

Introduction

I Rationale for education in civics and government

There is an old saying that the course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education. In a democracy such as ours, we must make sure that education wins the race.

John F. Kennedy (1958)

A The civic mission of the schools

Although it has been argued that the establishment of the proper institutions is sufficient to maintain a free society, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, and others recognized that even the most well-designed institutions are not sufficient. Ultimately, a free society must rely on the knowledge, skills, and virtue of its citizens and those they elect to public office. Civic education, therefore, is essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy.

The 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. Their effective and responsible participation requires the acquisition of a body of knowledge and of intellectual and participatory skills.

Effective and responsible participation also is furthered by development of certain dispositions or traits of character that enhance the individual's capacity to participate in the political process and contribute to the healthy functioning of the political system and improvement of society.

Many institutions help to develop Americans' knowledge and skills and shape their civic character and commitments. The family, religious institutions, the media, and community groups exert important influences. Schools, however, bear a special and

historic responsibility for the development of civic competence and civic responsibility. Schools fulfill that responsibility through both formal and informal curricula beginning in the earliest grades and continuing through the entire educational process.

Formal instruction in civics and government should provide students with a basic understanding of civic life, politics, and government. It should help them understand the workings of their own and other political systems as well as the relationship of American politics and government to world affairs. Formal instruction provides a basis for understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizens in American constitutional democracy and a framework for competent and responsible participation. The formal curriculum should be augmented by related learning experiences, in both school and community, that enable students to learn how to participate in their own governance.

In addition to the formal curriculum, the importance of the informal curriculum should be recognized. The informal curriculum refers to the governance of the school community and relationships among those within it. These relationships should embody the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. Classrooms and schools should be managed by adults who govern in accordance with constitutional values and principles and who display traits of character worth emulating. Students should be held accountable for behaving in accordance with fair and reasonable standards and for respecting the rights and dignity of others, including their peers.

B The need for increased attention to civic education

Although the National Education Goals, as well as the goals, curricular requirements, and policies of every state, express the need for and extol the value of civic education, this vital part of the student's overall education is seldom given sustained and systematic attention in the K–12 curriculum. Inattention to civic education stems in part from the assumption that the knowledge and skills citizens need emerge as by-products of the study of other disciplines or as an outcome of the process of schooling itself.

While it is true that history, economics, literature, and other subjects do enhance students' understanding of government and politics, they cannot replace sustained, systematic attention to civic education. Civics should be seen as a central concern from kindergarten through twelfth grade, whether it is taught as a part of other curricula or in separate units or courses.

Civics and government should be seen as a discipline equal to others. Civics and government, like history and geography, is an interdisciplinary subject, whose substance is drawn from the disciplines of political science, political philosophy, history, economics, and jurisprudence.

In sum, civic education should not be considered incidental to the schooling of American youth. Civic education instead should be considered central to the purposes of American education and essential to the well-being of American democracy. It is particularly important for students in less privileged socioeconomic circumstances. Research tells us that if these students are to have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills essential for informed, effective citizenship, it must be provided at elementary and secondary levels of their education.

Government “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” in Lincoln’s phrase, means that the people have the right to control their government. But this right is meaningless unless they have the knowledge and skills to exercise that control and possess the traits of character required to do so responsibly.

II Goals and standards

The following definitions should be kept in mind while reading the standards document.

A Goals

Goals are statements of the overarching aims or ends of education such as fostering the development of competent and responsible citizens.

B Standards

In the continuing effort to improve education in the United States, standards of varying kinds have been identified.

1 Standards for students

Standards for students are statements specifying what students should know and be able to do, as well as the level of achievement that is to be expected of them. Standards for students include *content standards* and *performance standards*.

- **Content standards**

Content standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do in a specific discipline such as civics, history, or geography. Content standards are concerned with the knowledge students should acquire and the understandings they should develop, as well as with the intellectual and participatory skills students should develop in the course of their K–12 experience.

- **Performance standards**

Performance standards are criteria for determining students' levels of achievement of content standards.

2 Standards for teachers

Standards for teachers are criteria for determining whether teachers have the capacity to assist their students in attaining high content and performance standards. These criteria include the adequacy of their preparation in the subjects they will teach, their ability to communicate their knowledge, their pedagogical skills, and the degree to which they stay abreast of their academic and professional disciplines.

3 Standards for schools

Standards for schools are called delivery, equity or opportunity-to-learn standards. They are intended to guarantee insuring an equitable educational environment by insuring that all children have the opportunity to learn challenging subject matter.

4 Standards for state and local education agencies

Standards for state and local education agencies are criteria for judging the success of state and local educational agencies.

III Content standards and intellectual and participatory skills

The content standards in this document specify not only the content to be mastered in civics and government, but also what students should be able to do in relation to that content. These standards include, either explicitly or implicitly, a specification of the intellectual and participatory skills students should acquire.

A Intellectual skills

Intellectual skills in civics and government are inseparable from content. To be able to think critically about a political issue, for example, one must have an understanding of the issue, its history, and its contemporary relevance, as well as a set of intellectual tools or considerations useful in dealing with such an issue.

Many of the content standards require that “Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about...” a particular topic or issue. These standards are followed by subsidiary statements which are intended to specify the knowledge and intellectual skills required to attain the standard.

The example standard presented on the following page is from the grade 9–12 standards section in this text.

B Terms used to identify intellectual skills

Verbs in common usage are used in these content standards to identify the intellectual skills which students should develop. For example, the standards require students to “describe,” “explain,” “evaluate,” and “take and defend” positions. These verbs were chosen rather than those found in some taxonomies used by professional curriculum developers because they are readily understandable by a broader audience—parents, students, and the larger community.

Part III, E**“How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?”****3 Political communication: television, radio, the press, and political persuasion**

Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to

- explain the meaning and importance of freedom of the press
- evaluate the role in American politics of television, radio, the press, newsletters, data bases, and emerging means of communication, e.g., the internet, faxes, electronic mail
- compare and contrast various forms of political persuasion and discuss the extent to which traditional forms have been replaced by electronic media
- explain how Congress, the president, state and local public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry
- evaluate historical and contemporary political communications using such criteria as logical validity, factual accuracy, emotional appeal, distorted evidence, appeals to bias or prejudice, e.g.,
 - ▶ speeches such as Lincoln’s “House Divided,” Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?,” Chief Joseph’s “I Shall Fight No More Forever,” Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms,” Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream”
 - ▶ government wartime information programs
 - ▶ campaign advertisements
 - ▶ political cartoons

The use of these verbs should *not* be interpreted to mean that the standards do not call for the development of higher-order thinking skills. Descriptions, explanations, and the evaluation, adoption, and defense of positions can range from basic intellectual tasks to those of the highest order.

The following are the verbs most commonly used in the standards and the intellectual skills they specify. It should be noted that each verb, such as the verb “identify,” may specify a skill that may be exercised at a range of levels, from the very simple act, for example, of identifying a member of Congress in a particular district, to identifying the criteria being used in a Supreme Court opinion.

1 Identify

To identify things that are tangible (one’s representative) or intangible (justice). To identify something may involve being able to

- (a) distinguish it from something else,
- (b) classify or catalog something with other items with similar attributes or, in some cases,
- (c) determine its origin.

2 Describe

To describe tangible or intangible objects, processes, institutions, functions, purposes, means and ends, qualities. To describe something is to be able to give a verbal or written account of its basic attributes or characteristics.

3 Explain

To identify, describe, clarify, or interpret something. One may explain

- (a) causes of events,
- (b) the meaning or significance of events or ideas,
- (c) reasons for various acts or positions.

4 Evaluate a position

To use criteria or standards to make judgments about the

- (a) strengths and weaknesses of a position on a particular issue,
- (b) goals promoted by the position, or
- (c) means advocated to attain the goals.

5 Take a position

To use criteria or standards to arrive at a position one can support

- (a) one may select from alternative positions, or
- (b) create a novel position.

6 Defend a position

- (a) To advance arguments in favor of one's position and
- (b) to respond to or take into account arguments opposed to one's position

C Participatory skills

Education in civics and government must not only address the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual skills; it also must focus specifically on the development of those skills required for competent participation in the political process. These include such skills as

- the capacity to influence policies and decisions by working with others
- clearly articulating interests and making them known to key decision and policy makers
- building coalitions, negotiating, compromising, and seeking consensus
- managing conflicts

Participatory skills are developed by providing students with opportunities to practice these skills and to observe and interact with those in their community who are adept in exercising them.

Learning opportunities useful in fostering participatory skills include:

1 Monitoring politics and government

Students should learn how to monitor the handling of issues by the political process and by government. To help them attain this skill, they might be assigned to

- track an issue in the media; research the issue in libraries; gather information from interest groups, members of government, and government agencies
- perform research tasks in the community, such as interviewing people in public and private sectors involved in the political process, or observing meetings and hearings of public and private sector groups dealing with particular issues
- report and reflect on their experiences

2 Influencing politics and government

Students should learn how to influence politics and government. To help them attain this skill, they can

- take part in the politics and governance of their classrooms and schools by working in groups to reach agreements about school rules, assuming roles of authority, campaigning for student offices, advocating desired changes in school policy, and taking part in student courts

- take part in simulations of the activities of government and private sector agencies and organizations, e.g., town meetings, administrative and legislative hearings, judicial hearings such as mock trials and moot courts, policy development meetings of organized groups, lobbying, nominating conventions, campaigns and elections, model UN meetings
- observe governmental agencies and private sector organizations at work
- learn how members of government and private organizations attempt to influence public policy by listening and talking to representatives visiting their classrooms
- present positions to student councils, school administrators, school boards
- write letters to newspapers and members of government
- meet with members of government to advocate their positions
- testify before public bodies
- perform service in their schools or communities directly related to civic life, politics, and government

IV Performance standards

Performance standards are statements of criteria to be used to measure levels of student achievement of content standards. These criteria may be used, for example, to assess a student's written or oral performance related to a specific content standard. An illustrative performance standard specifying three levels (basic, proficient, and advanced) of increasingly sophisticated student responses, each including and expanding on the previous level, is included in an appendix to this document. A complete set of performance standards to accompany these content standards will be developed by the Center if funding becomes available.

V Vocabulary used in content standards

These standards are multidisciplinary; they draw most heavily from the fields of political philosophy, political science, constitutional law and jurisprudence, and history. Two criteria have guided the selection of vocabulary for the standards: (1) those terms most essential for all students and (2) those terms most useful in understanding the world of politics and government.

In the first instance, the standards have refrained from using some of the terms of scholarly discourse and, in some cases, have used commonly known synonyms when it appeared useful to do so. In the second instance, the standards employ terms required to understand the world of politics and government. The standards, therefore, have sometimes used terms from scholarly discourse that may not be generally familiar, because they are useful in describing and understanding politics and government.

Some essential terms not in common usage or which might be misunderstood are described briefly. These and other terms are defined in the standards or included in the glossary.

A Civic life/private life

Civic life is the public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation, that is, the public realm. Private life, by comparison, is the personal life of the individual devoted to the pursuit of private interests.

B Civil society

Civil society is the sphere of voluntary personal, social, and economic relationships and organizations that, although limited by law, is not part of governmental institutions. Civil society provides a domain where individuals are free from unreasonable interference from government. Many people argue that civil society, by providing for centers of political power outside government, is an indispensable means of maintaining limited government.

C Constitution

The term *constitution* has various meanings, and constitutions serve differing purposes in different nations. In some nations a constitution is merely a description of a form of government. In the United States, as well as in some other nations, a constitution is a form of higher law that establishes and limits government in order to protect individual rights as well as to promote the common good. In the United States, constitutional government is equated with limited government.

D Liberalism

In addition to the experience of limited self-government during the colonial period and the experience of the American Revolution, the development of American constitutional democracy has been influenced by several intellectual traditions. Two of the most important of these are the complementary but sometimes contradictory philosophical traditions of **classical republicanism** and **liberalism**. Classical republicanism emphasizes the ideal of the common good while liberalism stresses individual rights. The Preamble of the United States Constitution contains ideals often associated with republicanism. The Declaration of Independence is a classic and succinct statement of the central ideas of liberal theory.

The term *liberal* is derived from *liberty*. The ideas associated with liberalism were developed during the Protestant Reformation, the rise of market economies and free enterprise, and were further elaborated during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Liberalism refers to a political theory developed by thinkers such as John Locke. They argued that the principal purpose of government is the protection of individual rights, the “unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” of which Jefferson spoke in the Declaration of Independence. They also held that the authority of the government is based on the consent of the people. That authority, they insisted, should be limited to the protection of individual rights.

A liberal democracy is a democracy based on the ideas of liberalism, the most important of which are the protection of individual rights and consent of the governed as the basis of political authority. Historians and political scientists have characterized most of the advanced western democracies as “liberal democracies.” The United States is a classic example of this form of government. Since “liberal” is often used to identify a position on the liberal–conservative political spectrum in American politics, these standards classify the United States as a “constitutional democracy” rather than a “liberal democracy” and limit the treatment of the history of liberalism and liberal democracy to the standards at the 9–12 level.

E Republicanism

Republics are states governed by elected representatives of the people. Republics can be contrasted to monarchies. While monarchs traditionally ruled by personal authority over their subjects, the government of republics is in principle the common concern of the people (*res publica*, “thing of the people”). Republics are similar to direct democracies in that sovereignty lies in the whole citizenry; but republics differ from direct democracies in that power is usually exercised by elected representatives rather than directly by the people.

The American Founders were influenced by the republican ideas of both ancient Greece and Rome. Classical republicanism, especially in Rome, stressed two central ideas. One was that the primary purpose of government is to promote the common good of the whole society rather than that of one particular class or segment of society. The second purpose was the necessity for the civic virtue of its citizens. Civic virtue requires the citizen to place the public or common good above private interest.

F Politics

Politics is the process by which a group of people, whose opinions or interests might be divergent (1) reach collective decisions that are generally regarded as binding on the group and enforced as common policy, (2) seek the power to influence decisions about such matters as how their government will manage the distribution of resources, the allocation of benefits and burdens, and the management of conflicts, and (3) accomplish goals they could not realize as individuals.

G Systems of shared powers

Although the political system of the United States has traditionally been called a presidential system or system of separated powers, these terms do not reflect the reality of the complex system of dispersed powers created by the Constitution. It is inaccurate to say, for example, that the power to make laws has been separated and given solely to the legislature.

Although powers are separated among the different branches of national, state, and local governments, they also are shared. Each branch shares some of the powers and functions of the other branches. For example, although Congress may pass laws, the president may veto them. Some law, administrative law, is created by the executive branch. Finally, Congress passes laws, but the Supreme Court may review their constitutionality.

Contemporary students of government increasingly refer to the United States and nations with similar arrangements for the distribution, sharing, and limitation of powers as “systems of shared powers,” because this phrase is a more accurate description than the term “separation of powers.” It is therefore being used in these standards.

H Citizens and Americans

The term *citizen* is used throughout this document in a broad, encompassing sense. For example, students are citizens of their classroom and their school. They also are citizens of their neighborhood and community. As a matter of fact, many of the rights, responsibilities, and citizenship activities described in these standards apply to all residents of the United States and its territories, not to natural-born or naturalized citizens alone. Section V.1.A., of the 5–8 and 9–12 standards, however, does define citizenship more precisely where it is appropriate to do so.

The term Americans also is used throughout this document. While it is true that others in the Western Hemisphere also consider themselves to be “Americans,” that name generally is recognized as designating the people of the United States of America.

VI Audiences and uses of national standards

The principal audiences for this document are

A Teachers

Content standards provide teachers with clear statements of what they should teach their students. They promote fairness by providing teachers with adequate notice of what is expected of them.

B Teacher education and credentialing institutions

Standards provide teacher education and credentialing institutions with clear guidelines for training teachers and granting credentials. Specifying what students from kindergarten through grade twelve should know and be able to do will give guidance for pre-service course selection and help ensure that teachers themselves benefit from a rigorous curriculum.

C Assessment specialists

Standards are essential to the development of assessment programs designed to determine acceptable levels of performance.

D Parents and the community

Standards will provide parents and other community members with understandable information about what should be taught and learned in K–12 education.

E Curriculum developers

Standards provide guidance for the development of high quality curricular programs, textbooks, and other related educational materials.

F Policymakers

Standards and evidence of their achievement provide a rational basis for the development and implementation of public policy in education.