

Attachment 1: Recommendations and Next Steps

Preparing Citizens Report on Civic Learning and Engagement

Recommendations

We believe effective civic education for all students PK-12 is a core responsibility of education in the Commonwealth.

1. Revise the definition of college and career readiness to include readiness for civic life.

A common definition of college and career readiness was approved by the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on February 26, 2013, and the Board of Higher Education on March 12, 2013. The BHE Policy on Civic Learning acknowledges that “the specific civic learning competencies which entering college students should demonstrate are not discussed in [this] definition. Addressing this gap should be part of our overall approach to civic learning and college readiness.” The study group on civic learning recommended that “for this discussion, the [BHE] should collaborate with its colleagues at the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Executive Office of Education.” We agree. To establish a working group for this purpose would send a clear and certain message about the importance of civic learning.

2. Establish a statewide network of regional advisory councils that will provide the Board with advice and recommendations to improve and enrich civic learning in the Commonwealth.

The purpose of this process will be to empower a wide range of K-16 educators, their partners in school committees, government, business, non-profits, and communities to provide concrete, specific recommendations to the Board regarding civic learning.

We envision five regional councils established along the geographic configurations of our existing State Student Advisory Council. These councils would convene at least three times annually and in early winter select delegates to attend an annual convention in the spring of each year to prepare a report on the state of civic learning in the Commonwealth that would contain specific recommendations for improvement. The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate has agreed to serve as our partner in this endeavor and has offered to host the annual convening of delegates. This report would be presented annually to the Board in June.

Our working group recommends that the first charge given to the advisory councils be to devise and recommend a model for schools and districts to assess effectiveness and measure progress in civic learning across the six promising practices. (See recommendation 6.)

3. Convene an annual conference sponsored by the Department and planned in partnership with the many professional organizations committed to effective instructional practice in history, social studies and civics. This conference should have as its goal the identification and promulgation of promising practices in civic learning across all disciplines.

In recent years the Department’s efforts to collaborate with teachers and school leaders relative to instruction and curriculum have been dominated by work in the priority areas of implementation of the revised English and mathematics frameworks, and work in the STEM disciplines and teacher evaluation. There has been no statewide convening of practitioners in history, social studies and civics in recent memory. To do so would be an appropriate response to the issues raised in this report.

4. Initiate the process to revise the 2003 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and, in doing so, consider developments in the field that, if thoughtfully integrated into our existing frameworks, could enhance the effectiveness of civics instruction.

We refer specifically to the integration of the C3 Framework which begins with the acquisition of knowledge and emphasizes skills and practices that prepare students for informed and engaged participation in civic life.

5. Establish funding to support district adoption and expansion of the six promising practices in civic learning. Three specific ideas would be to:

- a) **Offer grants to match local education funds and/or other partners to expand and improve local practice;**
- b) **Offer grants to existing educational collaboratives to establish dissemination projects; and**
- c) **Dedicate funds to support professional development in these areas.**

Local education funds have grown in recent years to a place where they have a viable role in many districts to support innovative practice. Collaboratives maintain unrealized potential to support innovation through dissemination in the regions they serve. Professional development is a cost-effective strategy for improving and sustaining effective practice.

6. Develop a strategy to assess each school and district's effectiveness in developing and delivering sound civic instruction, including ample opportunities for community engagement and varied practice in democratic processes to ensure every Massachusetts student graduates from high school prepared for active citizenship.

The Department will work with the regional advisory councils and the Department of Higher Education to develop these strategies to allow for state-wide application and to support schools/districts in this work, with the goal of presenting initial ideas at the 2016 promising practices conference.

Next Steps: Fall 2015

The working group recommends the following next steps:

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will communicate with the Board of Higher Education and the Secretary of Education its interest in revising the current definition of college and career readiness with the specific purpose of expanding that definition to include readiness for civic life.

By September 2015 the Commissioner will establish a Steering Committee to establish a framework for the regional advisory councils with the goal of initial meetings before Thanksgiving. The members of the steering committee shall include individuals with expertise in the six promising practices, representative of PK-16, school committee, government, business, non-profits, communities, and others as appropriate.

By September 2015 the Commissioner will establish a planning group composed of appropriate Department staff and representatives from stakeholder groups whose goal will be to present a conference on best practice in civic learning in the spring of 2016.

By October 2015 the Commissioner will initiate the process to revise the 2003 Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science.

Conclusion

There is some civic learning in every school in the Commonwealth. In many it is adequate. In a few it is exceptional. Presently, there is no reliable way to quantify this impression. Yet, overall, we concur with the view of the 60% of the Superintendents surveyed who deem it “insufficient” in their own districts.

Our recommendations are designed to do three things:

- **Raise the profile of civic learning by including it in the core purpose of public institutions of learning.**
- **Begin a patient, inclusive process that will result in our ability to quantify effective practice in every school in the Commonwealth.**
- **Support and expand effective civic learning through the professional development of teachers and funding the adoption and expansion of promising practices.**

It is the intent of the working group to provide specific recommendations that are achievable within the present context in which we operate. This context is defined by two larger realities.

First, many teachers, school and district leaders believe the ambitious agenda put forth by the Board and the Department has provided them with more than enough to accomplish and has limited, to a degree, a school or district’s capacity to embark on initiatives of their own choosing. The working group has sympathy with this perspective and has attempted to propose a set of recommendations that will require balance, patience and collaboration to achieve.

Second, the Department will be expected, at least in the short term, to maintain its present pace in advancing current initiatives with fewer fiscal and human resources. We recognize the potential for the activity we seek to further overextend those who are already overextended. We have sympathy with this circumstance as well. Yet, the purpose this report has been too long deferred. We suggest a modest set of next steps that point the way forward. We need to proceed.