

NJ Social Studies Network News

A Publication of the New Jersey Center for Civic Education

June 2011

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Social Studies Issues

Today's young people seem to be woefully lacking civic knowledge and skills. On the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics (2010), only 27% of fourth-graders, 22% of eighth-graders and 24% of twelfth-graders scored proficient. African American and Hispanic students were twice as likely as white students to score below proficient on national assessments. (See NAEP civics assessment at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/civics/>).

We should not be surprised since civic learning has been pushed aside in recent years. Until the 1960s, three courses in civics and government were common in American schools. But civic education has been in steady decline over the past generation or two and No Child Left Behind has made the situation worse by requiring students to do additional rote learning for language arts and math exams, taking time away from reading nonfiction, doing critical thinking, and understanding history and current events.

Unlike more than 30 other states, New Jersey does not require a single civics course at any time in the K-12 education of our young people. It is left to local discretion. The Inventory of Civic Education in New Jersey (See http://civiced.rutgers.edu/ADVOCACY/Inventory_Report_11-04.pdf) disclosed that only 39% of New Jersey school districts require all of their students to take a civics course in any grade. While those students taking an American government elective (10 to 20% of the student body of any given high school) might have the opportunity to participate in a class that requires an understanding of American constitutional democracy and the responsibilities and role of the citizen; students in most New Jersey school districts are exposed to one week to one month of civic content knowledge as part of U.S. history, with little emphasis on the importance of citizen action.

A required middle school civics course would fill the gap in the existing mandates to teach about New Jersey in an upper elementary grade (NJSA 18A:35-3) and two years of United States history in high school (NJSA 18A:35-1). By fifth grade, students have the ability to do the higher order thinking necessary for a rigorous course in civics. A significant number of students, especially in low-performing school districts, drop out of school by age 16 and would not have the benefit of a robust civics course if it were offered in high school, where there is little room for additional requirements anyway. Legislative action is necessary because the State Board of Education only sets course requirements for high school graduation.

A required civics course in middle school should not demand the hiring of additional personnel either by the New Jersey Department of Education or local school districts. Current middle school social studies teachers would need to be redirected and offered professional development and resources to teach engaging civics. The costs for professional development and curriculum materials can be kept low by developing a sample curriculum with online resources that teachers can use and providing joint public/private support for professional development.

Supported by the NJCSS, NJSSSA, NJPSA, NJ Chamber of Commerce and other civic and educational organizations, legislation to require a semester civics course in middle school (grades 5-8) will soon be introduced in the New Jersey State Legislature. We will keep you apprised as events unfold. We hope that you and your students will vocally (email and letters are okay too) support this effort to ensure that all of our students have the opportunity to obtain the knowledge, skills and attitudes for responsible citizenship. Creating citizens with the knowledge, skills and desire to participate in a democratic society is the very purpose for which public schools were established. A healthy democracy depends on the participation of citizens, and that participation is learned behavior. It doesn't just happen.

Arlene Gardner
NJCSS President and Executive Director, NJ Center for Civic Education

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NJ Council for the Social Studies

Last chance to submit a workshop proposal for the October 27th NJCSS Annual Conference: Deadline: June 30, 2011. Workshop proposal form is online at the NJCSS website: <http://www.njcss.org/index.php>.

It's time to renew your membership in NJCSS! The combined conference and membership registration fee is \$65 for teachers or \$80 for supervisors for joint membership in NJSSSA. Go to the NJCSS website at <http://www.njcss.org/index.php>. REGISTER NOW!

Collegiate Alliance for Social Education

CASE, the statewide organization of New Jersey university faculty teaching pre-service teachers, is sponsoring a free conference for university faculty and pre-service teachers at Rutgers University's College Avenue Campus on **September 23, 2011** from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Engaging materials and programs for social studies teachers will be highlighted, with a focus on economic education this year. To register, contact Prof. James Daly at james.daly@shu.edu.

Student Events



Ridgefield Park students explain their project at the May 25, 2011 Project Citizen Showcase

Ridgefield Park Jr. High School placed first at the New Jersey State *Project Citizen* Portfolio Showcase and Hearings on May 25, 2011. Their portfolio will represent New Jersey at the 24th annual *National Project Citizen Showcase* held at the annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislature. Congratulations to Ridgefield Park students and teacher Michael Savino!

Project Citizen is a process-based program that helps students to understand public policy by identifying a local public policy problem, researching the problem--including interviews with local public policymakers-- identifying possible alternative solutions, selecting a solution that is both constitutional and practical, and developing an action plan for getting their solution implemented. It is both service learning and civic education. [Click](#) to see a 5-minute demonstration and discussion by students and teachers from last year's *Project Citizen Showcase*.

More than 400 students participated in the Second Annual **Diversity Art and Essay Contest** sponsored by the Interfaith Dialog Center in Newark. This year's theme was "Who is my neighbor?" The first place Art contest winners include: Samantha Stokes, 8th grade student at Assumption Act, and Sophie Labell, 10th grade student at Waldwick High School. The first place Essay winners include Afreen Azmi, 8th grade student at Al-Ghazaly Jr. High School, and Andrew Bauer, 11th grade student at Neptune High School. For a full listing of second, third place and honorable mention, go to www.idcnj.org. The awards ceremony was held on June 5, 2011. Congratulations to the winning students!

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Summer Institutes

The **Council for Economic Education** is offering a series of FREE, all-day workshops about economics and financial literacy during July and August. Most of the workshops will be held at the HSBC National Center for Economic and Financial Education at 42nd Street and Lexington Ave. in New York City. Lesson demonstrations, refreshments and free materials will be offered at all workshops. [Click](#) to go to the Council's website for a listing of the workshops and to sign up.

The **New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation** is sponsoring a summer professional development workshop, *Just the Facts*, on **July 20, 2011** from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. This workshop will provide educators with the important skills to assist their students in researching the Vietnam War. The morning will include a scholarly presentation and the afternoon will be more hands-on with investigations of photographs, primary documents, and oral histories. Contact Katie Henry at khenry@njvvmf.org for a registration form. Fee: \$40. Deadline: July 13, 2011.

NCSS Summer Institute on **Teaching with Documents and Works of Art** is offered jointly by the National Archives and the Smithsonian American Art Museum **July 27-29, 2011**. Fee: \$299 for NCSS members, \$339 for nonmembers. Go to www.socialstudies.org/workshops.

The **American Red Cross** will conduct its 4th Annual [Exploring Humanitarian Law Summer Institute](#) in Washington, D.C. **August 1-4, 2011**. The training institute is intended for secondary school teachers and college faculty who are interested in teaching EHL in the classroom. Participants will receive the EHL curriculum and resources to enable them to explore humanitarian law and principles. EHL offers activities that can be used alone or integrated into current lessons. Registration is \$150 and a limited number of scholarships are available. For more information email: EHL@usa.redcross.org.

Professional Development

A **Master Teacher Institute in Holocaust Education** is being offered to middle and high school teachers in New Jersey. New courses will begin in September 2011. Each course will meet five times over the semester. The program is designed to develop expert teachers in Holocaust studies who will serve as resource providers in their schools, districts, and communities. Participants will receive resource materials; access to leading scholars in Holocaust studies, including access to Rutgers faculty and resources; and professional development credit. To be eligible, teachers must have a minimum of three years teaching experience and three years of involvement with Holocaust/genocide education. For further information or to download an application, visit <http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu> or call 732-932-2033. There is no fee to participate in this program.

The **National Constitution Center** is offering the *Women of Power Show*. It takes a look at extraordinary women throughout history. Students learn about the issues women faced while trying to secure equal rights. The show also explores passage of the 19th Amendment and the new roles of women in society. Students learn about courageous women who defied the norms of society and paved a path for future generations. They discover America through the stories of the women who persevered to establish equality for ALL citizens. For more information or to book the program, contact thcp@constitutioncenter.org.

The New Jersey Parent Information and Resource Center is sponsoring "**An Evening with Geoffrey Canada**," on Thursday, **September 15, 2011**, at the State theatre, 15 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Canada is the president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City. Tickets are \$25 for students; \$45 general admission, and \$65 preferred seating. For more information or to order tickets visit www.NJPIRC.org.

Princeton University's East Asia Center offers a **Seminar for Teachers** one Saturday per month from November 2011 through May 2012. The 30 hours of professional development also include over \$150 of materials, a \$100 stipend, a subscription to Education about Asia, and opportunities for summer travel in Asia. Seminar topics include major periods in the history of China, Japan and Korea; Classical Chinese literature; Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and their continuing legacy; Art of China, Japan and Korea; the impact of the West on East Asia; as well as modern issues. For further information and to receive a registration form contact Lesley Solomon at lesley86@hotmail.com.

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Resources for Teachers

Play the Budget Game. In an effort to help the public gain a better understanding of the state budget, *The Star-Ledger* has developed an online budget game that you may want to have your students try. Go to <http://nj.com/budgetgame> and click "Play Game". Continue by clicking on either the big "Spending" or "Revenue" box. In "Spending", you'll be able to change all major categories of state spending. You can increase or decrease funding for each of the categories. There is also an explanation of what is included in each category. Same for "Revenues". You can add a millionaire's tax or gas tax or reduce taxes. But the Revenue and Spending boxes need to match. Unlike the U.S. budget, the state budget must be balanced each year! Compare your choices with those of Governor Christie. Better yet, send him your thoughts! The annual budget must be set by July 1st.

Celebrate the Fourth of July with ideas, holiday heroes, documents, symbols, games, and arts and crafts from the Constitutional Rights Foundations website at <http://www.crfcelebrateamerica.org/>

Conflict Resolution and United States History offers an engaging way to involve students in grades 5-12 in considering historical documents and multiple perspectives in order to better understand what happened in the past and why. The printed materials include a CD with primary source documents, student overheads and power points for case studies of conflicts in American history ranging from the colonial period through the 1990s as well as a DVD. Go to <http://civiced.rutgers.edu/CONFLICT/overview.shtml> for a sample lesson, 4-minute video, teacher comments and an order form. Contact civiced@njcre.rutgers.edu for additional information or questions.

Free online lessons from the **Constitutional Rights Foundation** include: America's Economic Crisis Lessons, America Responds to terrorism, Brown v. Board 50th Anniversary, Educating about Immigration, Educating about Intellectual Property, Election central Resources, School-based Service Learning and more. For an index of free online lessons go to <http://www.crf-usa.org/online-lessons-index/free-lessons-index.html>.

C-SPAN Classroom is a free membership service dedicated to supporting educators' use of C-SPAN programming in their classrooms. The website, <http://c-spanclassroom.org>, provides access to hundreds of video clips which you can download and stream online, lesson plans, conference and fellowship opportunities for educators. Right now, C-SPAN is offering a FREE Presidential Timeline Poster to all new C-SPAN Classroom members. In addition, teachers and students can win prizes by competing in StudentCam, an annual documentary competition. For more information email educate@c-span.org.

Electronic New Jersey provides online access to an expanding set of curriculum units—now 23—using New Jersey history content for instruction about core themes in U. S. History. For classroom teachers grades 5-12. You can access the materials at <http://njdigitalhighway.org/enj/> or <http://njdigitalhighway.org/educators.php>.

Free resource materials about Africa from the New Jersey Center for Civic Education. Eight units from the early African kingdoms of the 7th century to the emerging democracies of the 21st century are available [online](#).

Free Interdisciplinary social studies and language arts lessons for grades 4-12 are available [online](#).

The **Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History** invites schools to become affiliates and join its network of American history schools and receive professional development, free and discounted publications, documents, recorded lectures, traveling exhibits, technical assistance, advice and guidance. To apply contact affiliates@gilderlehrman.org, call 646-366-9666 or visit www.gilderlehrman.org for more information.

Historical Documents of New Jersey and the United States, including the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the U.S. Constitution and the New Jersey Constitution, is available for free from the New Jersey State Bar Foundation. Contact 1-800-FREELAW or www.njsbf.org to request copies for your class. The order form is also available [online](#).

iCivics, the web-based education project spearheaded by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, is designed to reinvigorate civics teaching and learning about the Supreme Court, the judiciary and how the three branches of government work together. These engaging games, lessons and other materials for upper elementary and middle school grades can be found online at <http://www.icivics.org>.

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Teachers College Columbia University has developed a curriculum about the federal budget, national debt and national deficit called *Understanding Fiscal Responsibility*, organized around the core question "How should we address our nation's fiscal challenges today and in the future in a manner that is consistent with our values and traditions?" It aims to provide multiple perspectives about the challenging fiscal issues to help youth become informed citizens and make their own decisions. Go to <http://understandingfiscalresponsibility.org/>.

Teaching Global History: A Social Studies Approach, by Hofstra University Professor Alan Singer, offers an alternative thoughtful approach to pre-packaged textbook outlines and materials for high school classes. It is available in paperback from Routledge. Go to <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415875493/>.

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Thanks for your support, and please feel free to contact our office with any questions, or for additional information on any of the programs we offer.

If you have information that you would like to share with other New Jersey social studies teachers and/or supervisors, please send it by the end of the month for the next month's E-newsletter.

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Please note that the Center's area code has changed from 732 to 848 as part of the new Rutgers University telephone system.