

# Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning In California: A Blueprint For Action



A Report By The California Task Force On K-12 Civic Learning  
August 2014



# CALIFORNIA TASK FORCE ON K-12 CIVIC LEARNING

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## LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

To chart the course for civic learning in California, Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson formed the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. This historic partnership between the courts and the education department came about because the courts interact daily with the broad range of Californians that come from our schools. The courts depend on an informed public to understand the importance of a fair and impartial judiciary and to understand their roles when they come to court as jurors, litigants or witnesses.

We are honored to co-chair the Task Force, a group of experts and leaders from law, education, business, labor and other stakeholder groups, who worked tirelessly to assess the civic learning landscape and craft recommendations to ensure that *all* California students gain the civic knowledge, skills and values they need to succeed in college, career and civic life.

The Task Force met through the fall of 2013 to analyze the problem and found that we are not where we need to be. In response, the group crafted a set of draft recommendations for revitalizing K-12 civic learning in California and used this draft as a basis for discussion and input at seven regional meetings around the state. Others participated via an online survey. The Task Force used the feedback from these regional meetings and the survey to revise and finalize the recommendations presented here.

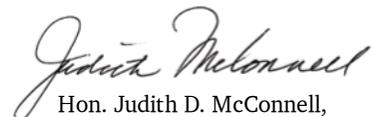
The Power of Democracy Steering Committee will work to see that recommendations of the Task Force are implemented and that *all* K-12 students in California receive a top-flight civic education. The Steering Committee, which was formed to guide and support the work of the Task Force and other civic learning initiatives, is under the leadership of the Chief Justice and includes the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's principal advisor, representatives from all three levels of the California courts, state and local education organizations, and the State Bar and local bar associations.

We now invite you to join us by following the practical steps outlined in the blueprint—for schools, parents and communities—and by staying connected through the Power of Democracy Steering Committee website at [www.powerofdemocracy.org](http://www.powerofdemocracy.org).

Sincerely,



Superintendent David Gordon  
Co-Chair  
California Task Force on  
K-12 Civic Learning



Hon. Judith D. McConnell,  
Co-Chair  
California Task Force on  
K-12 Civic Learning



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# Executive Summary

**Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning  
In California:  
A Blueprint For Action**



There has never been a better—or a more crucial—time to revitalize civic learning in California.

The success of our nation and state depends on educated, informed and active citizens and residents. However, we are not preparing our diverse residents with the civic knowledge, skills and values they need to succeed in college, career and civic life. A few sobering facts tell the story. The United States recently ranked 139th in voter participation of 172 democracies around the world, and less than half of eligible young people ages 18-24 voted in the 2012 elections. Just 13 percent of high school seniors showed a solid understanding of U.S. History in the same year, and nearly half of Americans who participated in a 2011 Pew study said states' rights, rather than slavery, was the main cause of the Civil War. In California, less than 50 percent of high school seniors surveyed viewed being actively involved in state and local issues as their responsibility.

The education system has a central role in equitably cultivating the qualities that will enable our youth to mature and participate in our society. Indeed, states across the nation have long held the view that schools have a strong civic mission. And yet, in recent years this mission has been neglected. This neglect is due to a variety of factors, including decades of shifting federal and state education policies that have sought to improve education quality overall but have generally left civic learning by the wayside in the process. In spite of these factors, there are examples of high quality, balanced civic learning in California schools, but they are the exception, not the rule. To change this, all of us can and must do our part.

We have much to gain by revitalizing civic learning. The chief benefits of civic learning are a vibrant and informed civic life and democracy and a healthy society. High-quality civic learning also helps teach children skills they need for the 21st century workplace, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, initiative and innovation. In addition, civic learning done right engages students by making what they learn at school more relevant to real life. It promotes academic achievement, as well, and prevents some students from dropping out.

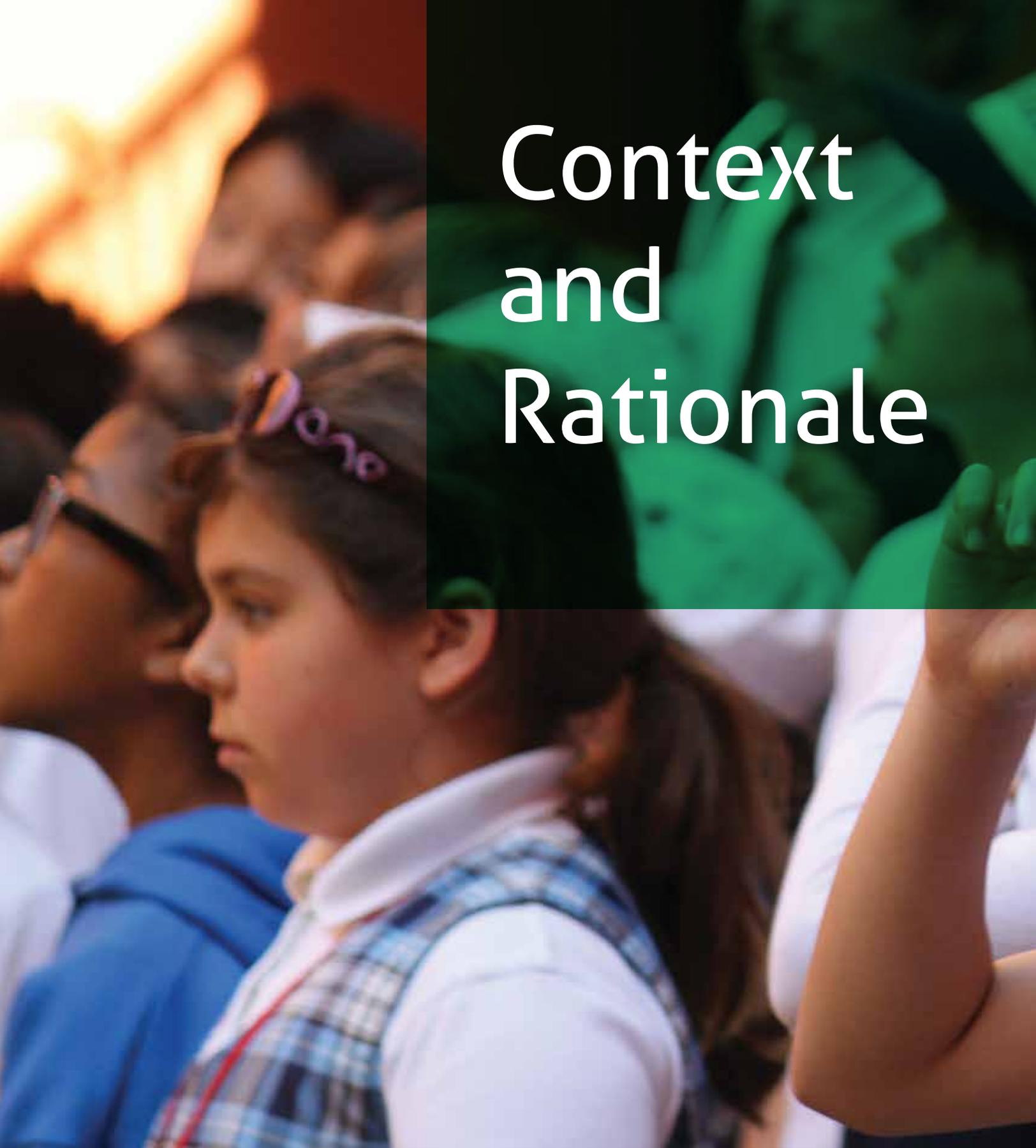
Civic learning is vital for our increasingly diverse California society. In 2012-2013, our 6.2 million K-12 students were 53 percent Latino, 26 percent white, 9 percent Asian and 6 percent African American, with the remaining 6 percent comprised of other ethnicities. In addition, an increasing number of our students are not native speakers of English. Almost 4 in 10 kindergarteners are English language learners. This diversity, and the attention it requires, is now acknowledged in our school funding model. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) recognizes the necessity of investing in the reduction and ultimate removal of inequitable outcomes in California public schools. Revitalizing civic learning opportunities, in an equitable manner, can contribute to meeting these goals.

As a nation, we already know how to do civic learning well. Research has demonstrated that six core activities—known as the Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning—directly improve the quality and effectiveness of civic learning in schools. These practices are: classroom instruction in government, history, law and economics; service learning projects tied to the curriculum; simulations of democratic processes; extracurricular activities that have a strong civic dimension; student participation in school governance, and discussions of current events and controversial topics.

There has never been a better—or a more crucial—time to revitalize civic learning in California. Our state is in the midst of several major public education reforms, including implementing the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts. We are also undergoing a profound shift in the way that K-12 education is funded, via the new LCFF. As we in California implement these sweeping systemic changes, it is critical that we not leave civic learning behind. To this end, the Task Force makes the following system-wide recommendations to improve civic learning in *every* district, in *every* school, for *every* child.

- Revise the California History-Social Science Content Standards and accompanying curriculum frameworks to incorporate an emphasis on civic learning, starting in kindergarten, so *all* students acquire the civic knowledge, skills and values they need to succeed in college, career and civic life.
- Integrate civic learning into state assessment and accountability systems for students, schools and districts. Civic knowledge, skills, values and whether students are receiving learning opportunities that promote these outcomes must be assessed and linked to revised California History-Social Science Content Standards and relevant Common Core State Standards. This will enable periodic reporting to the legislature and the public on the state of students' civic learning.
- Improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators to help them implement civic learning in schools. Connect professional learning in civics to Common Core State Standards professional learning experiences.
- Develop an articulated sequence of instruction in civic learning across all of K-12, pegged to revised standards. At each grade level, civic learning should draw on the research-based Six Proven Practices listed above and include work that is action-oriented and project-based and that develops digital literacy.
- Establish a communication mechanism so community stakeholders can easily connect with teachers and students on civic education and engagement. Students need to get out of the school building to practice civic engagement, and civic leaders need to come into schools to engage students.
- Provide incentives for local school districts to fund civic learning in Local Control Accountability Plans under the new LCFF.

These recommendations constitute a comprehensive plan. The report that follows describes the context and rationale in more detail, elaborates on the recommendations, shares civic learning success stories from around the state and provides suggestions for actions we all can take immediately to dramatically improve the quality of civic learning in our schools.



# Context and Rationale



# The Civic Mission of Schools



“The qualifications for self-government are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training.”

So said Thomas Jefferson. The education system has a central role in equitably cultivating the qualities that will enable *all* students to mature and participate in our democracy. Indeed, states across the nation have long held the view that schools have a strong civic mission. A recent report from Stanford University echoes this notion. The report says that schools play a crucial role in delivering civic learning experiences that expose students to the balanced knowledge, skills and values they need to fully participate in our society.<sup>1</sup>

However, in recent decades this mission has been neglected. Factors contributing to this are varied and complex. Since the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Education Reform*,<sup>2</sup> American education has experienced waves of criticism and reform, including new standards and accountability measures in most states, the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Race to the Top and Common Core State Standards, yet these policy changes have provided little focus on civic education. Facing tight budgets, the federal government discontinued its already modest funding for K-12 civic learning in 2010, and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) no longer tests students’ progress in civics. In short, civics has been an after thought during a period of rapid change and intense pressure on schools, districts and state education agencies, including in California. However, our need for civic learning may be greater than ever in this time of political polarization at the national level, ongoing immigration, deep distrust in political institutions and turmoil in the news industry.

To address the need to revitalize civic learning in our state, the Chief Justice of California and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction formed the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning to craft a set of recommendations to improve civic learning in our schools. This report presents the Task Force’s findings.



“ There is not a magic [power] that comes down on your 18th birthday and hits you with a wand and says, ‘Now you are a great citizen, go out there and do it.’ You have to teach this, it has to be part of the culture of school from kindergarten through 12th grade.”

—Robert Ruckman, Teacher, Arvin High School

# California's Civic Promise



California history includes thousands of examples of Californians whose active participation has made this state a better place. Across The Golden State, students fortunate enough to receive high quality civic learning opportunities are carrying this proud tradition forward. For example, Kenji Anzai from Rio Americano High School is leading an effort to install solar panels on his school. Lou Chen from Cajon High School is running an SAT prep club to help students from low-income families gain entry to college. Lukas Novak from Folsom High School represents students on his district's school board. Rosy Mora from Village Academy High School leads discussions of controversial topics, such as bullying, at her school. (Read about these and other civics success stories in sidebars throughout this report.)

The Task Force's goal is for *all* students in California to get the instruction, support and experiences they need to do similarly inspiring things and realize California's civic promise. The Task Force's recommendations are designed to ensure that *every* school, in *every* district, integrates high quality civic learning practices into instruction and school life, so that *all* students—including those from low-income families, under-served ethnicities, English language learners and children with special needs—are prepared to participate in civic life. Failure to ensure equitable integration of the most promising civic learning practices into the education of every child imperils our democracy.

Participation can take many forms, and there are numerous ways in which students, families and communities can make a difference. Voting is one of our most important rights and responsibilities, but registering to vote and voting on Election Day are not enough. The health of our democracy depends on our schools producing *informed* voters and community members who value the importance of civic life. Civic engagement includes speaking to the school board, writing to congressional representatives, serving on a jury, collaborating with neighbors on local improvement projects, understanding and debating current events and helping others.

## SUCCESS STORY:

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# BUILDING SKILLS AND COMMUNITY THROUGH *WE THE PEOPLE*

As a student at Fremont's Irvington High School, Kelsey Wong never sought the spotlight. Having once struggled with a speech impediment, she was shy of public speaking and rarely raised her hand in class. But in 11th grade, an inspiring AP World History class kindled her interest in current events. Her teacher, Jenna Hull, encouraged her to try out for the school's *We the People* team.

*We the People* is a competitive program focused on citizenship and the Constitution. It prepares students to compete in mock congressional hearings. Students act as experts testifying before a panel of judges who represent Congress. More than 28 million students and 75,000 educators have participated in the program since it began in 1987.

**"I'm grateful for this program for giving me knowledge, a voice and a community. It taught me that we have the power to make change."**

—KELSEY WONG, STUDENT

"Beyond finally understanding *The Federalist Papers*," said Kelsey, participating in the program taught her many valuable skills for college, career and civic life. For one, the accurate, self-directed political research it required forced her to learn effective time management. For another, working together to compete in the mock congressional hearings taught her the importance of good communication and prioritizing within a group. "I'm grateful for this program for giving me knowledge, a voice and a community," said Kelsey. "It taught me that we have the power to make change."

# California's Civic Crisis



We can all agree that civic participation is both a right and a responsibility. Unfortunately, in our nation and our state, civic participation is not where we need it to be in order to sustain our democracy and flourish in the 21st century global economy. In fact, by nearly every measure—news readership, voting, political engagement, philanthropy, volunteering, church attendance—civic engagement has been declining since the end of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

## **The following sobering facts describe the current problem.**

- The United States recently ranked 139th in voter participation of 172 democracies around the world.<sup>4</sup>
- Nationally, less than half of eligible young people ages 18-24 voted in the 2012 elections.<sup>5</sup>
- Just 13 percent of high school seniors who took the 2012 NAEP, often called The Nation's Report Card, showed a solid understanding of U.S. history.<sup>6</sup>
- Nearly half of Americans who participated in a 2011 Pew study said states' rights, rather than slavery, was the main cause of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup>
- In California, a survey of 2,366 high school seniors revealed that just 60 percent could correctly answer questions designed to test their knowledge of current political issues and the structures and functions of government.<sup>8</sup>
- Less than half of California high school seniors participating in the same survey viewed being actively involved in state and local issues as their responsibility.<sup>9</sup>



“ The people that I represent are looking for a quality workforce, and civic education is crucial because it promotes innovation, it promotes entrepreneurship, and it promotes risk taking. You have to understand the process, and you have to be engaged.”

—Allan Zaremberg, President, California Chamber of Commerce

- Students from lower income families have less access to high-quality civic learning opportunities than students from more affluent backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> Currently in California, a full 58 percent of K-12 students are eligible to receive free or subsidized lunches, which is a proxy indicator for low socio-economic status, so the civics “opportunity gap” affects at least 6 in 10 of our students.
- Latino and African American youth, who make up 59 percent of California’s K-12 students, receive fewer high quality civic learning opportunities than their white peers.<sup>11</sup>

## SUCCESS STORY:

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# CIVIC LEARNING PROJECTS HAVE A LASTING IMPACT

Teachers and students at High Tech High North County develop projects that fuel learning and civic engagement. As a teacher at the project-based charter school, located in San Marcos, Michelle Clark watches her students grow as they take on open-ended projects. "Everything is project based," said student Nicole Boyle. "Everything is working with each other, building a community within the school and then also reaching beyond our school walls, out into the wider community."

Many projects at High Tech High start with problems and questions. "Students told me that they don't watch the news," said Clark. "They described the news as 'a bummer' and 'depressing.'" Clark asked students to analyze why there were so few positive stories in the news and what they could do about the problem.

**"With all the projects I've done, it's the civic engagement projects that leave the most lasting impact on students."**

—MICHELLE CLARK, TEACHER

Out of these questions sprang a project called Positive Train. Clark's students researched organizations and people making a difference in their community. A journalist from *The North County Times* visited the classroom and explained how to write different types of newspaper articles. Armed with their research and new knowledge of journalism, Clark's students wrote stories about the positive community projects they found and submitted them to newspapers. Two students had their work professionally published, and others shared them at school events.

For Clark, projects like Positive Train teach students how to discover a need in the community, research solutions and then do something about it. "With all the projects I've done, it's the civic engagement projects that leave the most lasting impact on students," she said.

# The Current State of Civic Education in California

The current quality and availability of civic education in our schools contributes to these problems.

- California's current K-12 civic education experiences:
  - o Too often emphasize memorization over participatory skills and experiential learning;
  - o Do not assess whether students are prepared for their roles and responsibilities as residents and citizens or the degree to which schools and districts provide students with the learning opportunities that promote the desired civic outcomes, and
  - o Rely too heavily on a single American Government class in 12th grade that comes too late for the many students who have already dropped out.<sup>12</sup>
- Our current history-social science standards are 15 years old, provide inadequate attention to civics and are out of step with what we know our children need to learn. Many important events and developments have occurred in the years since our state created these standards. (See the Definitions sidebar on pages 49–50 for an explanation of key policy terms used in this report.)
  - o The terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, and the ensuing military engagements and concerns about national security and civil liberties are not reflected in the standards.
  - o The powerful potential of technology as a tool for civic engagement, noted in several recent studies,<sup>13,14</sup> is missing from curriculum and instruction.
- Civic learning is not currently tracked through our state assessment system, and experience shows that if a subject is not tested, it is not taught.



“More and more, campaigns are fought in the digital sphere, and our students need to be tech-savvy and information-savvy and be able to put these tools to good use.”

—David Knatcal, Teacher Advisor,  
Junior Statesmen Foundation

- Civic learning content and pedagogy are not systematically embedded in teacher and administrator professional learning experiences.
- Existing high-quality civic learning opportunities are not equitably distributed. Despite a shared interest in engaging in civic life,<sup>15</sup> just a subset of students—typically those who are white, of high academic ability and of higher income families—have access to quality civic learning opportunities, such as service learning, simulations of democratic processes and discussions of current events and controversial topics.

Failing to correct these problems is harming our state and nation. We can and must do better.



## SUCCESS STORY:

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# SERVICE LEARNING BUILDS LEADERS

Service learning is more than community service hours or a beach cleanup. It connects students' learning in the classroom to life outside it and teaches them life skills. Academia CIVITAS at Rio Americano High School in San Juan Unified School District is a four-year program that prepares students to be active, responsible and knowledgeable citizens. CIVITAS requires students to participate in 175 hours of service learning, all tied to classroom instruction. As juniors, students engage in a summer internship that prepares them for a yearlong senior project. "The senior project is the student's gift back to the community," said Linda Reed, former teacher and current program coordinator at CIVITAS.

**"I had to take risks and talk to a lot of people. I am no longer afraid to put myself out there and pull individuals together to make a project."**

—KENJI ANZAI, STUDENT

Student Kenji Anzai, who is interested in math and science, applied what he learned in school to a summer internship at a solar company after junior year. For his senior project, he researched and wrote a proposal for installing solar panels on school property. His project, which took into account structural and financial factors, culminated in presentations to the school board and community organizations. "If I had never joined CIVITAS, I would have been too afraid to organize a school conversation or propose an improvement project," said Kenji. "I had to take risks and talk to a lot of people. I am no longer afraid to put myself out there and pull individuals together to make a project."

Reed says that service learning prepares her students to take on leadership roles at school and for the rest of their lives. Kenji agrees. "The CIVITAS program teaches students skills including communication, organization, time-management and political skills," he said. "These skills will stay with me forever. I'm primed to be an agent of change in my community for a lifetime."

# The Urgent Need for Civic Learning and Its Many Benefits



We have much to gain by revitalizing civic learning, and we have much to lose if we fail. The chief benefits of civic learning are a vibrant and informed civic life and democracy and a healthy society. Civic learning done right also helps teach children skills they need for the 21st century workplace, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, initiative and innovation.<sup>16</sup> In addition, high-quality civic learning engages students by making what they learn at school more relevant to real life. It also promotes academic achievement and prevents some students from dropping out. Research shows, too, that young people are more likely to vote if they have taken a civics class.<sup>17</sup>

Civic learning is also vital for our increasingly diverse California society. In 2012-2013, our 6.2 million K-12 students were 53 percent Latino, 26 percent white, 9 percent Asian and 6 percent African American, with the remaining 6 percent comprised of other ethnicities. In addition, an increasing number of our students are not native speakers of English. Almost 4 in 10 kindergarteners are English language learners. This diversity, and the attention it requires, is now acknowledged in our school funding model. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) recognizes the necessity of investing in the reduction and ultimate removal of inequitable outcomes in California public schools. Revitalizing civic learning opportunities, in an equitable manner, can contribute to meeting these goals.

Furthermore, a substantial number of students in our state are recent immigrants, and participants at our regional meetings noted that many of these students live in communities that are largely insulated from the wider society. Undocumented students may shy away from civic activities at school in order to keep themselves

and their families out of the limelight, and yet it would benefit our society if all communities were integrated into the fabric of civic life.

Economically disadvantaged, minority and immigrant students actually bring a comparative advantage to civic learning activities in that their life experiences and perspectives can richly inform civic learning. For example, they are likely to come to discussions of current domestic policy issues with relevant personal, family or community knowledge with respect to such issues as immigration, unemployment, health care, affordable housing and language, among others. For students who may be more accustomed to having their experiences characterized as deficits in the school setting, high-quality civic education can bring the value of their experiences to the fore. In fact, civic education can provide a gateway to opportunity for these students.

“If we don’t strive to endow the newest members of our society with critical thinking skills and a global emotional maturity, than we will self-destruct.”

—Lukas Novak, Student, Folsom High School



## SUCCESS STORY:

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# STUDENT AIMS TO LEVEL THE SAT PLAYING FIELD

The numbers in San Bernardino Unified School District are stark. According to district Superintendent Dr. Dale Marsden, more of its high school students drop out than graduate. Some 99 percent of students in the district are children of color, and 92 percent come from low-income families.

Lou Chen, a student at Cajon High School and the son of two college professors, always knew he would go to college. The same is not true for many of his peers, but Lou didn't see his fellow students as lacking in talent or academic potential. Rather, he thought that what they needed was a sense of the broader possibilities that high school graduation and college enrollment could bring them, along with the sort of practical support and encouragement often taken for granted in higher-income school districts.

**"It's not just, 'Children today, adults tomorrow,'  
but, 'Students today, leaders tomorrow.'"**

—LOU CHEN, STUDENT

To bridge this gap, Lou got engaged. He started an SAT prep club focusing not only on testing but also on college readiness, study skills, college applications and more, often for students who would be the first in their families to pursue a college degree. "I'm trying to level the playing field," he said, using social media and in-school meetings to share study tips, remind students in the club about application deadlines and help them believe in their future. "It's not just, 'Children today, adults tomorrow,' but, 'Students today, leaders tomorrow,'" he said.

# Quality Civic Learning Defined

In high-quality civic learning, students learn to think critically, develop research skills, assess and synthesize information and present coherent arguments based on data. To put these skills into practice, they work with others in groups, organize activities in their communities and speak persuasively in public. They also develop common shared values about opportunity, fairness and tolerance and an understanding that their actions can have an impact, especially when people work together.

As a nation, we already know how to do non-partisan civic learning well. We know that it starts with classroom instruction in government and history and extends to actual engagement and experiences in our communities. According to the research, six core activities—known as the Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning—directly improve the quality and effectiveness of civic learning in our schools.<sup>20</sup>

## The Six Proven Practices are:

- **Classroom instruction in government, history, geography, law, democracy and economics**, striking a balance between teaching important facts and documents—such as the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights—and demonstrating their relevance to today’s society;
- **Discussion of current events and controversial issues**, including their relevance to young people’s lives;
- **Service learning experiences that are directly linked to curriculum and instruction** and that give students a chance to apply what they are learning through informed civic action;
- **Extracurricular activities** that give students opportunities to get involved in their schools, communities and local government and to work together toward common goals;





“Not every student will fall in love with government and politics, so we need to focus on getting every student to understand how broad the relevance and implications of civics is in their daily lives.”

—Brian Kaplun, Student, John Burroughs High School

- **Student participation in school governance**, to cultivate a sense of responsibility and give young people a real voice in how their classrooms and schools are run, and
- **Simulations of democratic processes**, such as formal debates, voting, mock trials, Model United Nations and simulations of legislative deliberation.

We also know that the success of what happens inside of schools depends in part on the school climate. Effective civic learning both requires and promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect along with a sense of community responsibility. Teachers and school administrators set the tone by modeling civic values and civic engagement. The resulting positive school climate has been shown to promote students' overall learning and academic achievement, reduce high-risk behaviors and increase teacher retention rates.<sup>19</sup>

Some schools and teachers in California are already using the research-based Six Proven Practices, and we applaud these schools. However, we need to implement these practices in *all* of our schools, for *all* of our children, so we can build a stronger and more engaged society and ensure that our children gain the knowledge, skills and values they need to succeed.

## SUCCESS STORY:

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# CIVIC INQUIRY FOSTERS CIVIL DISCOURSE AND INFORMED DEBATE

Schools that take civic learning seriously know how to teach their students more than just the branches of government or how a bill becomes law. Using service learning and hands-on experiences, they teach students real-life skills in problem-solving, team-building and active listening.

**“We teach them that if you want to be heard, first you have to listen.”**

—WILLIAM BOGIE, TEACHER

William Bogie, a history and social sciences teacher at Village Academy High School in Pomona Unified School District, developed a pilot program called Empowerment Period with the goal of empowering students in the classroom and beyond. The program involves approximately 25 students from 9th through 12th grade, meeting twice a week. The multi-age mix is deliberate, with older students encouraged to mentor younger ones first in the practices of mutual respect and acceptance of differences, and then in informed debate and civic responsibility.

“We teach them that if you want to be heard, first you have to listen,” said Bogie, who wanted to avoid the “who can yell the loudest” style of argument that too often passes for passionate engagement. Students form small groups to use the Structured Academic Controversy and Public Issues Discussion models to discuss topics ranging from capital punishment to role models to bullying.

“We expressed our points of view and listened to others’ points of view,” said junior Rosy Mora. “We learned to accept others and their opinions.”

“All of the ‘4 Cs’ of the Common Core State Standards—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity—are integrated into the program,” said Bogie, so teachers who use it get a chance to put Common Core strategies into practice through civics.

# Civic Learning Outcomes



The ultimate outcomes we seek are a vibrant civic life, a healthy society and an informed electorate to fuel and guide our democracy. But what, exactly, do we want our children to know and be able to do as a result of participating in civic learning experiences? We want them to have the following capacities:

## Civic Knowledge

- Understand ethics, history, geography, law and economics;
- Possess financial literacy and digital media literacy;
- Understand constitutional concepts such as separation of powers and due process;
- Understand democratic processes and how our government works;
- Understand local, state, national and global issues of the day, and
- Understand the concepts of diversity, privilege and power.

## Civic Skills

- Be able to gather and process information, listen well, think critically, speak in public and engage in discussion and debate;
- Be able to collaborate, build consensus and take collective action to address community issues;
- Be able to vote, perform jury duty and communicate with policy makers;
- Be able to fluently use technology and digital civic engagement tools, and
- Be able to critically evaluate campaign advertising.

## Civic Values

- Demonstrate concern for the rights and wellbeing of others;
- Tolerate, appreciate and seek out a variety of perspectives;
- Have a sense of civic duty at local, state, national and global levels, and
- Be aware of their power to act and be predisposed to take action to change things for the better.

“ We need to educate students about local matters, because that is what we are going to interact with the most.”

—Rosy Mora, Student, Village Academy High School



## SUCCESS STORY:

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# GIVING ALL STUDENTS A VOICE

Brawley Union High School in the Imperial Valley takes service learning and civic education seriously. The school—where some 84 percent of students are Latino and 71 percent qualify for free or subsidized lunch—was recently honored with a Civics Learning Award of Excellence, one of only three schools in the state to receive this top honor.

**“We do a lot of projects, so it’s very hands-on and better than learning right out of the textbook.”**

—JORDAN BREWER, STUDENT

Social studies teacher Jose Flores was instrumental in Brawley’s achievement. He made bilingual civics and U.S. history classes available to the entire student body, and with his encouragement, membership in civics-related clubs jumped from 27 to 140 students. In his classes, he encouraged students to practice political discussions and set up mock voting and mock trials, using actual ballot boxes and voter information booklets modified to include school and local issues, as well as state and federal concerns. He took students on field trips to city council chambers and invited judges and other elected officials to speak to his classes.

“We do a lot of projects, so it’s very hands-on and better than learning right out of the textbook,” said senior Jordan Brewer.

Flores also encouraged all his students to get involved in student governance, at a time when fewer than 100 out of 1600 students voted in school elections. “I want the kids to know that, even in the Imperial Valley, you can still have a voice, you can still have a leadership role,” he said.

“In my earlier school years, I never had the opportunity to be part of something like this,” said junior Alyssa Rodriguez. “It’s very cool.”

# The Time to Act is Now

There has never been a better—or a more crucial—time to revitalize civic learning in California. Our state is in the midst of several major public education reforms. These include: Implementing the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts and new science standards; developing a new English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework; implementing the Local Control Funding Formula, which gives school districts increased control over their budgeting decisions while providing additional resources toward addressing education needs of critical subgroups; revising the Academic Performance Index (API) to include more than student test scores; designing new K-12 assessment systems to be in place by 2016, and updating the University of California A-G admission requirements.

As we in California implement these sweeping systemic changes, it is critical that we not leave civic learning behind. In fact, civic learning can actually help us implement many of these reforms. For example, we can take advantage of the natural connection between civic learning and the Common Core State Standards in English language arts to help teachers implement the new standards. They both call for careful reading of informational texts, critical thinking, analysis skills, digital media literacy and developing and communicating arguments based on evidence. Both also emphasize the application of knowledge and skills in real-life settings. We can take advantage, too, of a similar natural connection between civic learning and the new ELA/ELD Framework.

Of special note, the shift to the Local Control Funding Formula presents new opportunities to address inequitable access to quality civic learning experiences and to actively employ civic education to appreciably reduce the continuing achievement gap for African American and Latino students.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

For *all* students in California to have access to a continuum of civic learning experiences starting in kindergarten—and to effectively respond to equity issues—we must embed robust civic learning throughout the K-12 experience, both within and beyond school walls. To this end, the Task Force makes the following system-wide recommendations to improve civic learning in *every* district, in *every* school, for *every* child. These recommendations constitute a comprehensive plan.

“ We need to take action now to get students educated about civics beyond voting and get students educated starting very young about what it means to live in a system of government where we control the outcome.”

—Hon. Debra Bowen, California Secretary of State



# Standards, Assessments, Accountability and Incentives



In today’s high-stakes K-12 education world, school leaders and teachers must by necessity focus on the “need to know,” frequently leaving out the “nice to know.” Therefore, we must put civic learning squarely in the “need to know” category. To achieve this, we must embed civic learning in core K-12 systems and ways of doing business. These include standards, assessments and accountability mechanisms, as well as recognition and rewards for progress. [See the Definitions sidebar on pages 49–50 for explanations of policy vocabulary.]

- **Revise the California History-Social Science Content Standards and accompanying curriculum frameworks to incorporate an increased emphasis on civic learning, starting in kindergarten, so all students acquire the civic knowledge, skills and values they need to succeed in college, career and civic life.** The standards define learning outcomes for all students and thus drive the development of accompanying frameworks, assessments, instructional materials, curriculum resources and professional learning for teachers and administrators. Standards in all other core academic disciplines—English language arts, mathematics and science—have recently been revised.
  - o Establish a timeline and process for updating the California History/Social Science standards.
  - o Revise and complete the draft California History/Social Science Framework to define desired outcomes for civic learning knowledge and skills at every grade level K-12. Draw on the *College, Career & Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*, published by the National Council for the Social Studies, as a resource.<sup>20</sup>
  - o Weave the uses of technology and digital civic literacy throughout the new standards.

- **Include civic learning in state assessment and accountability systems for students, schools and districts.** Civic knowledge, skills, values and whether students receive learning opportunities that promote these outcomes must be assessed and linked to the revised California History-Social Science Content Standards and relevant Common Core State Standards, to enable periodic reporting to the legislature and the public on the state of student civic learning.
  - o A civics matrix test, in which students take a brief portion of a test and the results are aggregated to produce results for schools and districts, makes the most sense. Such a test—administered in one grade level each for upper elementary, middle and high school—has numerous advantages over other state tests; it is less costly and takes much less class time to administer.
  - o The data from this civics matrix test should be incorporated into the Academic Performance Index (API) when it is revised. Those portions of the civics matrix test relating to knowledge and skills should be incorporated into the testing portion of the new API, which are not to exceed 60 percent of the new index. The portions of the civics matrix test relating to civic “opportunities to learn” should be incorporated into the remaining sections of the API.
  - o Incentives should be offered for school districts to develop their own performance assessments at the local level, so laboratories of excellent civic learning and engagement can be identified and shared statewide.
  - o Assess and report on equitable access to civic education and the research-based Six Proven Practices at the school, district and state levels. Assess the degree to which different groups of students are receiving high-quality civic learning opportunities, and assess the degree to which student outcomes are equal across groups. Provide support to schools and districts so they can develop plans to address shortcomings revealed by these assessments and close the civic learning opportunity gap.
- **Recognize students, teachers, principals, schools and districts that show exemplary outcomes in civic learning.** Certificates, competitive awards and badges are some examples of how to do this.

# Teaching



Research demonstrates that teachers have more impact on student learning than any other factor controlled by schools, and teachers are more effective when they work in schools with strong leaders.<sup>21</sup> Together—and with support from other administrators and staff—teachers and school leaders shape the school climate, which guides the quality of everything that happens inside schools. Teachers and school leaders rely on professional learning experiences to teach them what they need to know and be able to do. Recognizing that professional learning experiences in civics are a lynchpin to dramatically improving civic learning for *all* students in California, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- **Improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators, and provide access to existing professional learning experiences in civics to help them implement civic learning in schools.**
  - o Strengthen civic learning throughout the professional learning continuum, as follows:
    - Teacher and administrator preparation programs and their admissions requirements must require classes that include history-social science methods that promote democracy education, student engagement and the research-based Six Proven Practices;
    - Induction programs for new teachers and administrators must refresh and amplify the civics content and pedagogy taught in preparation programs; and
    - Ongoing professional learning experiences over the course of teachers' and administrators' careers must emphasize both greater civics content knowledge and improved pedagogy as defined by best practices for professional development.
  - o Target the classroom, extracurricular activities and the entire school culture, so each school embodies democratic values and principles by involving students in governance, decision-making and community building.



- o Include substantive instruction in the uses of technology as a teaching tool for civics and as a medium of civic engagement.
- o Provide additional professional development for teachers who are working with students who are currently receiving few or no civic learning opportunities—students of color, students from low-income families, English language learners, students with special needs and incarcerated youth.
- o Train administrators to assess and ensure incorporation of research-based civic education practices into civic learning experiences to reach all students equitably, across subject-matter disciplines.
- **Connect professional learning in civics to Common Core State Standards professional learning.** Given the natural connection between civic learning and the new Common Core State Standards for English language arts, it is important to embed and emphasize this specific connection to civics within Common Core State Standards professional learning experiences.

# Curriculum



Curriculum and instructional materials provide teachers with the tools they need to get the job done at the classroom level, where the majority of civic learning takes place. To ensure that teachers have the curriculum and instructional supports they need to teach civics well, the Task Force makes these recommendations.

- **Develop a best-practices clearinghouse to support effective civic learning.** There are many excellent civic learning resources and professional learning opportunities currently available, and we strongly encourage schools to use them.
  - o The clearinghouse should include teacher training modules, curriculum and instructional materials for civics across K-12, as well as resources for afterschool, summer learning and non-traditional learning environments. The clearinghouse should also include materials proven to increase access and meaningful involvement by all children.
  - o All posted materials should be validated for quality, be aligned to revised standards and prepare students for performance-based assessments that measure civic learning.
  - o The clearinghouse should include interactive features, so users can easily share information and write reviews, and a searchable database to allow teachers and schools to search for programs by grade.
  - o Over time, additional resources may need to be developed to fill gaps and align with emerging research and education policy changes.
- **Develop an articulated sequence of instruction for civic learning across all of K-12,** and peg this curriculum to the revised standards recommended on page 32. At each grade level, civic learning should draw on the Six Proven Practices and include work that is action-oriented and project-based and that develops digital literacy.
- **Every school should create and implement a plan for developing the civic literacy of all its students** by integrating the Six Proven Practices into instructional practice and school life. (See the resources page at [www.powerofdemocracy.org](http://www.powerofdemocracy.org) for planning tools.)

- o Schools should seek to provide a balanced curriculum that educates the whole child and uses an integrated approach. Civic learning should be a part of the curriculum and should be a shared responsibility across disciplines.
- o An emphasis on civic learning curriculum and student outcomes should be strengthened within the existing history-social science curriculum.
- o History-social science is a core discipline and should have dedicated instructional time at every grade level, including in elementary school.
- o Schools should make every effort to maximize the natural connections between civic learning and the California Common Core State Standards for English language arts and the California ELA/ELD Framework. This will dramatically reduce the chances that civic learning will become an add-on to teachers' already demanding responsibilities.
- o Civic learning provides an opportunity for students to apply learning to real-life issues and has natural connections to many subject areas. When schools are creating their civic learning plans, they are encouraged to integrate civics with science, English language arts, mathematics, visual and performing arts and other subject areas as appropriate for their school.
- **Create networking opportunities for districts** to share ideas, instructional practices and resources to equitably achieve identified civic learning outcomes for all students at each grade level.
- **Provide guidelines and strategies to teach civic learning to *all* students**, including English language learners, students from low-income families, students with special needs and incarcerated youth.
- **Link instruction to formative assessments and outcomes**, so that teachers can use real-time data to guide instruction.



## Civics Instructional Resources

There are many high-quality civics instructional resources available to teachers. To begin your search, visit the resources page at [www.powerofdemocracy.org](http://www.powerofdemocracy.org).

# Community Stakeholders



The world outside of school is the laboratory for civic learning, and civic learning cannot flourish without active participation from local government, the courts, businesses, nonprofits, community organizations and families. Students need to get out of the school building to practice civic engagement, and civic leaders need to come into schools to engage students.

The Task Force believes that the state, its school districts and its schools can help create a favorable environment for participation by community stakeholders and therefore recommends that districts and schools:

- **Work with community stakeholders to identify what they can do.** Local government, the courts, businesses, nonprofits, community organizations and families can directly contribute to improving civic learning for all students by volunteering to come into schools and by providing service-learning experiences that tie to civic learning in the classroom. Schools should ensure that all elements of the community and its infrastructure are incorporated in these efforts. Examples suggested by participants in our regional meetings include:
  - o Creating internships and other service learning opportunities and working with teachers to tie these experiences into civic education classroom work.
  - o Supporting civic learning club activities such as mock trials, debate teams and junior statesmen, starting in elementary and middle school.
  - o Promoting the state’s Civic Learning Awards and/or starting a local award that either recognizes outstanding middle and elementary schools or shines a light on an exemplary teacher, school leader, family, business, nonprofit organization or community group.
- **Support sustained engagement by establishing a mechanism that connects teachers and students and the community.** In order to implement the research-based Six Proven Practices, it is essential to create a seamless connection between civic life in schools and civic life in our communities. And yet, community stakeholders at our regional meetings said they have trouble establishing connections and finding the right person to link to inside of schools.

We all must overcome this barrier so teachers can get the help they need to fully implement the Six Proven Practices.

- **Communicate with all families about the value of civic learning**, so they clearly understand the value of civic learning and make it a priority and support it at home. Provide specific suggestions regarding how to best support their children’s civic learning, especially for immigrant parents, who may face language barriers and knowledge gaps about the U.S. governance system and school model, but also for those who face time and resource constraints.

“ I’m from [an immigrant] background, and we need to get parents like me to understand that we are members of the community. Once I realized that I was a member of a community, that my child was a member of a community, that is when I got involved.”

—Lilia Cisnens-Felix, Parent



# Funding



In order to implement the above recommendations, we must work together to ensure that civic learning is adequately funded in every district in California. The Task Force recommends that all civic stakeholders work to ensure that civic learning is funded in Local Control Accountability Plans under the new Local Control Funding Formula. (See Appendix 2 on pages 56-57 for information you can use to make the case for civic learning in your school district.)



## SUCCESS STORY:

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# TEACHER MODELS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS

If something is broken, fix it. John Minkler has modeled this motto for decades by showing and teaching his students that they can solve real-life problems. He began his quest for change as a young educator, when he got frustrated teaching history and social studies the traditional way, with lectures and textbooks. A lot of his class time was devoted to teaching to the test, and he noticed that his students weren't engaged, so Minkler began looking for examples of teachers engaging their students in the community.

He joined the California Council for the Social Studies, attended conferences and discovered service learning. Service learning engages students and helps them "connect with the community to help solve real problems while applying what they learn in the classroom," said Minkler. The more he used service learning as a teaching tool, the stronger an advocate he became, and he began to wonder why service learning wasn't part of teacher training and the curriculum. Inspired, Minkler wrote curriculum for grades 7 through 12 called "Active Citizenship, Empowering America's Youth." This curriculum provided U.S. history teachers with service learning lessons connected to U.S. history standards.

**"In our garden and nutrition projects, I can use my skills and be recognized for the work I do."**

—ANDROMEDA ARCHULETA, STUDENT

In 2007, Minkler co-founded Academy for Civic and Entrepreneurial Leadership in Fresno. The Six Proven Practices play a significant role in education at the school. Civic learning is infused in classroom instruction via discussions, democratic simulations, service learning and student governance. In one project, students learned about food deserts, which affect areas around Fresno, and they built and grew gardens and donated much of the produce to a local shelter. The students also learned nutritional ways to cook, and many built gardens at their own homes. "In our garden and nutrition projects, I can use my skills and be recognized for the work I do," said student Andromeda Archuleta. "With community service activities, we build stronger connections with our team, our teachers and community partners."



# A Call To Action

# Take Action Now



“With your help we can elevate civic learning and invigorate a vibrant civic culture in California, for our children and all Californians.”

—Hon. Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye  
Chief Justice of California

Revitalizing K-12 civic learning in California will be a long process that will require strong and enduring commitments, and it is going to take effort from everyone.

While we seek to implement the policy changes recommended here, we can each take action immediately to improve civic learning opportunities for all students. (Please see the side bar *What You Can Do Now* on the following pages for suggestions.)

As we chart the course for K-12 education in the 21st century, we must work together to bring quality civic learning opportunities to *all* children in California. Together, we can realize California’s civic promise and ensure that our schools fulfill their vital civic mission.

# What You Can Do Now

If we want to reach all children, policy has to set the context, but we do not have to wait for new policies to be in place before we take action to improve civic learning in California. There are many things we can do right away. The following suggestions come from hundreds of people like you who participated in the Task Force's regional meetings.

## **All Californians Can:**

- Advocate for Task Force recommendations through Op-Eds, letters to the editor, calls to legislators and conversations with colleagues and friends in person and on social media.
- Attend Local Control Accountability Plan meetings and urge districts to include civic learning.
- Attend city council and school board meetings and talk about the benefits of civic learning and the need to implement the Task Force recommendations.
- Help their school, district and county office of education create a database of local civic learning contacts in government, business, community, the courts, higher education and nonprofits.

## **Business, Civic and Community Leaders Can:**

- Offer internships for students.
- Volunteer to be a guest speaker at a school or to serve in a mock trial or Model UN.
- Create an award or scholarship for outstanding achievement in civics.
- Talk to legislators about increasing funding and other support for civic education and advocate for bills supporting civic learning.

## **Local Government and Elected Officials Can:**

- Offer internships.
- Visit schools and talk to students.
- Provide information to schools on local issues and how to participate.
- Advocate with local schools and districts, state and district boards of education and state legislators to implement the Task Force recommendations.

## **Courts Can:**

- Volunteer to judge mock trials and serve on Model UNs.
- Create a student outreach program that connects students to learning experiences in the courts and volunteer to coordinate field trips to the court.
- Recruit volunteers to assist with civic learning projects at schools.

## **Community Organizations Can:**

- Pre-register student voters and do voter education at high schools.
- Educate parents and policy makers about the need for civic education.
- Support and advocate for the state policy changes recommended by the Task Force.
- Offer internships and service-learning experiences for students.
- Offer civic education for families.

# What You Can Do Now

## **Families Can:**

- Talk to their children about what they are learning in civics.
- Vote, if eligible, and take their child with them.
- Read the news and talk about news and politics with their children.
- Attend public meetings and tell their children about what happens there.
- Advocate for civic learning in schools.

## **Students Can:**

- Get involved in school government and write an opinion piece for the school newspaper about a topic they care about.
- Talk about issues that matter to them on social media.
- Volunteer for a political campaign, community organization or public agency.
- Do an internship or service-learning project and blog or tweet or about it.
- Attend public meetings like school board or city council and encourage other students to attend, too.

## **Superintendents Can:**

- Make civic learning a district-wide priority.
- Work to reduce the “red tape” separating businesses, local government, community organizations and the courts from participating in schools.
- Call their local government, courts, chamber of commerce and near-by higher education institutions and meet to plan civic learning collaborations.
- Promote strong student government and election processes across K-12.
- Rally school leaders to brainstorm ways to integrate civics into school life and curriculum.

## **Principals and Other School Administrators Can:**

- Invite public officials and other local leaders to come speak to students in school.
- Build civic learning into the school culture and include democratic processes in school life.
- Enhance student government activities and include students from diverse backgrounds in decision-making.
- Encourage students to attend school board and city council meetings.
- Increase the use of mock trials, mock elections, school elections and Model UN.
- Support and reward teachers who take the lead on civic learning.

## **Teachers Can:**

- Add the Six Proven Practices to their teaching repertoire.
- Link content standards to current events and connect what students learn to things that matter to them.
- Teach more local and state history and government, and bring in local leaders and public officials to talk about what they do.
- Take students to visit local government and courts while in session.
- Give students leadership opportunities in mock trials, Model UN and other civic learning projects.
- Encourage informed, respectful discussion and debate among all students, and work to ensure participation by all students.

## What You Can Do Now

### **PTAs Can:**

- Start a PTA award for outstanding civics projects.
- Organize a "speakers bureau" for presenters such as local city council members and legislators on current events topics.
- Organize volunteers to help with civics projects.
- Host candidate forums and provide voter registration for parents.
- Encourage families to vote.
- Advocate for civic learning in school.

### **Philanthropic Institutions Can:**

- Fund professional learning for teachers and programs that promote civic learning that use the Six Proven Practices and align with Common Core State Standards.
- Support state and local advocacy efforts to inform and inspire improved K-12 civic learning policy and practice.
- Commission research to increase the evidence base of effective instructional practices, tools and assessments.
- Convene local community organizations, parents, education leaders and businesses to raise awareness, share learning and align efforts.



## SUCCESS STORY:

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# MAKING CIVIC LEARNING THE NORM

What would it be like if all students experienced civic learning? The California Democracy School Initiative aims to find out. The program steeps teachers and school administrators in the pedagogy of civic learning and puts specific emphasis on how to teach inquiry and investigation.

“Many schools have civic learning opportunities, but often it is just a classroom here, a classroom there,” said Michelle Herczog, who created the program as part of her work at the Los Angeles County Office of Education. “We wanted to create a structure where all the students in the school could have the experience.”

**“We learn about change, about how we  
can help better our communities.”**

—CHRISTO GONZALES, STUDENT

This three-year program, which began in 2013, includes 12 schools in Los Angeles and Orange County. Each school selected a team of teachers and administrators to participate in the initiative. Administrators are an essential part of the team. “If you are going to make a systemic change, you really need to have not only the full support but the active involvement of the leadership—the principal, the school board, all the way up to the superintendent,” said Herczog.

Each school tailors the trainings to fit the needs of their school. For example, students at Juan Cabrillo High School in Long Beach explored questions of privacy in the 21st century. Throughout the program, which culminated in a town-hall style event, teachers worked in cross-disciplinary teams and facilitated rather than led conversations. “I’m sitting with my math teacher,” said teacher Barbara Doten. “I’m sitting with my science teacher. I’m sitting with my special-ed reading teacher. We are all, as a community, planning what it means to develop civic literacy in our classroom.”

Students are already feeling the impact. “We learn about change, about how we can help better our communities,” said student Christo Gonzales.

“What I love most is the fact that we are out there, talking to the students, talking to the teachers, more involved,” added student Stephanie Maciel.

# Definitions

**Academic Performance Index (API):** The API measures academic performance and improvement for each school in the state on an annual basis. The API is a single number, ranging from a low of 200 to a high of 1000, which reflects a school's performance level, based on the results of statewide assessments. The state has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. Schools that fall short of 800 are required to meet annual growth targets until that goal is achieved. API targets vary for each school.

**Accountability:** Accountability systems make it possible for families and others to know if all children are learning well and at the appropriate rate. Accountability systems also let families and others know if children are getting equal access to high-quality learning opportunities.

**Assessments:** Assessments tell us if students are learning what they need to know and be able to do, and they provide useful data to help teachers and school leaders continuously improve teaching and learning. Assessments are designed to determine if students are achieving the outcomes identified in the standards.

**C3 Framework:** The C3 Framework provides an inquiry-based approach to enhance the rigor of social studies education, strengthen literacy skills identified in the Common Core State Standards and build students' content knowledge and the critical thinking, problem solving and participatory skills they need to become engaged residents in the 21st century. The C3 Framework is the result of a three-year effort led by 23 states in collaboration with the National Council for the Social Studies and many other partners.



## Definitions



**Common Core State Standards:** The Common Core State Standards are a single set of educational content standards for K-12 in English language arts and mathematics. The nation's governors and education leaders led the development of the standards, and teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country provided input. California is one of 45 states that have voluntarily adopted the standards.

**Curriculum Frameworks:** Curriculum frameworks provide guidance to teachers in their work to help students meet the outcomes identified in the standards. A framework is a teacher's roadmap.

**Professional Learning:** Professional Learning refers to planned, sequenced experiences that teach educators what they need to know and be able to do to teach our children well. The research suggests that high quality professional learning in civics is content-focused, active, ongoing, connected to curriculum and standards, collaborative and embedded in teachers' daily work flow. Professional learning opportunities are designed to help teachers meet the standards.

**Standards:** Standards provide clear, consistent guidelines for what students are expected to learn at each grade level in a given subject. Standards define learning outcomes for students, and they drive the development of frameworks, instructional materials, curriculum resources, professional learning and assessment.

## SUCCESS STORY:

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# BRINGING A STUDENT VOICE TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

How can a school board learn what its students really need? By asking those students to serve as student representatives to the board, as Folsom-Cordova Unified School District did. Lukas Novak, a senior from Folsom High School, recently became his school's student representative.

A dedicated teacher and an American Government class sparked Lukas' interest in civics. Because the class was small, students became "a family, a tribe," he said. "Everyone cared, and there was a lot of open discussion. The attitude was, 'Take your time and delve into the topic.'"

**"The world isn't just Folsom, California, or even the United States. Students need to open their eyes and know that what they do every day is important."**

—LUKAS NOVAK, STUDENT

Still, Lukas worried that the chasm between discussing campaign-finance reform in class and weighing in on district budgeting might be too wide for even an enthusiastic student like himself—active in Academic Decathlon, a member of his school's student advisory board and aiming for the Ivy League—to bridge. But in a room of "five adults and me," he found his fellow board members to be respectful, welcoming and very willing to listen to what he had to say regarding student concerns. This civic learning experience and others taught Lukas many lessons. "The world isn't just Folsom, California, or even the United States," he said. "Students need to open their eyes and know that what they do every day is important."



# Appendices



# California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning Roster



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**Mr. José Flores**, Brawley Union High School, Teacher\*\*  
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## CALIFORNIA TASK FORCE ON K-12 CIVIC LEARNING

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## How Civic Learning Benefits LCAP Priority Areas

The Local Control Funding Formula provides civics stakeholders with a unique opportunity to encourage school districts to use the research-based Six Proven Practices to provide high-quality civic learning for all students. As districts develop Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), you can encourage them to consider the ways in which civic learning is a powerful tool for meeting several of the LCAP priority areas.

### What Is Civic Learning?

Civic learning provides students with the knowledge, skills and values they need to be informed and engaged participants in our democracy. Research proves the efficacy of the Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning:

- Classroom instruction in government, history, law, democracy and economics;
- Discussion of current events and controversial issues;
- Service learning tied to curriculum and instruction;
- Extracurricular activities linked to school, community and local government;
- Student participation in school governance, and
- Simulations of democratic processes.

### The Benefits of Civic Learning to LCAP Priority Areas

#### • Student Achievement

Research shows that civic learning promotes academic achievement. It also supports college and career readiness. The American public and the business community are keenly interested in youth developing the competencies necessary to thrive in a changing global economy. Civic learning not only enhances knowledge of economic and political processes, it provides opportunities for youth to apply academic concepts in real-life settings, work collaboratively in teams and engage with professional role models. Taking courses that require community service and participating in student government have been found to predict high school graduation and college attendance and success.<sup>22</sup>

- **School Climate**

Civic learning builds a positive school climate, which in turn has a positive impact on a wide array of outcomes for students, ranging from academic achievement to personal character. Research shows that providing opportunities to engage in civic learning teaches the importance of community (both within the school and more broadly). Respectful dialogue about controversial issues is foundational to a positive school climate. The benefits of civic learning in one classroom can help shape the norms of other classrooms and the school more broadly.

- **Student Engagement and Reducing the Dropout Rate**

Civic learning provides compelling, motivating and challenging experiences that can keep children in school. Civic learning, beginning in elementary and middle school with a focus on civic responsibility, reduces student's likelihood of dropping out of high school.<sup>23</sup> More than 80 percent of students who drop out indicate that they would have been more likely to stay in school if they had more opportunities to participate in experiential learning.<sup>24</sup>

- **Implementation of Common Core State Standards**

Civic learning naturally supports the college and career readiness skills and abilities called for by the Common Core State Standards, especially in English language arts. For example, the new standards prioritize comprehension and use of complex texts, and our Constitution and Bill of Rights are excellent content for such skill development. The new standards also call for the capacity to analyze a problem and to communicate purposefully, both orally and in writing, which can be achieved through simulations of democratic processes such as classroom mock trials. Including history-social science teachers in Common Core State Standards professional learning experiences can facilitate integration of civic learning and the Common Core.

### **Making Civic Learning Opportunities Available to All Students**

Currently in California, low-income students, students of color, English language learners and students with special needs are significantly less likely to have access to the Six Proven Practices. They are therefore denied the civic knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to access the power of our democracy. LCAP is an opportunity for local leaders to address this inequity and ensure that *all* students are not just prepared for college and career, but to be informed and engaged citizens and residents of our communities.

Please go to [www.powerofdemocracy.org](http://www.powerofdemocracy.org) for a downloadable version to take to your LCAP meetings.





# Endnotes

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