

# REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

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DATE: September 18, 2014

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso *State Task Force* Assignment No. 14-09-0662  
Chief Legislative Analyst Council File No. 14-0002-S96

## State Civics Education Curriculum

CLA RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached Resolution to include in the City's 2015-2016 State Legislative Program SUPPORT/SPONSORSHIP of Legislation or administrative action to improve the State civics education curriculum.

### SUMMARY

On September 10, 2014, the Resolution (Wesson-Huizar) was introduced stating the following:

- The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning (Task Force) recently released a report urging a new approach to civics learning which it asserts should cultivate qualities that will enable all students to mature and participate in our democracy;
- The Task Force seeks to rewrite the State's 15-year old standards to incorporate civics learning in every grade, to involve students in school governance and decision-making, and to include governments, businesses, the courts and nonprofit organizations to create opportunities that will help build interest in government and community issues; and
- Civics education is essential in these times of political polarization, distrust in the political process, and dramatic shifts in the source of news and information concerning local, state, national, and international news, events, and issues.

### BACKGROUND

In July 2013, Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson joined together to establish the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning (Task Force), which included Superintendent David Gordon, Sacramento County Office of Education, and Justice Judith McConnell, Administrative Presiding Justice, Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District as co-chairs, as well as, members of the public, civic education experts, and representatives of education coalition groups.

The goal of the Task Force is to have the state's educational mission also focus on preparing students to become responsible, actively engaged citizens in our democratic society. To achieve this goal, the Task Force was charged with exploring and elevating the status of civic learning and engagement in California's curriculum, instructional practices, professional development for teachers, student testing, accountability systems, existing infrastructure, and partnerships with the community and business.

In August 2014, the Task Force released a report entitled, "Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint For Action." The report states that there is much to gain by revitalizing civic learning. The reported chief benefits of civic learning are a vibrant and informed civic life and democracy and healthy society. Civic learning helps teach children skills they need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, initiative and innovation. In addition, civic learning done right engages students by making what they learn at school more relevant to real life.

Civic learning is vital for an increasingly diverse California society. In 2012-2013, approximately 6.2 million K-12 students were 53 percent Latino, 26 percent white, 9 percent Asian and 6 percent African-

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American, with the remaining 6 percent comprised of other ethnicities. In addition, an increasing number of students are not English native speakers. Almost 4 in 10 kindergarteners are English language learners. This diversity, and the attention it requires, is now acknowledged in the school funding model. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) recognizes the necessity of investing in the reduction and ultimate removal of inequitable outcomes in California public schools.

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

The Task Force further states that there has never been a better or more crucial time to revitalize civic learning in California. Our state is in the midst of several major public education reforms, including implementing the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts. California is undergoing a profound shift in the way that K-12 education is funded. As these changes are implemented, it is critical that civic learning be included. The Task Force makes the following system-wide recommendations listed below to improve civil learning for every child.

- Revise the California History-Social Science Content Standards and accompanying curriculum frameworks to incorporate an emphasis on civic learning, starting in kindergarten.
- Integrate civic learning into state assessment and accountability systems for students, schools and districts.
- Improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators to help them implement civic learning in schools.
- Develop an articulated sequence of instruction in civic learning across all of K-12, pegged to revised standards.
- Establish a communication mechanism so community stakeholders can easily connect with teachers and students on civic education and engagement.
- Provide incentives for local school districts to fund civic learning in Local Control Accountability Plans under the new LCFF.

These recommendations constitute a comprehensive plan that can be implemented to immediately improve the quality of civic learning in our schools.



Darrell Powell  
Analyst

**RESOLUTION**

**RULES, ELECTIONS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations, or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state, or federal governmental body or agency must first have been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning recently released a report urging a new approach to civics learning which asserts should cultivate qualities that will enable all students to mature and participate in our democracy; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force seeks to rewrite the State's 15-year old standards to incorporate civics learning in every grade, to involve students in school governance and decision-making to, and to include governments, businesses, the courts and nonprofit organizations to create opportunities that will help build interest in government and community issues; and

WHEREAS, Civics education is essential in these times of political polarization, distrust in the political process, and dramatic shifts in the source of news and information concerning local, state, national, and international news, events, and issues.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2015 and 2016 State Legislative Program support for or sponsorship of legislation or administrative action to revise the State civics education curriculum to ensure that civics learning content, concepts, and skills are provided at all appropriate grade levels and ensure that voter education information is included in the American government and civics curriculum at the high school level.

PRESENTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
HERB WESSON, Jr.  
Councilmember, 10<sup>th</sup> District

SECONDED BY: \_\_\_\_\_