

It's up to us:

BRIDGING

the civic opportunity gap

Research shows socioeconomic status often determines a student's opportunity to engage in civic learning. Schools must prepare all students to become good citizens and problem-solvers.

In today's education reform discussions we hear much about the need to close gaps and prepare students for college and career. While it is vital to our nation's future that every student be prepared to succeed in higher education and in the workforce, it is vital to the health and future of our democracy that our schools also prepare students for a lifetime of knowledgeable, engaged and active citizenship.

Unfortunately, access to civic education is extremely lacking in California schools. Furthermore, we find that even among students afforded civic learning opportunities, gaps exist between groups. A "civic opportunity gap" confirmed by research finds that race/ethnicity, academic track and socio-economic status often determines a student's opportunity to engage in civic learning (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). This study finds that high school students "attending higher SES schools, those who are college-bound, and white students get more

of these (civic learning) opportunities than low-income students, those not heading to college, and students of color."

Why is this important to address? As noted in the executive summary of the research report:

"Equal access to high school civic learning opportunities becomes more pressing when we consider that low-income citizens, those who are less educated, and citizens of color are under-represented in the political process. Based on a review of relevant research, the American Political Science Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy (2004) reported: 'The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government ... Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar with the clarity

By Michelle M. Herczog

and consistency that policymakers readily heard” (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008).

Authors of another analysis of civic activity found higher income families were:

- four times as likely to be part of campaign work;
 - three times as likely to do informal community work;
 - twice as likely to contact elected officials;
 - twice as likely to protest; and
 - six times as likely to sit on a board.
- (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

In addition to inequality based on socioeconomic status, there are political inequalities linked to a citizen’s race and/or ethnicity. A recent study by the non-partisan Public Policy Institute of California found, “Those who are white, older, affluent, homeowners, and highly educated have a disproportionate say in California politics and representation in the civic life of the state” (Ramakrishnan & Baldassarre, 2004).

Although California is only 44 percent white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), whites made up 67 percent of registered voters in 2005 (DiCamillo, 2006). The fact that these political inequalities are still so deeply entrenched makes the question of equal access to civic learning opportunities in public schools all the more urgent.

What can be done?

There are three valuable resources that can impact policy and practice for closing the civic achievement gap in California schools.

1. “Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools”

This new report is an urgent call for action to restore the historic civic mission of our nation’s schools. It provides recommendations for education policymakers to ensure every student acquires the civic skills and knowledge needed for an informed, engaged citizenry. It also presents six proven practices that should be at the heart of every school’s approach to civic learning:

1. Schools should provide instruction in government, history, economics, law and democracy.
2. Schools should incorporate discussion

of current local, national and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.

3. Schools should design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is

“The loss of quality civic education from so many of our classrooms has left too many young Americans without the most basic knowledge of who our forefathers are, or what they did, or the significance of the founding documents that bear their names. Too many children are ignorant of the sheer effort, the risks and sacrifices made by previous generations, to ensure that this country survived war and depression; through the great struggles for civil, and social, and worker’s rights. It is up to us, then, to teach them.”

– President Barack Obama, 2008

linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

4. Schools should offer opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom.

5. Schools should encourage student participation in school governance.

6. Schools should encourage students to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

The Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools can be downloaded at no cost at www.civicmissionofschools.org. It was produced by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools in partnership with the Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the National Conference on Citizenship, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, and the American Bar Association Division for Public Education.

2. “Preparing students for college, career and citizenship”

This guide is intended to achieve a dual purpose: to provide English-language arts teachers a civic education context for improving literacy skills and to provide social studies teachers a pedagogical framework for building literacy competencies needed



for civic life. Knowing that reading, writing, listening and speaking and language skills identified in the California Common Core State Standards will guide core academic instruction for ALL students, the integration of civic education will likewise allow civic learning to be accessible to all students.

Lesson activities in each of the grade spans follow a natural progression that build students’ historical knowledge of the foundations of democracy, an understanding of how America’s constitutional principles are reinterpreted over time, and the skills and dispositions needed for effective citizenship. Each series of lessons calls for students to actively participate in activities that will strengthen reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in the context of civic dialogue, debate, persuasion and action.

A civic action component found at all grade levels guides students to use skills to address current issues in their community, analyze and problem-solve solutions,

develop an action plan and carry it out. By applying English-language arts skills in a meaningful context, all students will build content knowledge and develop civic skills and dispositions needed for civic competency, while at the same time meet the Common Core State Standards for English-Language Arts. The guide can be downloaded at no cost at www.lacoe.edu/historysocial-science. It was produced by the Los Angeles

County Office of Education in collaboration with the Trinity County Office of Education and the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools.

3. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum for History-Social Science

In response to the narrowing of the curriculum, particularly in low-performing schools, the continuum developed by the

Los Angeles County Office of Education in 2008 recognizes that access to culturally proficient instruction can close achievement gaps in all subject areas, including history-social science. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum examines the following three program components: curriculum content and resources; instructional methods; and assessment (how we assess for mastery and use data to make instructional decisions).


Within these three program components, six levels of cultural proficiency are described: 1. Cultural destructiveness seeks to eliminate vestiges of the cultures of others; 2. Cultural incapacity seeks to make the culture of others wrong; 3. Cultural blindness refuses to acknowledge the culture of others; 4. Cultural pre-competence acknowledges the cultural differences of others, but may do so in surface or inappropriate ways; 5. Cultural competence promotes adaptations to better meet the diverse needs of our customers and students; and 6. Cultural proficiency advocates for life-long learning about one's own and others' cultures for the purpose of meeting the needs of all underserved groups, closing gaps, and achieving educational equity in classrooms and schools and social justice in the communities we serve.

The Continuum asks important questions about the content and curriculum materials we use in classrooms. These materials are worthy of analysis if we are intent on providing a culturally proficient curriculum for students.

In the teaching of history, as described in California's History-Social Science Framework, as a story well told, we need to ask ourselves, whose story are we telling? Which perspectives are shared? What message or agenda is delivered?


For example, in teaching early American history do we focus entirely on the series of events led by white colonists to declare independence, win a war, draft and adopt a national constitution and bill of rights? By omitting or distorting the stories of African-Americans (who represented nearly one-fifth of the population), as well as women and Native Americans, we run the risk of being culturally destructive by promoting

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How leaders create schools with high collective efficacy

Research is clear about what is needed to lead a school where the best teachers demand to be on the leadership team, and students know they will be successful.

By George Manthey

Having written a dissertation on teacher collective efficacy, it was an honor for me to be asked to review an article on individual and collective student efficacy for publication in the *European Journal of Educational Psychology*. According to the researchers, a student's belief in him or herself ("I will be able to improve my poorest marks throughout the year") is a better predictor of that student's success than his or her efficacy feelings about school ("As a group my class is able to achieve good grades in all subjects"). That's probably not surprising news to anyone.

But contrast it with research about individual and collective teacher efficacy, in which the collective efficacy beliefs of teachers ("Teachers at this school are able to get through to difficult students") are a better predictor of academic success than a teacher's belief about his or her own efficacy ("I can motivate students who show low interest in school work").

A casual glance at these two contrasting conclusions might lead one to predict that the best chance of a school to have "success for every student" would be to have students with high personal efficacy and teachers with high collective efficacy. Again, this is another no brainer.

But what if that is not your situation? What leadership implications are there for those who might be in schools where student self-efficacy is mixed, at best, and collective teacher efficacy is near the bottom of the scale? I'm reminded of an outstanding teacher at a school where I consulted who refused to be on the school improvement team unless I would guarantee him that it would make a difference.

"George," he said, "I have too much work to do with my students to take any time away from that unless I know it will help." If I'd known about these studies at that time, I might have been able to convince him that he'd never be truly successful with his students unless all teachers at his school became more effective.

What I'm really wondering is this: What would the chances

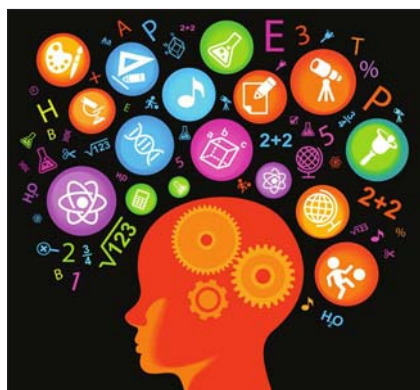
be of "success for every student" if students knew they would be successful if they attended a particular school? Could there be a better way to raise a sense of individual efficacy? Isn't this the draw of the most successful magnet or charter schools? Think of the school lotteries shown in the movie, *Waiting for Superman*.

The belief that "If I can only go to that school then I will be successful," and "If I have to go to my neighborhood school then I won't be," provides a narrative for the research about student individual and collective efficacy.

As leaders, we have little control over who our students are and what they bring to school with them. But we can influence who they become by creating schools with high collective efficacy. And the research is very clear about how that can be done. It requires:

- teachers and leaders with deep knowledge of the best instructional practices;
- strong home and school communication;
- a clear and focused vision;
- collaboration and purposeful conversations;
- an abiding belief that all students are able to succeed;
- high expectations;
- time on task;
- authentic student engagement;
- frequent monitoring of results;
- an aligned curriculum; and
- strong leadership.

A personal assessment of your school or district status in each of these areas will lead to the clear and focused vision required for a school with high student self-efficacy and even higher collective teacher efficacy. That's a school where the best teachers will demand to be on the leadership team. And where leadership, by definition, is strong. ■



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negative stereotypes and denigrating culturally different groups.

By silencing or dismissing the voices of dissension from abolitionists and others in the drafting of the Constitution, we practice cultural incapacity because the message promotes the idea that assimilation to the dominant culture is integral to success. When discussing the creation of govern-

ment for the “common good” do we ask, “common good” for whom?

Cultural blindness occurs when we select content and resources with an assumption that they meet the needs of all students and adequately represent historical events, issues and themes. When practicing cultural pre-competence, we begin to realize the need to include voices, contributions and events from groups that reflect the cul-

tural diversity in the classroom. Though well intentioned, a common practice is to present diverse stories as addendums to the traditional story and not integrated into a collective story of history.

By moving into the area of cultural competence, we begin to affirm the cultural stories of diverse students in our classrooms and present a collective story that respects students’ own cultural heritage and multiple perspectives about historical events, themes and issues. Teachers begin to provide students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes of civic participation to move beyond the classroom to address issues of injustice in their communities.

Becoming advocates for change

In a culturally proficient classroom, students seek out multiple perspectives in the historic record beyond those represented in the school or classroom. They become advocates for social, political and economic change to ensure the rights and privileges guaranteed to all people in a democracy.

Using instructional approaches that fit the diverse learning styles of our students is another surefire way to engage more students in the learning process and improve academic outcomes for underperforming groups. The “how” aspect of teaching is manifested as: 1. The accessibility of high quality instruction that meets the learning needs of students; 2. The types of instructional strategies that value and reflect different learning styles; and 3. The support for students, particularly English learners, to acquire discipline-specific vocabulary to develop conceptual understanding of history.

Assessment continues to play a large role in determining what we want students to know and be able to do. Important decisions are made in determining what is important to assess and how students are asked to demonstrate mastery. Furthermore, data can be culturally destructive when it is ignored or misused to make negative educational decisions for students.

Culturally proficient teachers use and disaggregate multiple performance measures that support various learning styles and inform instructional practices for all students to succeed. They also involve stu-



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*- Sandra Day O'Connor,
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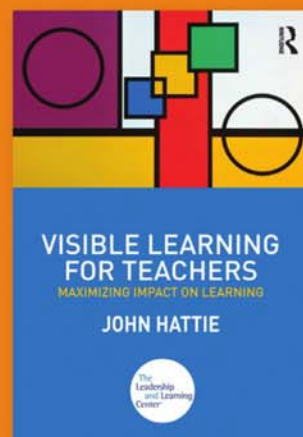
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dents in developing and reflecting upon their own assessments to help them perform well on all types of assessment measures. The Continuum can be found at www.lacoe.edu/historysocialscience.

Preparing the next generation

Fully engaged in the 21st century, we find the benefits and challenges to our democratic way of life shifting and evolving both at home and abroad – the Arab Spring, climate change, Occupy Wall Street, the race to the White House. Real challenges in today’s world require great thinkers, innovative problem-solvers and engaged citizens of a global community. How do we prepare all members of the next generation to address these complex challenges?

The civic achievement gap reveals the ugly truth that we are not promoting democracy for all, but democracy for some. By providing ALL students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become responsible, engaged citizens in our democratic society, we will fulfill our collective

civic mission for the young people we serve, the life of our democracy, and the future of our world. ■

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