



Excellence in Civic Engagement Program

Preparing All Arizona Students to Participate as Active and Responsible Citizens

The Arizona Department of Education is pleased to announce the creation of the “**Excellence in Civic Engagement Program.**” This program recognizes the current efforts of Arizona’s schools in civic learning and supports their commitment to improvement. The goal of civic literacy is to ensure that students have a fundamental knowledge of the general framework of their government, acquire and demonstrate the **skills and traits necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens.**

In 2011, the Campaign for the Civic Missions of Schools released its report ***Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools.*** This report provides research-based evidence of the decline in civic learning in American schools and presents **six proven practices** that should be at the center of every school's approach to civic learning. The Arizona Department of Education’s Excellence in Civic Engagement Program is an effort to help schools **prepare students for college, career and civic life** by applying the goals and recommendations outlined in the report to recognize and support Arizona’s schools in their commitment to civic education. Connecting the goal of civic literacy for Arizona students to Arizona’s Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics helps ensure that students in Arizona are not only college and career ready, but also able to understand and apply the ideals set forth in the founding of our nation to the social and political realities of today.

Arizona’s Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics support the goal of civic literacy in various ways. Reading and comprehending complex informational text allows students to acquire extensive content knowledge about historical events, democratic ideals, processes and institutions. Communicating precisely, constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others empowers students to paraphrase information, articulate complex ideas representing various points of view and practice the art of civil discourse. Identifying and analyzing a problem in the community provides students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction.

We hope your school will consider applying for the **Excellence in Civic Engagement Program** so that you can be recognized as one of **Arizona’s Civic Engagement Schools** for your work in helping prepare your students to participate as active and responsible citizens. The “Arizona Civic Engagement School” designation will do more than highlight to the community your commitment to civic education: The designation will also assure that our republic’s future is secure in the hands of educated, prepared youth.

For further information, including how your school can become an Arizona Civic Engagement School, please visit <http://www.azed.gov/civicingagement/>



Proven Practices in Civic Learning

The Civic Mission of Schools set out a list of six “promising practices” that, together, constituted well-rounded civic learning. Nearly a decade later, extensive research has confirmed that these promising practices are indeed “proven practices” in civic learning. These practices are listed below:

PROVEN PRACTICE #1: PROVIDE INSTRUCTION IN GOVERNMENT, HISTORY, LAW, AND DEMOCRACY. Formal instruction in U.S. government, history, and democracy increases civic knowledge. This is a valuable goal in itself and may contribute to young people’s tendency to engage in civic and political activities over the long term. However, schools should avoid teaching only rote facts about dry procedures, which is unlikely to benefit students and may actually alienate them from politics.

PROVEN PRACTICE #2: 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. When young people have opportunities to discuss current issues in a classroom setting, they tend to have greater interest in politics, improved critical thinking and communications skills, more civic knowledge, and more interest in discussing public affairs out of school. Conversations, however, should be carefully moderated so that students feel welcome to speak from a variety of perspectives. Teachers need support in broaching controversial issues in classrooms since they may risk criticism or sanctions if they do so.

PROVEN PRACTICE #3: DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPLY WHAT THEY LEARN THROUGH PERFORMING COMMUNITY SERVICE THAT IS LINKED TO THE FORMAL CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION. Service programs are now common in K-12 schools. The ones that best develop engaged citizens are linked to the curriculum:

- Consciously pursue civic outcomes, rather than seek only to improve academic performance or to promote higher self-esteem
- Allow students to engage in meaningful work on serious public issues; give students a role in choosing and designing their projects
- Provide students with opportunities to reflect on the service work
- Allow students—especially older ones—to pursue political responses to problems consistent with laws that require public schools to be nonpartisan
- See Service-Learning as part of a broader philosophy toward education, not just a program that is adopted for a finite period in a particular course

PROVEN PRACTICE #4: OFFER EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES THAT PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED IN THEIR SCHOOLS OR COMMUNITIES. Long-term studies of Americans show that those who participate in extracurricular activities in high school remain more civically engaged than their contemporaries, even decades later. Thus, everyone should have opportunities to join high school groups, and such participation should be valued.

PROVEN PRACTICE #5: ENCOURAGE STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE. A long tradition of research suggests that giving students more opportunities to participate in the management of their own classrooms and schools builds their civic skills and attitudes. Thus, giving students a voice in school governance is a promising way to encourage all young people to engage civically.

PROVEN PRACTICE #6: ENCOURAGE STUDENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN SIMULATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES. Recent evidence indicates that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation, and diplomacy in schools can lead to heightened political knowledge and interest.



Steps in Completing Application

- STEP 1:** Select a planning team of up to six members (team members may be administrators, teachers, curriculum specialists, counselors, student activity leaders, students, volunteers, parents, or other school affiliates).
- STEP 2:** Designate a Team Leader.
- STEP 3:** Send Teacher/Staff Data Collection Forms with instructions to appropriate teachers and staff with a clear due date to complete and return to the designated Team Leader.
*Teacher-Staff Application Introduction and Data Forms are located at <http://www.azed.gov/civicengagement/>
- STEP 4:** Direct planning team to compile the data from the Teacher/Staff Data Collection Forms in each of the six proven practices.
- STEP 5:** Ask Team Leader to complete the school application with the data collected by planning team.
*School application can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dGwzclBLNORkSmJ3WnlzbFNPM9CVFE6MQ>
- STEP 6:** Submit your completed school application by May 1st, 2013.

For further information contact:

John Balentine
Director, K-12 Social Studies
Arizona Department of Education
Email: John.Balentine@azed.gov
Phone: 602-364-1981