



NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals
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Topic Highlighted in this Issue:

Citizenship: Voting and Voter Participation

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**Minnesota, Maine,
Montana, Wisconsin,
South Carolina**

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STATES FOCUS ON FUTURE VOTERS TO IMPROVE VOTER PARTICIPATION

A central purpose underlying the National Education Goals is the development of citizenship among American students and adults. The Student Achievement goal, Goal 3, calls for students to master challenging subject matter "so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship." The Adult Literacy goal, Goal 6, calls for adults to have the knowledge and skills necessary to "exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

But responsible citizenship cannot easily be measured. Civic education can be tested to determine knowledge about such topics as the U.S. Constitution or how legislation is passed. But there is more to citizenship than this. According to a new report from the Education Commission of the States (ECS), education for citizenship "is a moral enterprise... It is concerned with organizing schools in ways that give students opportunities to learn about citizenship and its importance and acquire the needed skills and knowledge associated with it."

Ultimately, citizenship may express itself visibly in a way that *can* be counted—voter registration and voting. For this reason the National Education Goals Panel has reported state rates of self-reported voter registration and voting as indicators for the last decade. Indeed, the right and duty of citizens to vote probably have never been more dramatically displayed than in this November's elections, in which the importance of every single vote was evident.

This *Monthly* is focused on state activities to increase voter participation, especially among young voters. While official state figures for the 2000 elections are not yet available, in the 1996 election cycle, South Carolina and the District of Columbia increased voter participation significantly since 1988. Among the seven top-performing states in 1996 - Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin - 65% of the residents reported having voted. The projected voter participation in the 2000 Presidential election is 51 percent.



A troubling trend has been the gradual decline in voting among young people ages 18 to 24. Eighteen-year-olds were permitted to vote for the first time in the 1972 Presidential election, and half of them went to the polls that year. The voter turnout rate among this age group has been declining ever since. While registering to vote has been made easier in recent years, only half (49 percent) of those ages 18 to 24 were registered to vote in 1996, and only 32 percent of this age group reported voting in that year. In 1998, less than 20 percent of young people voted. The Committee for the Study of the Electorate estimates that fewer young people voted in 2000 than in 1996. A *New York Times* summary on Nov. 12, 2000, estimates that only 17 percent of the 18-29-age group voted. Yet, surprisingly perhaps, more than half of young Americans (53 percent) say they have volunteered for non-political, civic organizations. Apparently, many young people are willing to make a civic contribution but do not see the political process as the way they choose to do so. In this context, what is it students know and what are their attitudes about citizenship?

Student knowledge and attitudes about citizenship

NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card

The Goals Panel uses the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to assess what students know and are able to do regarding formal civic education. In November 1999, NAEP reported that two-thirds or more of students in grades 4, 8 and 12, the three grades tested, performed at or above the basic level, but less than one-third reached the proficient level, the level the Goals Panel considers necessary to meet the student achievement goal. Specifically, NAEP found that 69 percent of 4th graders, 70 percent of 8th graders, and 65 percent of 12th graders had reached the basic performance level in 1998. Only 2 percent at grades 4 and 8, and 4 percent at grade 12, reached the advanced level.

What were the students studying? More than 70 percent in grades 4 and 8 said they had studied the U.S. Constitution and Congress in the current school year. Less than half of them, however, had studied other countries' government or international organizations. Most instruction was based on textbooks, worksheets, lectures. More than half of grade 12 students indicated they did some volunteer work in their communities, and those who volunteered scored higher on the civics assessment.

What Young People Think about Citizenship and Voting

While young people may not have as strong knowledge in civics as the public might hope, another study found that they still see the importance of voting and of involvement in the political process. Such attitudes give hope of "the possibility of a democratic renewal," according to the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), which conducted this study. Its Survey on Youth Attitudes was an initial activity of NASS's New Millennium Project, a bipartisan effort to better understand the problem of declining youth engagement in the political process and to find the best ways to counteract it.

Among the major findings of the 1998 survey of 15-24-year-olds:

- Young people today are generally apprehensive about their future and decidedly more focused on personal rather than public goals.
- Youth volunteerism rates are high, but these volunteer activities most often take the form of



The National Education Goals Panel

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social service rather than public service. They prefer to volunteer in such social services as soup kitchens or hospitals.

- Young people lack information and skills to learn about politics and the process of voting, largely because the understanding of citizenship is vague. Fewer than half (46 percent) either never or very rarely spoke with their parents about politics. Fifty-five percent said their schools did not do a good job of giving them information they need to vote.
- American youth admit they do not have good information about candidates, parties, and issues. For 25 percent of those surveyed, this is the reason they do not vote.
- American youth are not interested in the abstract idea of voting because it's a civic duty, but do respond to the idea of participating when voting will actually affect them. Many youth believe they may vote at higher levels when their concerns as parents or taxpayers will relate more to the decisions politicians make.
- Young people are distrustful of politics and politicians, and they do not believe the political process responds to their concerns.

Civic Education Initiatives

Across the country, a number of organizations are concerned about youth disengagement in political forms of citizenship and have undertaken a variety of initiatives to address it. Before describing the initiatives in states with high voter registration and voting (Minnesota, Maine, Montana, and Wisconsin) and improved voter turnout (South Carolina), we will look at programs and resources states can draw upon for help.

Formal Civic Education

To improve youth citizenship, it is important, according to Charles Quigley, head of the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, CA, to have effective civic education programs. However, he estimates that these are available to only about one-fourth of the students in the United States. Civics education, says Quigley, should be a sequential curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade. In addition, teachers need a deep understanding of the cornerstones of government and democratic principles and need adequate materials. Civics education should empower students in the political process. Citizenship is not just voting or writing a letter, he points out, but can be exercised by working with interest groups, forming coalitions, or learning how to articulate positions on issues.

The Center for Civic Education, the Constitutional Rights



Foundation, the American Bar Association and its state affiliates, and many other national groups have produced exemplary, research-based materials, in the opinion of Quigley. They not only provide content but also focus on participation skills, civility, tolerance and other attributes of citizenship. Unfortunately, such resources are being “crowded out of instruction” by more attention to core subjects that are assessed. Civics is not tested by most state accountability systems.

Quigley cites two additional problems. Not only is civics education almost non-existent in teacher preparation programs, it also is slighted in textbooks (and civics education is very textbook-bound, as the NAEP results indicated). While often presented in a “dry” way, civics education once was prominent in social studies textbooks, Quigley says, but the social activism of the 1960s “replaced political history with social history.”

The New Millennium Project of states’ Secretaries of State

The survey data obtained by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) described above created the context for a broad range of activities by NASS and individual secretaries of state. According to Kay Albowicz, director of communications for NASS’s New Millennium Project, the association is serving as a forum and clearinghouse for activities around the country. In California, for example, the secretary of state now sends every 18-year-old a card on his/her birthday, along with a voter registration form. The Arkansas Secretary of State office decided young people do not like to be told to vote but might respond to being asked. It tries to match new young potential voters with veterans and make voting a shared activity. In Iowa mock elections at town halls across the state bring out both students and parents, then everyone goes to voting places together afterwards.

Partners with the Millennium Project include Kids Voting USA, Student-Parent Mock Elections, and MTV Choose or Lose. The Project, says Albowicz, will continue to encourage youth debates at local and state levels, mount efforts to increase voter registration and push for greater voter turnout by young people. The long-term goals of the Project are to improve civic education of youth and adults and to encourage people to consider government service.

ECS’s Program: Every Student a Citizen

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) has established a National Study Group on Citizenship in K-12 Schools to study youth disengagement from civic literacy and experience. Its initiative, “Every Student a Citizen,” has three goals:

- To articulate the need to revitalize education’s civic and citizenship mission.
- To advance service learning as a strategy that can challenge and guide students to meet their civic responsibilities.
- To engage every student in activities that make a difference in their schools and communities.

ECS has long emphasized service learning—the integration of community service in a structured way with the regular curriculum—from kindergarten through college. Its Compact for Learning and Citizenship, which began at the college level, now encourages service learning at all levels as a way to give young people a sense they can improve institutions. Gaining a stake in the political process “is learned through practice, not out of a book,” the National Study Group reports.

The report, “Every Student a Citizen: Creating the Democratic Self,” provides recommendations for all levels of governance and types of stakeholders. For the state level, it recommends:



THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



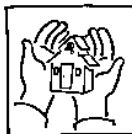
Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

- *Governors.* Provide forums to educate state legislators, members of state school boards, state chapters of professional education associations, state teacher organizations and unions, school principals and district superintendents about the importance of including civic education in the core K-12 curriculum. Focus these efforts on experiential learning, especially service learning, as the gateway to education for citizenship.
- *State school boards.* Create at least two student positions with full student expression and participation in all decision-making activities and governance.
- *Legislators.* Regularly visit local schools to explain roles and responsibilities. Establish student internship positions in legislative offices. Fund K-12 efforts that incorporate multi-dimensional curricula aimed at fostering civic responsibility, the development of civic skills and civic education, including funds for professional development of teachers and community outreach.

ECS' National Study Group acknowledges a state of disillusionment about the political process, especially among the youngest voters. "If we do nothing to improve how students are educated for citizenship," it concludes, "we give up the ability to set the terms for the future of our children and, in the end, the nation. The opposite of doing nothing about citizenship education is not stasis. It is to concede that the disconnect Americans now experience as a problem inevitably will be a permanent condition. The decision to default is one the nation cannot afford."

How Some States Respond to the Challenge

The states with the highest percentages of citizens reporting they had voted in 1996 have long traditions of strong citizen participation, but they also work at providing information and opportunities for citizen participation.

Much of the current activity by states is centered in the offices of their secretaries of state, which use a variety of strategies. Many come from the NASS Millennium Project such as a trivia quiz written to appeal to young people, but each state has crafted its own approaches to encourage voter registration and voting.

In **Minnesota**, 69 percent of adults report having voted in 1996 and 81 percent having registered to vote. The state widely distributes a "Teen Citizenship" brochure, which is also available on the web site of the Minnesota Secretary of State. It encourages teenagers to volunteer to help on campaigns for candidates or for issues, encourage others who are eligible to vote to go to the polls,



attend political functions, and enlist as an election judge trainee. This last activity is very popular in certain counties, according to Kent Kaiser, communications director for the Secretary of State. Young people ages 16-17 can enroll as an Election Judge Trainee and serve on election days as aides for the regular judges. This not only pulls them into the political process, but it also brings them into contact with older members of the community who have been involved in voting for a long time, Kaiser notes. Some schools give extra credit in government classes for students who serve as election judge trainees. Upon reaching age 18, the young people may serve as regular adult election judges.

The Secretary of State also visits schools upon invitation to talk about the importance of voting and of being engaged in other good citizenship activities. Legislators are encouraged to visit schools on a regular basis because “we know that when young people have had a connection with politicians personally, they get more enthused about participating,” says Kaiser. A Youth Citizenship Task Force advises the Secretary of State on ways to reach students, advice that often turns up on the web page for students.

Technology is used by the state extensively to provide information and create connections for citizens around issues, Kaiser says. For example, the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library web site lists special interest groups at the state and national levels on numerous topics/issues. Perhaps the greatest impact on voting, though, is that the state makes it easy to do so, Kaiser adds, noting that people can register and vote on the day of an election.

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In **Maine**, 69 percent of adults report voting and 84% report they are registered to vote. The state has used same-day voter registration for more than 25 years, and this year allowed people to obtain “no reason” absentee ballots for voting ahead of time. Also this year, the Maine Secretary of State challenged young people to take the 25-question voter quiz on the NASS web site and compare their scores when the answers were released Nov. 7. Several weeks before the 2000 election, Secretary Dan Gwadosky took part in a panel discussion with Bowdoin College students on the NASS survey results regarding youth attitudes toward voting.

Schools in Maine are active in the Student/Parent Mock Election program. In 1996, more than 460 schools participated, and more than 100,000 votes were cast by students, faculty and parents. Even though 1998 was a non-presidential election year, 300 schools participated. Maine’s Educational Assessment Program, given in grades 4,8, and 11, always includes a performance assessment on a public policy issue that is linked to state standards in economics, geography, history, or civics and government. According to Connie Manter, social studies consultant, students are asked to note both sides of an issue, then take a stand and write a defense of it.



RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

Center for Civic Education
5146 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302-9321
800-350-4223
www.civiced.org

Close Up Foundation
44 Canal Center Plaza
Alexandria, VA 22314
800-CLOSEUP
www.closeup.org

Constitutional Rights Foundation
501 S. Kingsley Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90005
213-487-5590
www.crf-usa.org

Youth for Justice
American Bar Association (with the
Center for Civic Education, Constitu-
tional Rights Foundation, and other
groups)
Division for Public Education
541 North Fairbanks Court
Chicago, IL 60611-3314
312-988-5735
www.abanet.org/publiced/lre/yfj.html

"Every Student a Citizen: Creating the
Democratic Self," Education Commis-
sion of the States, 707 17th St., Suite
2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427;
www.ecs.org

"NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for
the Nation," National Assessment of
Educational Progress; HYPERLINK
"[http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/
pubs/main/1998/2000457.shtml](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/main/1998/2000457.shtml)

"Survey on Youth Attitudes," National
Association of Secretaries of State,
New Millennium Young Voters
Project, 444 N. Capitol St., NW,
Washington, DC 20001, 202/624-
3523; www.nass.org

The standards and the curriculum emphasize civics and government, Manter says, because it is a goal of the schools to graduate young people "who can be responsible and involved citizens." Also, she says, Maine takes its reputation as the first state to vote in national elections "very seriously."

CONTACT

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In **Montana**, 68 percent of citizens report they voted and 76 percent report they are registered to vote. The state began its efforts to improve voter participation before the Millennium Project but has incorporated many of the strategies into its overall activities. The legislature passed Montana Youth Vote in 1991. Now privately funded, it is supervised by the Secretary of State and the Office of Public Instruction and allows students not yet old enough to vote to cast their vote on election day. It started with only 4th graders but was opened to all Montana students in 1996. Voting at first was at polling booths, but since 1996 students have voted via the Internet.

Among the voter activities in Montana are:

- First Vote, which provides registration guides and other assistance to high schools for their voter registration drives
- Parent/Student Mock Election
- Citizenship Award, given to one high school senior in each school selected by the Secretary of State's office for community service, leadership and participation in school government programs
- Essay contest, for grades 5 and 6 on the importance of voting; winners are announced on Election Day
- Public service announcement campaign, uses TV and radio stations statewide, and newspaper ads appear in the weeks before Election Day
- Media guide distributed to all media outlets
- Restaurant placemat activity provides election information and a voter registration card on placemats; the effort was started by a chain restaurant in Helena and has spread throughout the state.
- The Secretary of State coordinates service organizations and college students to provide transportation to the polls for those needing a ride.



What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

In December, the Secretary of State's office will deliver awards to counties in Montana that have the highest voter turnout and the most improved turnout.

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<http://www.state.mt.us/sos/BEST/start.htm>

In **Wisconsin**, 66 percent of the citizens reported voting and 81 percent reported being registered. A report from a statewide Civics Action Task Force to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction urged a total revamping of civics and government instruction in the state's public schools. Presented early in 2000, the report found that despite policies requiring the teaching of social studies and local and state government, districts, schools, and teachers varied greatly in the degree to which they implemented the policies. Also, "while secondary democratic citizenship education curriculum traditionally emphasizes content knowledge about national government," the report says, "frequently less attention is given to civic knowledge and involvement at the local and state levels."

The Task Force's first recommendation is for social studies programs to "reclaim" Democratic Citizenship Education as their central focus. It also calls for schools and communities to serve "as laboratories for democracy," more quality resources that promote civics action, and state-of-the-art professional development in Democratic Citizenship Education. As a follow up, the state superintendent appointed a consultant on Democratic Citizenship Education, and his agency is drawing up a proposal to require one semester of the three-credit requirements in history/government for high school students to focus on active democratic principles. Also, the department has selected a group to recommend best practices in Democratic Citizenship Education.

The Wisconsin governor is honorary chairman of the Kids Vote program, and local districts use this and a variety of other civics resources to promote interest in voting.. As in most states, it uses the Internet to disseminate information, such as an Election 2000 web site that was part of the Reference Portal of the Department of Public Instruction and provided links to more than 15 of the most popular state and national sites focusing on the 2000 elections.

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In **South Carolina**, while voter participation declined nationally, the percentage of South Carolinians reporting they had voted increased by 5 percent from 1988 to 1996. The climb to 55 percent can be attributed mostly to extensive voter registration drives and motor-voter laws that encourage residents to register to vote when they obtain licenses to drive or register their cars, according to Hanna King, public information officer for the Election Commission. Also, a "Voting Is Fun" curriculum for elementary school students provides a curriculum for teachers, sample ballots, and lesson plans on candidates and issues.

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UPCOMING NEGP EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Dec. 6, 2000

NEGP Teleconference, "Rising to the Test: Meeting the Challenges of Standards, Assessment and Accountability." Educators from urban, suburban and rural districts and schools will discuss the strategies they have employed to help students reach high standards. For information on how to participate in the NEGP Website at www.negp.gov or telephone Burt Glassman at 202/724-0078.

Dec. 7, 2000

National Education Goals Panel Meeting at the National Press Club 10 AM to 12 noon, including the release of the report by Robert Rothman on NEGP field hearings and policy recommendations on Bringing All Students to High Standards.