

# **Study of Civic Education In Arizona**

A Collaborative Effort of the  
Arizona Civics Coalition

&

Center for Civic Education and Leadership  
at Arizona State University

2009



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Dear Fellow Citizen,

Thank you for taking the time to read the Study of Civic Education in Arizona. You will read about the goals of civic education and the characteristics of an effective civic education program.

The data that formed the study was collected from a number of sources including students and teachers who completed written surveys and participated in focus groups throughout Arizona.

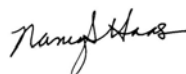
As you will see, there are no recommendations in this version of the report. Recommendations will come from Arizona educators, policy makers and concerned citizens. A Civic Education Summit will provide the initial venue for those conversations to begin.

I hope you will join us in making your recommendations to the Arizona Civics Coalition and add your voice to the many who have called for an enhanced emphasis in civic education from kindergarten through high school.

There are voices on a national and state level calling for schools to strengthen civic education so that today's students can develop into engaged citizens needed for the vitality of our great country. To add your voice to theirs, please contact the Arizona Civics Coalition at [info@azcivics.org](mailto:info@azcivics.org) or (602)340-7268.

Finally, I would like to thank the teachers and students who took the time to complete our surveys and to the teachers who participated in focus groups. Without your input this report would not have been possible.

Sincerely,



Nancy Haas, Ph.D.  
Director,  
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## Study of Civic Education in Arizona

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Finally, this report would not be possible were it not for the participation of the numerous district administrators who helped us administer the surveys, the hundreds of classroom teachers who administered the student surveys in their classes, and the thousands of students who completed the surveys. We hope the product of this remarkable collaboration will enrich Arizona students and help to keep our democracy vibrant through the next generation.

Jeffrey Schrade  
Senior Director, Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education

For more information about this report, please contact the Arizona Civics Coalition by email at [info@azcivics.org](mailto:info@azcivics.org) or by telephone at (602)340-7268

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## Study of Civic Education in Arizona

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, a Mrs. Powel asked Benjamin Franklin: “Well, Doctor, what have we got – a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin replied: “A republic, if you can keep it.” John Bartlett, *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* 321:2 (17th ed. 2002).

Whether we can “keep it” depends on our youth. And whether our youth are prepared to keep it depends on the state of our civic education. In view of the importance of these principles to Arizona – and to the United States – concerned Arizonans from the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education, and other civic-minded organizations formed the Arizona Civics Coalition. Working in partnership with the Center for Civic Education and Leadership at Arizona State University, and supported by grants from the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and the Arizona Community Foundation, the Coalition created a comprehensive survey process, including both written questionnaires and focus groups, and administered it to 160 teachers and 5,316 students across the State. The results were exceptionally illuminating – encouraging in many respects, discouraging in others, and ultimately hopeful.

What is encouraging is that the results leave little room for doubt that civic education can have a tremendous impact on young people’s degree of civic engagement. For example:

- (1) Students who discuss politics in four or more classes show the greatest interest in politics;
- (2) Students who discuss politics and government in three or more classes are almost twice as likely as others to participate in a boycott or sign a petition;
- (3) Greater classroom discussion of civics topics dramatically increases a student’s likelihood of feeling that his or her involvement in governance can make a difference; and
- (4) Civic education significantly increases the likelihood that a student feels proud of this country.

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What is discouraging is that the existing framework for public education in Arizona has pushed civic education to the back burner. Arizona teachers agree that civic education is not being effectively delivered in Arizona. The primary reason is that civic education is not a required topic for the AIMS test, and teachers are under tremendous pressure to “teach to the test,” making it impossible for them to devote substantial time to other topics. Teachers also report that when civic-related topics are covered, they tend to be treated as historical subjects, rather than principles with relevance to the students’ lives and the present-day community. At the same time, teachers are wary of simply adding civics to the list of tested subjects, concerned that they are already overstretched and overstressed by the existing mandates.

What is ultimately hopeful about the Coalition’s findings is that they show that the path to enriching our young people’s genuine understanding of the principles on which this country was founded is clear. Civic education *can* turn young people into fully-engaged citizens. It remains only to determine how best to achieve this goal, and many of the detailed findings contained in this report will be helpful in addressing this question. The Coalition is confident that Arizona’s policymakers, informed by these findings and aware of the importance of effective civic education, will find the solution – and the Coalition stands ready to assist them in any way it can. Using the institutions and principles that Doctor Franklin and his cohorts left us, we can, and will, keep our republic strong.

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# Study of Civic Education in Arizona

## Part I

### Background

The Arizona Civic Education Study was administered in 2006 for the purposes of evaluating the perception of civic education within the Arizona public school curriculum, and identifying the civic education needs of Arizona schools and districts. To achieve this goal, a working group of the Arizona Civics Coalition, in partnership with Arizona State University, compiled a comprehensive measure of civic engagement policy and practice in Arizona's public schools. The study was supported by grants from the national *Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools* and the *Arizona Community Foundation*.

The data for the study were collected from Arizona teachers, administrators, and middle and high school students. Teachers and administrators participated in focus groups and completed written surveys, while students completed a written survey. The districts participating in this survey are representative of the state as a whole in terms of enrollment, grade level, and region. All told, 112 teachers and principals completed written surveys, 48 teachers participated in focus groups, and 5,316 students (2,079 middle school students and 3,237 high school students) completed written surveys.

This report will describe the extent to which the goals of the Arizona Civics Coalition are observed in Arizona schools, and the extent to which the characteristics of an effective civics program are incorporated into the curriculum and instructional strategies as reported by Arizona teachers.

First, we will look at the Arizona State Academic Standards for Social Studies, focusing on the civic concepts. Second, we will examine the effects of civic education and other influences on the attitudes and level of civic engagement of Arizona students. Third, we will examine administrators' and civic education teachers' beliefs and practices relating to civic education.

This study also examines recently published reports describing the current state of civic education, and these reports' suggestions for the future. Among the most heralded of the

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recent reports is the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS) report. The CMS report is regarded as the most wide-reaching national consensus document on the status of and need for civic education in American schools. The CMS report gave rise to a national campaign to increase and improve civic education. It is our hope that the Arizona Civic Education Study will further the goals of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools by providing specific data regarding the state of civic education in Arizona schools.

### **Civic Education Defined**

Margaret Stimmann Branson, Associate Director of the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, California, made the following eloquent statement regarding the significance of civic education in a democracy:

... education is self government. Democratic self government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance; they do not just passively accept the dictums of others or acquiesce to the demands of others. As Aristotle put it in his *Politics* (c 340 BC), "If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost."

Thus, civics is the curriculum whose primary purpose is to cultivate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for meaningful citizenship in a democracy. According to the Standards for Civics and Government created by the Center for Civic Education (1994/2003), "[t]he goal of education in civics and government is informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy" (p. 1). Notwithstanding the importance of these goals, the amount of time devoted to civics instruction in schools has decreased in recent years (Center on Education Policy, 2005, 2006, 2008). Concerned with this trend, a group of concerned Arizona individuals and organizations joined together to form the Arizona Civics Coalition, whose goal is to strengthen civic education policy and practice in Arizona.

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## Civic Education Goals

In 2005, the Arizona Civics Coalition adopted the goals of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. These goals reflect the Coalition’s vision of a rich and comprehensive civic education curriculum:

Civic education should help young Arizonans acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Competent and responsible citizens:

1. **Are informed and thoughtful**; have a grasp and an appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy; have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; and have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter into dialogue among others with different perspectives.
2. **Participate in their communities** through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs.
3. **Act politically** by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning and protesting, and voting.
4. **Demonstrate moral and civic virtue**, such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference.

## Arizona Social Studies

It is helpful to place Arizona’s civics education program in context. Because civics is treated as a component of social studies, it is necessary to review the requirements of the Arizona Social Studies Standard. The Standard, displayed in Figure 1, is organized into five categories: American history, world history, civics/government, geography, and economics. From kindergarten through

eighth grade, concepts from each of these categories are blended together. In high school (grades 9-12), students are expected to learn the concepts through classes dedicated to the individual categories (i.e., a civics course in 12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Figure 1. Arizona Social Studies Standard Performance Objectives by Grade Level

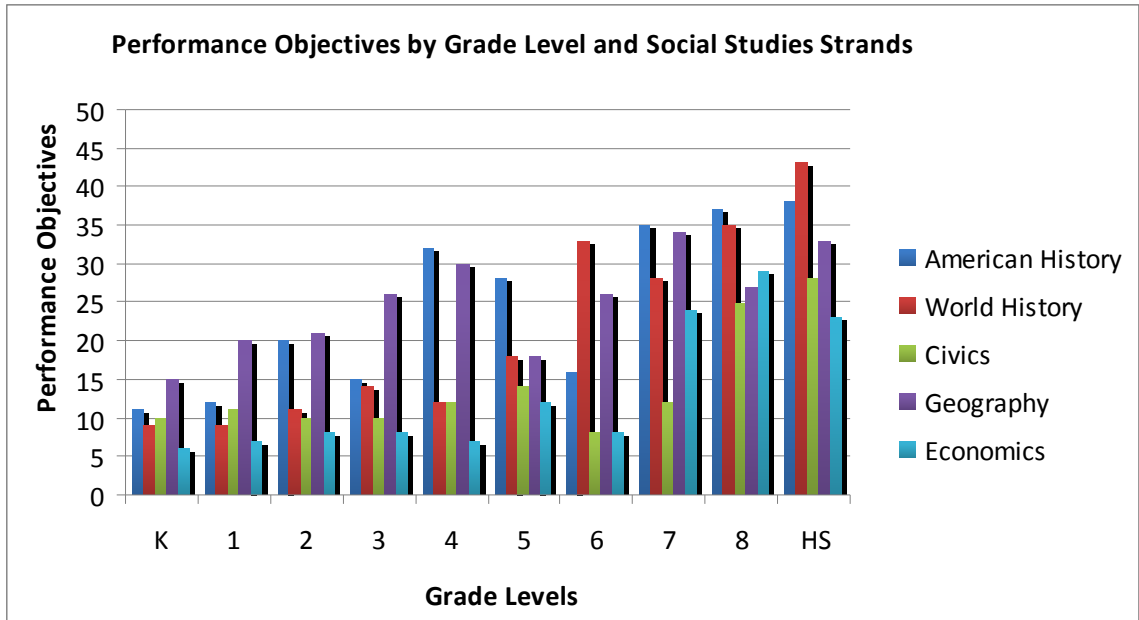


Table 1 below displays the number of performance objectives for each of the five concepts in the civics strand. The ideas reflected in the *Foundations, Structure, and Functions of Government* concepts align with the first goal of the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS) report -- specifically, “students are informed and thoughtful.” The second and third goals of the CMS report are represented in the section *Rights, Responsibilities, and Roles of Citizenship* of the Arizona Standard concepts.

Table 1: Performance Objectives for the Five Civics Concepts by Grade Level

CONCEPTS	Performance Objectives									
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	HS
Foundations of Government	5	7	4	4	4	3	1	2	3	4
Structure of Government	1	1	2	2	2	2	0	1	5	11
Functions of Government	0	0	1	1	3	5	3	2	9	5
Rights, Responsibilities, and Roles of Citizenship	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	5
Government Systems of the World	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	3
<b>Total Per Grade Level</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>

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If civics was the only subject teachers were required to teach, conveying 10 to 28 civics performance objectives over the course of a school year would not be a particularly daunting task. However, considering the fact that civics is only one of five components of the social studies curriculum, and that social studies teachers are required to address concepts in all five components in the course of the school year, the task of teaching 10 to 33 civics performance objectives can be overwhelming. Consider the challenges facing a fifth grade teacher. The fifth grade has a total of 90 performance objectives for social studies, including 28 for American history, 18 for world history, 18 for geography, 12 for economics, and 14 for civics. In addition to social studies, there are 242 performance objectives in other core curricular areas to be covered in the fifth grade – with social studies there are 332 performance objectives. There are additional performance objectives not mentioned here like art, music, physical education and health. Teachers are reporting that they do not have enough time to do justice to all of the core content areas let alone the specialty areas.

Fifth Grade Performance Objectives

- Language Arts – 109
- Mathematics – 83
- Science – 50
- Social Studies - 90

This scarcity of instructional time to adequately address civics is exacerbated by state and national assessment mandates that require increasing test scores in reading, writing, and mathematics. Teachers report that they are under great pressure to devote most of their classroom time to content areas that are tested -- language arts, mathematics, and science -- to the detriment of non-tested areas like social studies.

According to a study by the Center for Education Policy (2008), the amount of time spent on social studies in elementary school nationally has decreased 32% since 2001. A survey of Arizona teachers reveals that there has been an even greater decline in civics instruction. Despite the assertion that the historic mission of American schools has been to educate for democratic citizenship (Hahn & Torney-Purta, 1999; Hinde, 2008), the teaching of civics, along with the rest of social studies, has been severely curtailed in recent years (Center for Education Policy 2006, 2007, 2008; von Zastrow and Janc, 2004).

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## Part II

### Civic Education's Impact on Middle and High School Students

To better understand the state of civic education in Arizona schools, the Arizona Civics Coalition conducted a written, self-administered questionnaire distributed to Arizona middle and high school students in 2006-2007. Many items included on the survey instrument were drawn from or suggested by three major studies of youth civic engagement: a national study conducted in 2002 by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement; a study conducted in 2003 by the National Conference of State Legislatures; and a study conducted in 2003 by the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium. Ultimately, 16 schools participated in the study, resulting in a sample that contained 5,316 cases. The results are reported below as they relate to the four goals of civics education in Arizona as adopted by the Arizona Civics Coalition.

#### Civic Education Goal One: Foundational Civic Knowledge and Awareness

*Competent and responsible citizens are informed and thoughtful; have a grasp and an appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy; have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; and have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter into dialogue among others with different perspectives.*

**How often are topics related to government or politics discussed in your classes? What is the relationship between the degree to which concepts related to civic education are discussed in school and the impact those discussions have on student's civic attitudes and civic engagement?**

Approximately 36% of the middle school students surveyed report that they never discussed topics related to civic education in any of their classes, while 47% recall civics-related discussions in one or two classes. That less than half of the middle school students report discussing civic-related topics does not bode well, particularly in light of the fact that the knowledge students gain in the lower grades should ideally lay a foundation for later middle school and high school civics courses.

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By the time students reach high school, 16% report no civics discussions in their classes, while 64% recall such discussions in one or more classes. Students most often recalled these discussions in social studies classes, such as history, government, and economics. Twenty-six percent of middle school students, and 43% of high school students, recall these topics being integrated in their English classes. These positive findings point out that cross-curricular discussions are taking place that help students become informed and thoughtful citizens.

- 36% of the middle school students do not recall discussing topics related to civics in any of their classes.
- 17% of high school students do not recall any civics-related discussions.

**How much discussion is enough? In classes where civics discussions take place, do students think the amount was too much, too little, or just the right amount?**

Almost 60% of the middle school students believe that the right amount of time is spent talking about politics and government, while 22% feel that not enough time is spent discussing these issues. In high school, 55% of the students feel that the right amount of time is spent talking about politics and government, while 32% report that not enough time is spent on these subjects.

**Do class discussions increase student interest in government?**

Although there are more students who do not follow government and politics (56%) than students who do (44%), there is a positive relationship between how much a student follows politics and government and how often the civics-related topics are discussed in that student's classes. The students who discussed politics in four or more classes had the greatest interest in politics. It appears that class discussion of civics topics has a direct, positive effect upon students' personal interest in politics and government.

**Where do students get their information about politics and government?** For the most part, students receive their information concerning politics and government from sources outside of school. About half of both middle and high school students reported that they at least occasionally get information about politics and government from television news. Fewer than half of students get their news by reading a newspaper. Blogs, chat rooms, and political email appear to hold little

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appeal for middle and high school students, with fewer than 20% of these students turning to those sources for information about government and politics. The Internet is popular with students and schools should teach students how to access the most reliable information on the Internet.

With the increased accessibility of the Internet, there is a growing disconnect between how teenagers access the “information superhighway” in and out of school (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2001). According to the Pew report, 94% of students use the Internet to help with schoolwork. This is potentially a positive development, as more websites are developed to teach civic education. A typical Internet search produces links to a wide range of civic education options for students, from games to open-source encyclopedias. In our study, 73% of the students said that they use Internet search engines -- a much greater portion than the 20% who use blogs, chat rooms, and even games. MySpace was the only other Internet service to rival the use of search engines. Students in the Pew study acknowledged a disjunction between the way in which the Internet is used in schools and the way in which it is used outside of schools, and they expressed a desire for schools to take greater advantage of the Internet as an instructional tool in class.

### **Civic Education Goal Two: Civic Participation**

*Competent and responsible citizens participate in their communities through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs.*

Most students in the survey reported that they participate in extracurricular and out-of-school activities such as organized sports and church groups, with high school students reporting participation in more school-related activities than middle school students. This finding is not surprising, because there are more opportunities for extracurricular activities in high school than in middle school. Not only are students involved in activities out of school, most of them are involved in more than one activity.

#### **How much difference do students think that they can make in their community?**

A little over half of the middle school (55%) and high school (55%) students believe they can make a difference in their communities. One of the ways that students attempt to make a difference is

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through volunteerism: 40% of middle school students and 42% of high school students said they volunteer in the community.

### **Does parent involvement make a difference?**

Parents who discuss politics with their children have a significant effect on adolescents' belief that they can make a difference in their community. Fifty-two percent of the students, who indicated that they talk frequently about politics with their parents, believe that they can make a difference in the community, compared with 38% of the students who rarely or never talk about politics with their parents.

Students whose parents vote are more likely to feel that they can make a difference in the community than students whose parents do not vote. This study found that 46% of students whose parents vote in every election feel they can make a difference in the community, compared to 22% of the students whose parents rarely or never vote. The study also found that students who believe they can make a difference in the community are more likely to be engaged in volunteer work.

### **Do students' attitudes toward civic engagement change as they get older?**

Since a person's age generally determines the grade he or she is in, the study examined how grade level affected volunteerism and students' belief that they can make a difference in the community. Regarding volunteerism, grade level generally did not make a significant difference in students' attitudes until high school, where seniors had a higher rate of volunteerism than students in other grades. Students in the ninth grade had the lowest incidence of volunteering. It should be noted that most districts in Arizona do not offer social studies classes for high school freshmen, while seniors are required to complete a government class before graduation. The direct link between civics classes and student attitudes toward civic engagement deserves further study.

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**Does the number of courses where politics and government is discussed affect how much students believe they can make in their communities?**

Both middle and high school students believe they can make a difference in the community. The number of classes in which they discuss civic education topics does not appear to significantly affect how much of a difference students believe they can make.

**Civic Education Goal 3: Political Action**

*Competent and responsible citizens act politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning and protesting, and voting.*

**Have students tried to impact politics and community issues? Do students voice opinions to try to impact political and civic life?**

The majority of middle school and high school students report that they do little in the way of political action (Table 2). When students in either group decide to voice their opinion concerning politics or current affairs, they tend to do it electronically, through email and the Internet.

Table 2. Political Action by Middle and High School Students

Political Action	Middle School		High School	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Written a letter to a newspaper	23%	77%	22%	78%
Called a radio or TV station	16%	84%	14%	86%
Signed an email petition	36%	64%	34%	66%
Signed a paper petition	30%	70%	37%	63%
Participated in a protest	25%	75%	26%	74%
Used the Internet to get political information	45%	55%	52%	48%
Bought or boycotted a product based on a social issue	33%	67%	34%	66%

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## **Does the number of classes where politics was discussed make a difference in students' political involvement?**

The answer is an overwhelming “Yes.” Students who discussed politics and government in three or more classes were almost twice as likely to participate in a boycott or a protest or sign a petition. Parental voting, on the other hand, appears to have little effect on student political involvement. (As described earlier, however, parental voting does have a positive effect on students' beliefs about making a difference in the community.)

## **With whom do students talk politics outside of school?**

Engaging in civic discourse with others is an important component of becoming an engaged citizen. The students in this study indicated that they generally do not talk about politics, but when they do, they are more likely to talk with their families than their friends. Just as civics-related discussions in classes promoted a greater interest in politics, it also increased the degree to which students discuss politics with their families. The survey also found that the discussion of civics-related topics in class does not prompt adolescents to discuss politics with their friends.

## **Civic Education Goal 4: Civic Virtue**

*Competent and responsible citizens have moral and civic virtue such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference.*

## **Do students believe they are personally responsible for civic involvement?**

Only a slight majority of middle school (52%) and high school (53%) students believe that they are personally responsible for getting involved in order to make things better. Classroom discussion of politics and government, however, dramatically affects this belief. 47% of middle school students who discuss government and politics in one class believe that they are responsible for their civic involvement, but for those who discuss government and politics in three or more classes, the number jumps to 61%. For high school students, the effect of classroom discussion of government and politics is even more dramatic: 38% of high school students who discussed these topics in one

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class felt personally responsible, while 66% of those who discussed these topics in three or more classes felt this way. Civic education in general had similar effects. When asked how important it is to work to make the community better, 42% of the middle school students and 39% of the high school students who discussed these topics in one class considered it very important. For those who discussed these topics in five classes, the number rose to 47%.

### **Are high school students proud of their country?**

The percentage of high school and middle school students who reported feeling pride in their country was an identical 47%. Here again, civic education was found to have a positive effect. When they had civic education classes, the proportion of students feeling pride in their country rose to 61% for middle school students and 66% for high school students.

### **What are students' attitudes of trust toward school, elected officials and government?**

Students were split down the middle, with nearly as many thinking that they do and do not have a say in how their school is run. There was no difference in their opinions based on the number of classes they had taken in which politics was discussed.

Middle school students appear to be a little more trusting of people in general (60%) than high school students (52%). Both middle school and high school students place the greatest amount of trust in their parents and their friends, followed closely by their teachers. With regard to trusting the government and elected officials, students trust federal and state elected officials, but they express less trust in political parties. The closer the relationship between the elected official and the community, the greater the level of trust – e.g., students are more likely to trust the mayors of their towns than federally elected officials or the federal government generally.

Although students generally trust the government, there are differences in attitudes in other areas related to government. For example, middle school students (52%) are more likely than high school students (47%) to agree that elected officials don't care about people like them. Also, more middle school students (52%) than high school students (40%) feel that government is too complicated to understand.

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## **What do students think about how minority populations are treated?**

One of the foundations of a just democracy is institutions that protect minorities from the tyranny of the majority. When the students were asked if they thought minorities were treated the same, better, or worse than non-minorities, both middle and high school students responses varied in accordance with the number of classes they had in which politics and government were discussed. For students who discussed politics in one class, 43% of middle school students and 33% of high school students felt that minorities were treated the same as non-minorities. For students who discussed politics in five classes, the number dropped to 36% of middle school students and 29% of high school students.

As for thinking that minorities are treated better than non-minorities, the results were similar: The proportion went from 32% to 28% for middle school students who discussed politics in five, as opposed to one class, and the corresponding number dropped from 34% to 28% for high school students.

The most dramatic change appeared in responses to the question of whether minorities are treated worse than non-minorities. The proportion of middle school students holding this opinion jumped from 25% for those who discussed politics in one class to 36% for those who discussed politics in five classes. For high school students, the proportion rose from 33% to 43%.

## **How important are certain personal and family values to the students?**

Middle and high school students gave nearly identical answers with respect to how important it is to feel safe where they live, have strong family relations, and be in good health. Over 80% of middle and high school students indicate that those values are very important to them. The middle and high school students' responses were very similar on the topic of making money. Making a great deal of money did not seem very important to either middle or high school students: Only 40% of the middle school students, and 37% of the high school students, felt that making money was very important to them. Classroom discussion of politics and government did not appear to significantly affect responses to these questions.

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### **Who influences students related to being a good citizen?**

88% of middle and high school students say that parents have the greatest influence on their ability to be good citizens, followed by other family members. 72% of students report that teachers influence their ability to be good citizens. Students report that their peers have the least amount of influence, with only 40% of middle school students and 37% of high school students reporting that their peers influence them to be good citizens.

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## Part III

### Civic Education from Teachers' Perspectives

While state and district policy provides a framework for civic education, it is the teachers who must put policy into practice in the classroom in order for civic education to be effective. This study examines teachers' perspectives of civic education within the curriculum, and identifies ways in which the practice of civic education can be improved at the school and district level.

A wide variety of teacher perspectives were collected from sources including: a survey mailed to school districts, an online survey completed by elementary teachers in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms, and statewide focus groups involving 72 teachers from across the state Arizona.

Educators' responses in this section are grouped by the characteristics of effective civics education programs as suggested by the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS) report. The last section devotes specific attention to professional development, drawing upon data from an online survey conducted by the Arizona Civics Coalition.

Although there is no single recipe for the success of any given program, the following principles are widely accepted as important to the delivery of effective civic education.

#### **1. Foundational Principles**

**An emphasis on the ideas and principles that are essential to constitutional democracy,** such as those found in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, and how they influence our schools, religious congregations, the workplace, and local, state and national governments. Students should grasp the relationship between these documents and the problems, opportunities, controversies, rights and responsibilities that matter to them in the present.

#### **2. Civic and Political Engagement**

**Explicit advocacy of civic and political engagement.** In the process of teaching civic education, educators should encourage their students to participate personally in politics and civil society, including at the local level, although without advocating a

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particular position or party.

**A deliberate, intentional focus on civic outcomes** such as students' propensity to vote, to work on local problems, to join voluntary associations, and to follow the news.

### **3. Relevant and Active Learning**

**Active learning opportunities** that offer students the chance to engage in discussions of issues and take part in activities that can help put a "real life" perspective on what is learned in class. These activities can range from collaborative or independent research projects and presentations to simulations, mock trials and elections, service-learning projects, and participation in the student government.

### **4. Professional Development**

**Provide teachers with access to professional development** in civic education, foster collaboration and networking with other teachers and civic education organizations, and recognize teachers who are doing good work in this area.

## **Foundational Principles**

Foundational principles are the cornerstone of civics education. Inculcation of the foundational principles of our government as part of a civics education curriculum can be a crucial means of nurturing citizens who are able to make informed and reasoned decisions as members of a democratic society. These foundational principles are found in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, among other sources, and they are part of the essential fabric of our constitutional democracy. With effective civic education, no student will graduate without having developed a concrete understanding of the relationship between these ideals and the problems, opportunities, controversies, rights, and responsibilities that matter in their lives.

The National Council for the Social Studies (1994) asserts that the purpose of social studies is to "help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (p. vii). However, of all the social studies components (history, geography, civics, economics, psychology, etc.), civics is the main vehicle by which students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to effective participation in democratic society.

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Seventy-five percent of the teachers surveyed agree that the primary purpose of public schools should be to educate students for citizenship. Teachers in the focus groups also stated that students should learn the foundations of American government and politics (primarily meaning the founding documents and other aspects of American history and government that have been traditionally taught) and learn the values that are seen as important in American society, such as respect, responsibility, and loyalty. The teachers also felt that students should understand their rights as expressed in the Constitution. When elaborating on the responsibilities and duties of citizenship, most teachers mentioned voting, civic action, and contributing to the community. Teachers said that students should be taught how to effectively participate in government by practicing participation skills in the processes of government.

**The disconnect between civic education goals and classroom realities:** According to the teachers involved in this study, these goals of civic education are not actually being achieved in Arizona, for a number of reasons. They stressed pressure to favor the tested areas of reading, writing, and mathematics; the high number and wide-ranging content of performance objectives; and the lack of time allotted for teaching social studies in general. The recurring message from the teachers is that there is too much content and not enough time to cover it. In short, while they believe that the civic education goals are worthwhile and important, teachers feel unable to achieve the goals of civic education.

**The status of social studies in the curriculum:** Thirty-nine percent of the teachers polled on the online survey reported that they almost never teach social studies. Evidence from the survey reveals that teachers in kindergarten through third grade (42%) teach it less often than teachers in grades four through six (33%). Only 8% of the early grade teachers (grades K-3) teach social studies daily, compared with 33% of the upper elementary grade teachers. When asked if anyone in their school and/or district ever encouraged them to spend less time on social studies and more time on reading, writing and mathematics, 52% of the teachers reported that directives to decrease or eliminate the time spent on social studies instruction had been implied but not explicitly stated. However, 18% of the respondents reported that they were told directly by administrators or other leaders to reduce or eliminate the teaching of non-

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tested subjects such as social studies. Only one out of three teachers reported that teaching social studies is encouraged at their schools.

The teachers in the focus groups gave similar responses. Teachers stated that there is too much emphasis on the curricular areas represented on standardized tests that either exclude civics altogether, or test only the foundational/historical aspects of civics and exclude civic participation. Teachers reported that they felt the emphasis on reading and writing in elementary schools has led to a decline in emphasis on social studies. They report that students often come to their middle and high school classes with little or no knowledge of civics from the elementary grades. For instance, an eleventh grade civics teacher mentioned that at the beginning of each semester he has had to teach his students what the three branches of government are. Some of his students had no idea that there is a judicial branch until it was covered in his class.

The teachers indicated that they continue to feel pressure to spend most of their instructional time teaching only those subjects that are tested, especially reading. This trend of “teaching to the test” continues, even though there is ample evidence to suggest that reducing or eliminating social studies and other content areas has a negative impact on reading comprehension in middle school (Duffy, et al, 2003; Hinde, et al, 2007; McKenna & Robinson, 2005; Moore, Readance, & Rickelman, 1983).

It is often suggested that students can be exposed to social studies content by integrating it into tested content areas such as language arts, science and mathematics. Although meaningful and purposeful integration of social studies with other content areas into curricular units of instruction is an effective method of teaching a wide range of concepts, only 16% of the teachers participating in the online survey integrate social studies on a daily basis. More than half of the teachers (57%) integrate social studies once in a while, while 7% indicate that they never use interdisciplinary strategies.

**Teachers’ comments about the Social Studies Standard reveal concerns:** Teachers clearly take the state standards seriously. However, the primary concern that seems to be shared by teachers all over the state in every grade level is that there are too many concepts to be taught

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in any depth with the current amount of instruction time. In our online survey, 50% of the teachers said that there were too many concepts to teach for understanding. Teachers involved in the study generally feel that they have adequate knowledge of the content they have to teach, rating their content knowledge in social studies at seven or higher out of ten.

**Should social studies be tested on AIMS?** The AIMS test is itself a polarizing issue, so it is not surprising that there was a wide range of opinions about the test and whether social studies should be included on it. In fact, only 13% of teachers reported no strong opinion on the issue. When asked if civics should be tested on a statewide assessment, 58% of the surveyed teachers felt that it should be included, while 29% percent felt just as strongly that civics should not be tested on the AIMS. The old adage says “what gets tested gets taught,” and it seems as though the majority of social studies teachers would favor a statewide test for social studies.

## **2. Civic and Political Engagement**

Ideally, learning the foundations of a constitutional democracy should lead citizens to be civically and politically engaged. The CMS goal of civic engagement specifically states that an effective civic education program includes explicit advocacy of civic and political engagement. In the process of teaching civic education, educators should encourage their students to participate personally in politics and civil society, including at the local level, although without advocating a particular position or party.

Without variation, all the teachers felt strongly that the overall purpose of civics is to produce active citizens in our democratic republic. Teachers elaborated on the meaning of citizenship by using such terms as “productive members of society,” “effective citizens,” “active participants” and “involved.” Likewise, 75% of teachers and administrators agreed that the primary purpose of public schools is to educate students for citizenship. When asked if the Social Studies Standard promoted critical thinking, 54% of the teachers said it did. The same percentage of teachers believe that the concepts in the Social Studies Standard prepare students to be competent and responsible citizens.

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### **3. Relevant and Active Learning**

Relevant and active learning is an important instructional component for any subject, but it is particularly important for social studies and civic education. An effective social studies/civic education curriculum offers active learning opportunities that offer students the chance to engage in discussions of issues and take part in activities that help to put a “real life” perspective on what is learned in class. These activities can range from collaborative or independent research projects and presentations to simulations, mock trials and elections, service-learning projects, and participation in the student government.

Teachers agree that relevance in learning is important. A commonly expressed consideration was that civics curricula should be relevant to students – i.e., students should readily see the relevance of the civics lessons to their lives, and be able to apply what they learn to work for change. Teachers explained that the best way to make the curriculum feel relevant is through simulations, role-playing, debate and discussion, group work, field trips, service learning, and other hands-on active learning strategies.

The focus groups felt that an ideal civics curriculum should:

- Connect history, government and citizenship to relevancy in daily lives through current events.
- Provide direct contact with local, regional and /or federal government.
- Provide connections with the local community through community service.
- Reach the entire student body, not just special clubs.
- Include character education, leadership skills, voter education.

Many teachers believe that students should be involved in participatory activities, and that field trips are an especially powerful way to involve students in deep learning through participation. However, teachers expressed concern that financial constraints prevent them from taking their students on field trips to government and community sites as much as they would like. Therefore, they feel that field trips -- an especially powerful civics teaching method – are not feasible.

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Teachers expressed interest in using technology to “virtually” transport students to government sites and to involve them in technology-based learning, but they felt their own classrooms are not equipped to do this. They generally recognized the potential of technology (usually meaning the Internet) to create meaningful learning opportunities and enhance their teaching. Many teachers did, however, show some resistance to incorporating technological innovations into their teaching methods.

Almost all of the teachers surveyed (98%) indicated that up-to-date, inexpensive, readily accessible and usable classroom materials would be helpful in improving the civic education program in their schools. The focus group teachers’ responses were similar. They acknowledged that hands-on activities are vital and, unfortunately, textbooks often do not include hands-on activities in their materials. Teachers feel that teaching from textbooks alone does not provide adequate content or activities to engage their students. They explained that their textbooks are useful but would like more enriching activities to supplement them.

**Service learning as a relevant and active learning strategy:** According to Learn and Serve, America’s Service Learning Clearinghouse, service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. The social studies area in general, and particularly in the field of civic education, lends itself to the service learning approach.

In our online survey of elementary teachers, only 2% of teachers indicated that they engage their students in service learning, while 59% indicated that they would like to. Thirteen percent of the teachers said that they do not know how to implement service learning, and 23% indicated that there were too many barriers, such as time and money, to implement service learning.

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#### **4. Professional Development**

According to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC - 2009), a high quality or effective professional development program results in improvements in teachers' knowledge and instructional practice, as well as improved student learning outcomes. The NSDC description of professional development is consistent with the recommendations in the CMS report, which suggests that effective civic education programs provide teachers with access to professional development in civic education, foster collaboration and networking, and recognize teachers who are doing good work in this area.

The area of service learning has the greatest need for professional development. Almost all of the teachers in the survey (95%) agreed that service learning helps students understand their community needs better, yet only 4% of them incorporate service learning into the curriculum. Fifty-four percent of teachers indicated that although they do not engage their students in service learning, they would like to do so. Professional development may help teachers incorporate service learning into their curriculum.

Teachers from the focus groups indicated a desire for relevant staff development through quality professional development, but express anxiety about participating in professional development due to financial issues and lack of substitute teachers. One of the educators involved in a focus group noted that she is a district curriculum specialist, which allows her to attend more conferences and workshops. She reiterated that the professional development opportunities in which she has participated have significantly improved her teaching abilities and enhanced her content knowledge. But she noted the irony of the fact that it is the classroom teachers, rather than administrators like herself, who should be acquiring these skills.

An online survey conducted by Arizona foundation for Legal Services & Education asked Arizona civic educators to identify needs for developing an effective professional development program. The professional development topic that was seen as most worthwhile was engaging students in meaningful instruction (59%), followed by teaching specific topics relevant to adolescents (54%), and integrating civic education across the curriculum (51%).

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Teachers in the survey indicated overwhelmingly (87%) that they learn about professional development opportunities from email messages. Focus group teachers agreed, but also mentioned that they sometimes learn of professional development opportunities from other educators, particularly their grade level or department chairpersons. In terms of what would entice teachers to attend professional development, a variety of themes emerged. The participants most commonly mentioned the following:

- Relevance – teachers want professional development to relate directly to their classroom. They also want to stay current with content and best teaching practices.
- Good presenters and presentations – Teachers said that good presenters model effective teaching strategies and provide opportunities for the participants to be active learners.
- Time of year – many teachers indicated that leaving their students during the school year posed problems for them – including securing substitute teachers. They stated that the summer was an ideal time for professional development. Many indicated that they would be willing to attend professional development on Saturdays to avoid having to take a day off from school.
- Minimal or no cost – teachers said that providing low or no cost professional development was important. Schools often do not have the funds to pay for teachers to attend workshops or to reimburse for travel expenses and food and lodging.
- Continuing Education Units – CEUs are important for state certification purposes.

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Professional development programs must provide teachers with minimal or no cost, dynamic opportunities on relevant topics that relate to student achievement, at a convenient time. These suggestions are not new to anyone who has been in education for any length of time, yet teachers can recall many occasions when these ideas have been overlooked.