

## CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK AND CIRCLE RELEASE NEW REPORT ON THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS

**I**n a groundbreaking new report, "The Civic Mission of Schools," Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE address the preparation of America's young people to participate actively in civic and political life. This consensus report contains concrete recommendations from 56 of the nation's most prominent scholars and practitioners on how to develop more effective and equitable civic education programs. For a free copy, visit [www.civicmissionofschools.org](http://www.civicmissionofschools.org).

The authors and endorsers of "The Civic Mission of Schools" include representatives of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council for the Social Studies, the Center for Civic Education, the American Bar Association, the American Political Science Association, the Heritage Foundation, the Education Commission of the States, and many other groups, as well as leading scholars and teachers.

The report was officially released on February 13th at a press luncheon where John Bridgeland, Assistant to the President and Director of USA Freedom Corps, commented, "This report is a timely, really serious and important contribution to the nation, and I am thrilled on behalf of the president and the administration to be here to accept it and look forward to working with all of you in the context of the White House Forum on American History, Civics, and Service." The luncheon was held at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. and brought together many of the leaders in the field of civic education.

### WHO SHOULD PREPARE AMERICA'S YOUNG FOR POLITICAL AND CIVIC LIFE?

"The Civic Mission of Schools" defines the goal of civic education as the preparation of "competent and responsible citizens," people who have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to participate in civic and political life. It then presents evidence that young people are less likely to participate, compared to their predecessors in earlier generations.

According to the report, schools are the best-positioned institutions to re-engage young people. "As our nation's schools continue to be more diverse, with growing numbers of children born outside the United States, the question of what is democracy and what it means to be an American, becomes ever more dramatic," said Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York. "Since the critical learning community for this new generation of Americans is the school, it is imperative for this country's future and each child's education, that schools not only transmit and demand mastery of reading and writing skills, but, as well, civic skills."

Historically, civic education was the primary reason for creating a public school system in America. Schools are able and authorized to reach virtually every young person in

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**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

*Continued from page 1* the country. They possess the capacity to encourage the development of civic skills and attitudes among all students, especially among those who are often marginalized. Finally, research shows that civic education in schools can have a lasting impact on young people's skills, attitudes, knowledge, and behavior.

### SIX PROMISING APPROACHES

"The Civic Mission of Schools" describes six promising approaches to civic education. Research shows that these approaches, if implemented in recommended ways, increase students' long-term civic knowledge and engagement. The six approaches are (1) formal instruction in government, history, and democracy; (2) moderated discussion of current issues; (3) service-learning; (4) extracurricular participation, especially in student government and school newspapers; (5) student voice in school governance; and (6) simulations of politics and diplomacy.

The choice of a program or approach is only one factor that influences the probability of success. Much depends on the preparation and enthusiasm of teachers, the availability of resources (especially classroom time and money), the appropriateness of a curriculum and pedagogy for particular groups of students, the level of support in the community, the interplay with the rest of the curriculum, and other such factors. Nevertheless, "The Civic Mission of Schools" marshals impressive evidence that these six promising approaches are effective alone and in combination.

### CONCRETE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Today, schools must overcome many obstacles, including fear

of criticism and litigation if educators address what might be considered controversial issues; pressures to meet the goals of high-stakes testing; and budget cutbacks in extracurricular activities. To address these obstacles, "The Civic Mission of Schools" presents recommendations for all of the major stakeholders in civic education.

Included in the recommendations is a call to review and implement state civics standards in light of the most recent research. Conducting a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment frequently and in every state is offered as one way to increase accountability. Also suggested is increasing federal financial support for civic education and combining disparate federal programs under a single roof. Schools of Education can help by improving pre-service and in-service teacher education in civics. School administrators can play an important role by protecting teachers who promote discussion of current issues. Finally, encouraging educators to give students voice in school governance can go a long way towards ensuring that young Americans have the tools they need to participate fully in democracy.

"Today more than ever, we need to help our next generation of voters and possible political and civic leaders to understand the value of being an active participant in our country's democracy," said Rebecca W. Rimel, President and CEO of The Pew Charitable Trusts. "Clearly, if we hope to get our youth off the bench and back in the game of civic life, we have to find a better way to reach them and engage them." "The Civic Mission of Schools" provides a clear strategy for adopting new and more comprehensive ways to engage youth in their communities and in politics. ★

**TABLE 1: Most Substantial and Direct Benefits From Each Promising Approach**

APPROACH	CIVIC AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE	CIVIC AND POLITICAL SKILLS	CIVIC ATTITUDES	POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN SOCIAL STUDIES	■	■		■	
DISCUSSION OF CURRENT ISSUES	■	■	■	■	
SERVICE-LEARNING		■	■		■
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES		■		■	■
STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE		■	■		
SIMULATIONS	■	■	■		