and pays less attention to the active role of citizens. See CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Civic Mission of Schools* (New York: 2003), p. 14, referencing John Patrick and John Hodge, “Teaching Government, Civics, and Law,” in James Shaver, *Handbook of Research and Social Studies Teaching and Learning* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 427-436.

<sup>3</sup> CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, p. 18, referencing Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Cliff Zukin, and Krista Jenkins, *The Civic Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* (2002), available at [http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth\\_index.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth_index.htm).

<sup>4</sup> As noted in CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, p. 15, social studies, a discipline rich in civic content, has been reduced: “Between 1988 and 1998, the proportion of fourth-graders who reported taking social studies daily fell from 49% to 39%. Taken from Andrew W. Weiss, Anthony D. Lutkus, Wendy S. Grigg, and Richard G. Niemi, *The Next Generation of Citizens: NAEP Civic Assessments—1988 and 1998* (June 2001), U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2001-452, p.37.

<sup>5</sup> In response to NCLB, some schools have chosen to implement costly remedial programs and to focus instruction time on math and reading, squeezing out space for social studies and arts, as well as for programs (like Gifted and Talented) that are geared toward higher performing students. These impacts are well documented in the Council for Basic Education’s study, *Academic Atrophy: The Condition of the Liberal Arts in America’s Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).

<sup>6</sup> CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, pp. 23-29.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent overview of state civic standards, see the on-line database of citizenship education policies by state developed by the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) at the Education Commission for the States (ECS). Available at: <http://www.ecs.org/nclc>. For analysis of these standards, see also *State Notes: Character/Citizenship Education, State Citizenship Education Policies*, April 2004; *Citizenship Education Policy at the School District Level*, 2004; and *State Policies to Support Citizenship Education*, November 2003, all published by ECS and available at <http://www.ecs.org/nclc>. For models of various standards, see the National Council for the Social Studies’ (NCSS) *Expectations of Excellence*, 1994; the Center for Civic Education’s *National Standards for Civics and Government*, 1994; the National Council for Geographic Education’s *Geography for Life*, 1994; the National Council on Economic Education’s *Voluntary Content Standards in Economics*, 1997; and the National Center for History in the School’s *National Standards for History*, revised 1996.

<sup>8</sup> For a critique of existing state civic standards, see Paul Gagnon, *Educating Democracy: State Standards to Ensure a Civic Core* (Washington, D.C.: Albert Shanker Institute, 2003), pp. 23-29.

<sup>9</sup> For an example of such a sequence, see *Education for Democracy: California Civic Education Scope and Sequence* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Country Office of Education, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Civics was last nationally assessed in 1998 and is not slated to be assessed again until 2006, as noted in the National Assessment of Education Progress Schedule of Assessments, distributed by the National Assessment Governing Board.

<sup>11</sup> CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, p.23, referencing Gordon Cawelti and James P. Shaver, *Improving Student Achievement in Social Studies* (Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> For research on the benefits of on-site, school-based professional development, see Richard F. Elmore and D. Burney, D., *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City*, ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED416203, National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future. Teachers College, Columbia University (New York: 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Melinda Fine, Ed.D., *Building Youth Skills for the 21st Century: Needs and Opportunities Identified by Leaders in Youth Development and Related Fields* (Kellogg Foundation, Michigan, 1999).