

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Recommended Research Articles, Recent Research Abstracts, Literature Reviews, and Data Sets.

QUICKLY LOCATE STATE POLICIES ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

A series of products by the Education Commission of the States' National Center for Learning and Citizenship (ECS/NCLC) reveals that wide variation exists in the extent to which state policies address citizenship education. Forty-one states have laws that call for the teaching of social studies which may include lessons in government, civics and/or citizenship. However, only a handful of states require students to pass a social studies exit exam in order

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to graduate from high school. In practice this means that most students in the United States go through a one-semester course in government, usually taken during their senior year of high school, and successful completion of this course is not a graduation requirement.

ECS has created a 50-state, interactive Web database that gives users a picture of where and how state policy supports citizenship education. The database can be accessed by going to www.ecs.org/nclc. Teachers, administrators, policymakers, and others interested in civic education can use the database to locate the most up-to-date information on state policies that support citizenship education in K-12 schools. In addition to the database, an ECS/NCLC policy brief reviews existing state policies, and lists resources that policymakers can turn to as they deliberate over the best solutions for their state. Finally, ECS/NCLC produced State Note—a summary report—that illustrates state by state how policies differ.

By clearly showing that states have widely different policies mandating what students learn about citizenship, ECS/NCLC draws more attention to the role schools play in helping students acquire the tools they need to effectively participate in civic life. "The civic mission of education should be given equal status as the focus on academic knowledge; this is consistent with the heritage of American education," said Terry Pickeral, NCLC Executive Director. "The nation depends on each generation's active participation in our democracy, and schools have a specific obligation to implement and sustain corresponding courses, teaching strategies and activities."

Citizenship Education Policy Varies Widely From State to State

According to the research, every state has some type of policy on citizenship education; however the policies vary. For example, policies regarding whether or not students must demonstrate a certain level of civic understanding in order to graduate are different depending on the state. Students hoping to graduate from high school in Colorado have to complete a one-semester course in the civil government of the U.S. while students in the District of Columbia must complete one and a half credits in history plus 100 hours of community service in order to graduate.

Despite the national focus on assessment and accountability in education, only a few states are taking steps to include civics in their evaluation systems. The authors found, "assessment and accountability systems remain a primary focus of state education

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reform efforts, but less than half of state systems address civics." Only 22 of states' assessment systems include knowledge of government or civics, while 13 states include performance on civics/government or social studies assessments within their accountability systems.

Vast differences arise among states when the age of students being assessed is considered. For example, beginning as early as the 4th grade, Missouri students are tested in both social studies and civics. However, in North Carolina, knowledge of U.S. history is not tested by the state until high school.

Creative Approaches: Enhancing Citizenship Education One State at a Time

Whether through commissions, increased funding, or innovative programming, many states are taking the need to enhance civic education seriously. For example, the North Carolina Civic

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TABLE 1: STATE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION POLICIES

State	Course Required	Exit Exam	Assessment System	Accountability System	State Statute
Alabama	■	i			■
Alaska	■				
Arizona	■				■
Arkansas	■				■
California	■		■	■	■
Colorado	■				■
Connecticut	■				■
Delaware	■		■	ii	■
District of Columbia	■				
Florida	■				■
Georgia	■	■	■	■	
Hawaii	■				■
Idaho	■				■
Illinois	■				■
Indiana	■		■		■
Iowa	■				■
Kansas	■		■		■
Kentucky	■		■	■	■
Louisiana	■	■	■	■	■
Maine	■		■		■
Maryland	■	iii	■	■	■
Massachusetts	■		■		■
Michigan	■		■	■	■
Minnesota	■				
Mississippi	■	■			■
Missouri	■		■	■	
Montana	■		■		
Nebraska	■				■
Nevada	■				
New Hampshire	■		■		■
New Jersey	■				■
New Mexico	■	■	■	■	■
New York	■	■			■
North Carolina	■		■	■	
North Dakota	■				
Ohio	■	iv	■	■	
Oklahoma	■				■
Oregon	■		■		■
Pennsylvania	■				■
Rhode Island	■				■
South Carolina	■		■		■
South Dakota	■			■	■
Tennessee	■	v			■
Texas	■		■	■	■
Utah	■		■		■
Vermont	■				■
Virginia	■	vi			■
Washington	■				■
West Virginia	vii				■
Wisconsin	■		■		■
Wyoming	■				■

i. Alabama's high school graduation exam will include social studies beginning with the class of 2004.

ii. Beginning in 2006, Delaware's accountability system will include performance on social studies assessments.

iii. Maryland students entering 9th grade in 2001 and 2002 are required to take, but not pass, an assessment in social studies to qualify for graduation. Students entering 9th grade in 2003 are slated to begin required to pass the exam as a requirement for graduation, pending state board approval.

iv. Passage of a citizen exam will be required for high school graduation in Ohio beginning with the class of 2005.

v. A passing score on the Texas Assessment of Skills and Knowledge will be required for high school graduation beginning in spring 2004.

vi. Virginia is phasing in end-of-course assessments required for high school graduation beginning in 2004.

vii. Beginning in 2005 for 9th grade students, West Virginia will require a course requirement for high school graduation.

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Education Consortium recently released a “civic index”— the first-ever statewide assessment of civic education and engagement. Results from the index led state lawmakers to pass legislation encouraging more classroom discussion of current events and increased responsibility for student councils in the North Carolina schools.

Delaware lawmakers are making concerted efforts to ensure their teachers receive the necessary preparation and training to teach students effectively about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Recently the state authorized \$100,000 to fund civics education for teachers. Similarly, the state of Michigan authorized \$750,000 for the development of the Michigan virtual high school. Initial plans for the project include developing a rigorous civics curriculum that teachers could access by going online.

Other states are concentrating on finding innovative ways to address the decline in the number of young people who vote. A bill signed by Governor Davis of California would require the Secretary of State to provide voter registration forms and information to all high school, community college, and state university students. In Illinois, recent legislation created a joint voter education program of the State Board of Elections and the State Board of Education for K-12 students. The program will allow students to vote in a simulated election taking place at an actual polling place during the general election.

As part of this series on policy and citizenship education, ECS/NCLC will also release a set of surveys and case studies that examine citizenship education at the district and school levels. To access them, and to find out what your state is doing to improve citizenship education, visit www.ecs.org/nclc.

SENDING THE RIGHT MESSAGE: HOW COMMUNITIES SHAPE YOUNG PEOPLES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICS

Cultivating Democracy, a new book supported by CIRCLE, chronicles the political socialization process of over 3,000 high school students from 29 economically, politically, and demographically

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diverse communities in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Written by James Gimpel, J. Celeste Lay, and Jason E. Schuknecht, the book offers a new framework for understanding how young people form their attitudes toward politics and civic life. The book suggests that for Generation Y adolescents, the characteristics of the community in which they grow up profoundly affect the political attitudes they form. These attitudes, in turn, influence how civically engaged they will be as adults.

Drawing on previous research as well as the thoughts of numerous high school students throughout the Washington D.C. and Baltimore metropolitan areas, the authors attempt to identify the local conditions that influence the political and civic attitudes of immigrant and native youth. According to Dr. Gimpel, “We tried to find the sources of attitudes that lead to political engagement—not just in individual traits that are commonly tapped by surveys, but also in the characteristics of the neighborhoods that shape experiences during later adolescence.” The authors find two factors in particular—the ethnic and political diversity within a community and relationships with family and school authorities—play significant roles in the development of attitudes necessary for civic engagement. In addition, the book provides concrete policy recommendations for mitigating the risk-factors within communities that keep young people from developing the knowledge and attitudes that advance civic engagement.

Diverse Communities Inspire Political Participation and Knowledge

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young people to participate in the political process than those that are more homogeneous. For example, the authors find that jurisdictions where no one political party dominates seem to be home to students who know more about politics and who feel that their vote could make a difference. On the other hand, areas where one party is consistently elected seem to undercut the incentive to learn about politics and reduce the sense among students that their views and opinions matter. According to Dr. Gimpel, “In politically competitive settings, both sides occasionally win elec-