



Civic Education

Administrative Directives

Education Commission of the States

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Advancing civic learning with administrative authority

By Brady Delander and Maria Millard

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Legislating civics education initiatives can be an arduous process that takes time and resources, and requires buy-in from various stakeholders. Some state officials – including superintendents of public education and chief justices – have used their authority to more quickly advance civics education initiatives and programs without legislation.

California and **Montana**, through the leadership of their state judiciaries and superintendents of public instruction, have taken steps to expand civics education through administrative directives. Such directives may be an expedited way to implement civics initiatives, though the challenge then becomes finding ways to sustain them.

The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning is a combined effort of California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, with funding from the California Bar Association. Among its many charges, the task force made recommendations intended to improve overall civic skills and dispositions in the state.

In Montana, Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau’s Civic Education Institute offered two days of professional development to every secondary social studies and civics teacher in the state, bringing in national experts to highlight and explain the top resources available. This report provides an overview of those efforts.

Key Takeaways

- Civic efforts in California and Montana are led by administrative directives.
- Initiatives from administrative directives can be more quickly advanced but may not be sustained with a new administration.
- Successful initiatives create broad support through convening numerous stakeholders and collaboration.
- Administrative directives may rely on private funds, coming at no cost to taxpayers.



California

Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning

In July 2013, the task force pulled together more than 40 civics experts, members of the public and civics proponents from across the state. They held public meetings to allow parents, teachers, school administrators, school boards, and labor and business leaders to weigh in on civics education – particularly curriculum, resources, professional learning, student assessments, and community and business partnerships.¹

Following the cue of many other task forces, the California team began its initial [report](#) by citing some dismal survey findings:

- Just 60 percent of 2,366 of the state’s high school seniors could correctly answer questions related to current political issues and basic government functions and structures.
- Less than half of those same seniors thought it was their responsibility to actively engage in state and local issues.

While students who had access to high-quality civic learning fared better in the survey, access to such learning opportunities was unequally distributed.² Informed by the public and stakeholders, the task force developed a set of recommendations including:

- High-quality civic learning experiences starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school
- Integration of civics into assessment and accountability systems
- Opportunities for professional teacher development.

Defining “high-quality” civic learning

The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning says high-quality civic learning occurs when students learn to think critically, develop research skills, assess and synthesize information and present coherent arguments based on data. To put these skills into practice, students work with others, organize activities in their communities and speak persuasively in public. They also develop common shared values about equality and fairness and understand that their actions can have an impact, especially when a group of people works together.

To accomplish the recommendations outlined in the report, the task force proposed several funding streams, both public and private, including Common Core implementation funding and grants from foundations and private sources. Already, many schools have implemented the recommended six proven practices, another outcome of the task force.³

The task force was the first step in generating buy-in and inspiring others to get involved in the conversation on civics education. Although another justice will replace Cantil-Sakauye and another superintendent will replace Torlakson at some point, they have planted seeds that may grow beyond their terms.

Montana

The Civic Education Institute

In Montana, Juneau partnered with the state’s Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike McGrath and Ted McConnell, executive director of the [Campaign for the Civic Missions of Schools](#), to advance several civics initiatives. Their Civic Education Institute, held in August 2013, was a two-day training given by national experts for all of the states’ secondary social studies and civics teachers. It included a law panel

moderated by McConnell, who is also a member of the California task force. Participants used [iCivics](#), interactive video games founded by former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and learned about ways to engage students in community projects.

The seminar was made possible through private funds, including organizations such as the Montana Supreme Court, Montana Paralegal Association, Montana Justice Foundation, Montana Trial Lawyers Association and the State Bar of Montana. Not a single taxpayer dollar was used.⁴

Continuing the work

Collaborative leadership by California's and Montana's judiciaries and departments of education ensured participation in these administrative directives by broad groups of stakeholders. These coalitions have helped to generate substantial interest and support for advancing civics education in these states. Both initiatives have momentum as they progress toward long-term goals of helping students to have fulfilling personal lives and careers and contribute to civic and economic progress in a diverse and changing democratic society.

California is finalizing a civics blueprint that will be shared with elected officials, the media and the public in the fall of 2014, with the intended outcome of guiding future policy discussions and possible legislation to improve K-12 civic learning in California. In Montana, Juneau is planning another civics institute, this time expanded to include elementary teachers, and continues to expand the dialogue and inspire continued engagement with civics education. The seeds of increased civic engagement have been planted and with sustainable and continued efforts, these initiatives will live beyond the tenures of these justices and state superintendents.

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About the series

This is the fourth in a series of reports examining state initiatives related to civic education. Previous reports highlight [states addressing civics with mandated task forces](#), explore [efforts in Florida and Tennessee to hold schools and students accountable for civics knowledge](#) and detail [state civic initiatives that don't require legislation](#).

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

¹ California Department of Education News Release. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr14/yr14rel12.asp>

² *Revitalizing Civic Learning in California: A Call to Action*. California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. <http://www.myboe.org/portal/default/Group/Viewer/GroupView?action=2&ql=CivicLearningTaskforce>

³ *Revitalizing Civic Learning in California: A Call to Action*. California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. <http://www.myboe.org/portal/default/Group/Viewer/GroupView?action=2&ql=CivicLearningTaskforce>

⁴ Montana OPI Press Release. http://opi.mt.gov/Media_Center/News_Updates/NewsStories/2013-08-05_085326.html