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THE CALIFORNIA SURVEY OF CIVIC EDUCATION: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF CIVIC EDUCATION ON GRADUATING SENIORS

The California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (www.cms-ca.org) commissioned Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh of Mills College to conduct the *California Survey of Civic Education*. This survey assessed the prevalence and impact of civic education practices in California's high schools on graduating seniors throughout the state.

In 2005, the survey was administered to 2,366 graduating seniors who had completed the 12th grade U.S. government course mandated by the California History/Social Science Framework and Standards. Major findings of the survey included:

- * Young people have a strong desire to help other people, as evidenced by their involvement as volunteers and their commitment to charity work.
- * Young people express considerably less commitment to engaging in political work.
- * Despite taking a course in U.S. government in their senior year, high school seniors' knowledge of structures and functions of government and of current political issues is modest, at best.

CURRICULUM EFFECTS: PINPOINTING WHAT WORKS IN THE CLASSROOM

In addition to the above findings, the survey asked students about what happened in their high schools and classrooms. The authors of the report then analyzed the relationship of these opportunities to various outcomes, including civic commitments, skills, knowledge, and activities (see Table 1 for a complete list of civic outcomes measured). They found that numerous opportunities in classrooms, schools, and in after-school settings were related to these civic outcomes, even after controlling for demographic factors. Their ability to assess causality was limited because they could not assess initial levels of student commitments (they are currently completing a longitudinal study of CA high school students that does control for prior commitments with support from CIRCLE and the MacArthur Foundation). Following is a discussion of the associations found between school-based civic opportunities and student civic outcomes.

Classroom content and practices. Students enrolled in classes that emphasized civic engagement in the curriculum and provided relevant material about civic and political structures and functions reported and demonstrated more of the skills and knowledge they need for effective citizenship. Moreover, they found that discussing current events was positively associated with civic outcomes,

particularly when the discussions were tied to students' interests. Curricula that present opportunities for students to consider multiple viewpoints concerning a single issue appear to be beneficial.

According to Dr. Kahne, "One instructional strategy that appeared to be particularly effective was having students work on projects with students from different backgrounds." Among students who reported opportunities to do this "a lot," 54% agreed that being involved in state and local issues was their responsibility, compared to only 29% of students who did not report having these opportunities. These experiences were also associated with a greater commitment to vote, more political knowledge, and greater interest in politics more generally.

Extracurricular activities. Participating in student groups was also positively associated with students seeing themselves as connected to the society, learning skills and internalizing norms of group membership, and obtaining opportunities to consider varied civic commitments and ways to pursue them. For example, students involved in extracurricular activities were 24% more likely to agree that being involved in state and local issues is their responsibility than those not involved in such activities.

TABLE 1: SELECT CLASSROOM PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH DESIRED CIVIC OUTCOMES

Classroom Practices		Commitment to Participate	Intend to Vote	Informed to Vote	Civic Skills	Social & Political Trust	Political Knowledge	Political Interest
CMS Promising Approaches	Instruction in Govt., History, Law	★	★	★			★	
	Discussion of Current Events				★			★
	Service-Learning				★			
	Extra-Curricular Activities	★	★		★			
	Student Voice	★				★		
	Simulations			★	★			★

Note: For a complete list of classroom practices tested and their civic outcomes, please see the full report.

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Student voice in the school. Students who report having a chance to voice their opinions about school policies were more committed to participation than those who said they had few opportunities to voice their opinions about school policies.

Provide multiple opportunities for civic learning. Effective civic education includes multiple opportunities for learning. Education for democracy should not rely on a one-semester course taken during the senior year. While some aspects of a schools' curriculum, such as the high school government course, clearly have the potential to significantly support multiple goals, it's also clear that educating for democracy should not rely on a one-semester course taken during the senior year. Rather, opportunities to educate for democracy exist throughout the high school curriculum and they build upon each other. A schoolwide

commitment is therefore necessary.

ACCESS TO CIVIC OPPORTUNITIES UNEVEN

Unfortunately, access to the type of school-based civic opportunities discussed above is uneven. The *California Survey of Civic Education* shows that students intending to go to four-year colleges receive significantly more civic learning opportunities than other students. Therefore, the report recommends that all California schools identify ways to strengthen their current civic education practices and to ensure that they deliver these opportunities to all of their students—not primarily to those who are more academically successful. A state-funded teacher professional development program for civic education would be important to support. To read the full report, visit http://www.cms-ca.org/civic_survey_final.pdf ■

ECS STUDY REVEALS GAPS IN STATE-LEVEL POLICY REGARDING CIVIC EDUCATION

In June 2006, The Education Commission of the States (ECS) National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) conducted a policy scan to define the current state of citizenship education. The study found that states were emphasizing knowledge of civics and government, obtained through traditional classroom instruction. Civic knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient; citizens also need skills and dispositions to sustain and enhance American democracy. These three competencies—knowledge, skills and dispositions—are at the heart of civic education.

THE STATE OF CIVIC EDUCATION

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have a requirement to teach material or offer at least one course in civics and/or government. While 49 states and the District of Columbia have enacted state standards for civics and/or social studies as academic subject areas, few standards cover skills and dispositions as well as knowledge.

The ECS Policy Scan highlights eight states that have effectively addressed all three components of civic competencies. These states are Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Virginia. In these states, students are required to recognize the privileges and responsibilities of good citizenship, including active civic and political participation in a pluralistic society. Often, these state standards require students to understand the United States' interaction with other nations and to

compare and contrast American political and economic systems to those of the rest of the world.

Requirements for studying civics or government have strengthened substantially since 2003, but accountability has remained relatively constant. As of June 2006, only 21 states had accountability measures (such as examinations) for civics and/or social studies.

In addition to requiring course and teaching requirements, some states have found other ways to foster civic skills. Some examples include:

- displaying historical documents and mottos;
- developing handbooks for citizenship education;
- recognizing citizenship education with awards;
- involving youth as judges or precinct officers in official elections; and,
- providing new sources of funding for civic education.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS

Reviewing and rewriting state standards is a significant undertaking. The recommendation of the ECS Policy Brief is not that states immediately revamp their standards, but that state education leaders recognize the equal importance of civic knowledge, skill and dispositions, and take steps to support the efforts of school districts to provide opportunities for students to acquire these competencies. To read the full Policy Brief, please visit <http://www.ecs.org/> ■