

NEW HAMPSHIRE SUPREME COURT SOCIETY

CIVICS EDUCATION TASK FORCE

**PLAN FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF
THE NEW HAMPSHIRE INSTITUTE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**

Our form of government requires an informed populace and a motivated citizenry capable of effective participation. However, the reality is that our schools are not producing informed and motivated citizens. This is evidenced by the fact that in the 2012 election, almost three quarters of young adults without education beyond high school did not show up to vote.¹ This statistic shows us that in order to maintain our democracy, our schools must do a much better job helping students acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens and active participants in the lives of their communities.

Civics education must become a fundamental priority of our schools, and it must involve more than helping students gain an understanding of a substantial body of civic knowledge. To ensure active participation in our democracy, educators must help students engage with their communities and learn a variety of skills associated with political and community life. They also must help students cultivate attitudes and beliefs that might best be described as "civic virtues."

The New Hampshire Institute for Civic Education ("the Institute") is being established to dramatically improve civics education in New Hampshire's schools. Its goal is to make New Hampshire "first in the nation in citizenship preparation."

Educators are the indispensable factor in effectively promoting civic education. It is primarily through their efforts that the goals of schooling are achieved or thwarted. The focus of the Institute's work will be to provide support, inspiration and resources to educators for the teaching of civics. The Institute will provide professional development opportunities and civics resources for educators at all grade levels, K-12. Specifically, the Institute will

- Establish a summer, on-campus² course of study for educators, with the United States Supreme Court's *Summer Institute for Teachers* serving as a model.³ We envision two, six-day sessions every summer with 30 educators in each of the two sessions. One session will focus exclusively on professional development for K-5 elementary school educators. The course of study will provide opportunities for

¹ CIRCLE Staff, "The Youth Vote 2012" (Medford, MA: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, CIRCLE), p. 5.

² Promising preliminary discussions with a leading New Hampshire boarding school to establish the summer program on its campus have begun.

³ http://www.streetlaw.org/en/programs/Program/10/Supreme_Court_Summer_Institute_for_Teachers

educators to advance their own civic knowledge, bring best practices in civics education to New Hampshire classrooms, and hone instructional skills that promote civil dialogue on public issues.

- Create and maintain a website that will serve as a civics resource library for teachers containing materials for use in classrooms, curricula in the form of lessons and units, information regarding effective teaching strategies and techniques. The website also will serve as a forum for educators (e.g., reporting upcoming conferences, requesting feedback on newly designed lesson plans). It will be organized by grade level and by topic to facilitate easy access to state-of-the-art materials. We envision a website similar to the website maintained for the Supreme Court Historical Society by Street Law Incorporated⁴, with portions open for general public viewing as well as a password-protected information exchange section for use by those who have completed one of the Institute's summertime study programs.

- Develop a model for personal electronic civics portfolios which students in grades K-12 will use to demonstrate their civics learning and maintain a record of their attainment of established benchmarks. The portfolio will also be used to maintain a record of students' civic engagement and skill development and will hopefully become a requirement for high school graduation.

- Continue participation as a founding partner of *Constitutionally Speaking*⁵ and support its efforts to galvanize public support for the reform of civics education in New Hampshire and to present public events that engage citizens of all ages in civil but spirited public dialogue about the important constitutional issues of our times.

Members of the Civics Education Task Force know from their work over the last five years that many New Hampshire educators recognize the importance of a good civics education.⁶ These educators want to prepare their students to be competent and responsible citizens actively involved in the lives of their communities. They have told us that they "want [and need] training that trains in substance. [They] need content."⁷ And they want to present the study of civics in a

⁴ http://www.streetlaw.org/en/resource_library.

⁵ *Constitutionally Speaking* is a collaboration of the New Hampshire Humanities Council, the New Hampshire Supreme Court Society, the New Hampshire Institute for Civic Education and UNH School of Law. See www.ConstitutionallySpeak4J.org.

⁶ N.H. Supreme Court Society's Civics Education Task Force, *The Compelling Need for Comprehensive Civics Education Reform in New Hampshire-Interim Conclusions*, August 31, 2010, p. 4, via <http://www.nhsupremecourtsociety.org/pdf/Civics%20Education%20Materials.PDF#page=6>

⁷ Colby-Sawyer College President Thomas Galligan's written summary of Civics Education Task Force meeting with educators at Colby Sawyer College, June 28, 2012.

way that is truly engaging for students. Yet these educators are not provided the education⁸, support, classroom time or resources⁹ to take on this responsibility. And why is this?

Neither the federal government nor the states make civics education a priority. Federal education reform for more than a decade has undermined civics education by mandating high stakes testing and accountability in only two subject areas, language arts and mathematics. The study of civics has not been systematic; the time devoted to teaching civics in lower grades has dropped; fewer high school civics courses are offered than in the past, and there has been a decline in meaningful civics assessment.¹⁰ In addition, rather than improving civics education, recent changes to the social studies standards promulgated by many states, including New Hampshire, actually may have undercut civics education. Instead of developing fewer standards and focusing on citizen engagement, the standards have added teaching requirements such that "even the most skilled educators would have difficulty meeting them within available class time".¹¹

A well-researched 2013 study by the National Council on Teacher Quality documents another problem - American colleges and universities are not producing teachers who can meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards being rolled out in schools across the nation. This study reports that "[f]ewer than one in nine [college] elementary programs and just over one-third of [college] high school programs are preparing [teacher] candidates in content [including, importantly, social study content] at the level necessary to teach the new Common Core State Standards."¹²

The Institute will help New Hampshire educators at all grade levels gain the subject matter expertise, the instructional skills and support to teach civics and to help students develop citizen action skills and the disposition to participate in our democracy. We envision an institute that will provide professional development opportunities for educators so that they are able to:

- Provide their students a robust, comprehensive and spiraling K-12 civics education consistent with the New Hampshire curriculum framework in civics and government.¹³

⁸ Greenberg, Julie, et al., *Teacher Prep Review, A Review of the Nation's Teacher Preparation Programs 2013* (National Council on Teacher Quality), at p. 2, via http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Teacher_Prep_Review_2013_Report.

⁹ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, "The Challenges Facing Civic Education" *Daedalus*, Spring, 2013, at pp. 75-76, via https://www.amacad.org/publications/daedalus/spring2013/13_spring_daedalus_Jamieson.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 75.

¹¹ *Id.* at 71.

¹² Greenberg, *supra* at p. 2.

¹³ Educators have told us that civics learning should start at an early age and progress steadily, grade by grade, through high school and not be concentrated so much in a single mandatory one-credit course in high school. This focus on the one credit mandatory course is more the norm in New Hampshire than it should be, despite the requirements set forth in the New Hampshire Curriculum Framework for Civics. Educators have told us that they need more and better professional development, and not only for social studies teachers. They also want and require

- Help their students develop the citizenship action skills necessary for effective advocacy of their positions on public issues at the local, state and national level. The forms of participation for which schools should prepare students include voting, jury service, attendance at town meetings, military and civilian service, and running for and holding public office.¹⁴ Voting, in particular, is a right that *all* citizens attain with adulthood and a responsibility that all should fulfill. Research shows that if students do not acquire the desire and determination to vote before graduating from high school, they will be unlikely to vote in their early adult years, and especially if they do not pursue higher education. This means that our K-12 educators must play a critical role in instilling in students a commitment to vote.¹⁵

- Develop in their students at all grade levels the ability to discuss current public issues, especially as each election (local, state and federal) approaches. Teachers can help their students identify and articulate their developing political beliefs in the classroom as well as through ongoing family dialogue in their homes. They also can encourage parents to include their children in their own voting activities. In short, teachers can help students come to value the importance of and learn the skills involved in civil dialogue, whether around the family dining room table, during class debates, through programs such as New Hampshire Listens¹⁶ and *Constitutionally Speaking*, or observing/participating in actual candidate question & answer sessions or candidate debates. Teachers can encourage their students to get involved in elections, learn some of

support from the New Hampshire Department of Education. As we were told at one meeting of the DOE's Social Studies Implementation Committee: "If it's not tested or if we are not otherwise held accountable, we don't teach it! It's not that we don't want to, we simply have too many other responsibilities to fit good civics teaching into the classroom." On the other hand, a long time elementary school teacher commented that if elementary school teachers had materials and methods for teaching civics with which they had hands-on experience and in which they had confidence, they would find a way to incorporate civics into their classroom. One elementary teacher told the story of colleagues googling "Constitution" for something to teach the day before Constitution Day (when New Hampshire law mandates teaching about the Constitution in all classrooms in all public schools).

¹⁴ Citizens need experience as well as knowledge to participate wisely and effectively, and their participation educates them further. Alexis de Tocqueville's observations about the educational value of civic engagement are particularly pertinent in New Hampshire. "Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science," he wrote; "they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and how to enjoy it." Not long after, John Stewart Mill advocated that citizens participate "as a means to their own mental education—a mode of strengthening their active faculties, exercising their judgment, and giving them a familiar knowledge of the subjects with which they are thus left to deal. This is a principal, though not the sole, recommendation of jury trial; of free and popular local and municipal institutions; of the conduct of industrial and philanthropic enterprises by voluntary associations."

¹⁵As part of their school experience students should learn how to register to vote; what is involved in going to the polls on election day; what are the pressing issues facing the nation, state and local communities; and how to exercise the right to vote on election day. Students should be introduced to their municipal clerks to learn how to register to vote. They should visit established polling places in their communities and take part in mock elections. Informed participation in elections means learning about the candidates' positions on the important public issues being debated, as well as developing positions on these issues in order to determine which candidates' positions best align with one's own views.

¹⁶ <http://nhlistens.org/>

the cutting-edge "Get Out the Vote" techniques currently used by candidates for public office¹⁷, and experience how citizens exercise their voting franchise in town meetings.

We know that the impact of a good civics education is substantial and wide ranging. Study after study has demonstrated the many positive influences of civics learning and engagement, including better knowledge of our system of government; enhanced confidence in the ability to exercise the prerogatives of citizenship; increased participation in community life; higher levels of civic participation; greater confidence in the ability to analyze issues and make informed decisions; knowledge about how to register to vote, go to the polls and cast a vote; development of a conviction that voting matters; better ability to analyze and understand history; heightened engagement in learning generally; greater empathy and ethical awareness; the ability to recognize racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in oneself and others; and, a reduction in racist attitudes and fighting.¹⁸ Research also suggests that civics education correlates with a decreased dropout rate¹⁹, and there is anecdotal evidence in New Hampshire that civics learning can improve classroom behavior.

The bottom line is that our educators have asked for our help. With the help of an institute like the one described in this plan, educators will gain the civic knowledge, the ability and the confidence to turn the tide in civics education in New Hampshire, so that New Hampshire's high school graduates become responsible, lifelong participants in our democracy.

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¹⁷ Issenberg, Sasha, *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*, Crown Publishers (2012); Green, Donald P. *fil.*, *Get Out the Vote*, Brookings Institution Press (2008).

¹⁸ Jamieson, *supra*, at 72-73. See also The Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools (2012)* via <http://civicmission.s3.amazonaws.com/1J8/fO/5/171/1/Guardian-of-Democracy-report.pdf>; Schultz, L.H., Barr, D.J., and Selman, R.L. (2001) The value of a developmental approach to evaluating character development programs: An outcome study of Facing History and Ourselves. *Journal of Moral Education*, 30(1), 3-27.

¹⁹ Jamieson, *supra*, at 73.