

4311.2

CIVIC EDUCATION

Preamble

The Board of Education has found that:

- Numerous national and state studies find that Americans and New Yorkers today demonstrate low levels of civic knowledge and engagement.
- Public schools have been central in educating Americans to be active and engaged citizens since the beginning of the American republic.
- Section 801 of New York’s education law requires the Regents to prescribe courses of instruction in (1) “patriotism, citizenship, and human rights issues” and (2) “the history, meaning, significance, and effect of the provisions of the constitution of the United States, the amendments thereto, the declaration of independence, the constitution of the state of New York and the amendments thereto...”
- Section 801-a of New York’s education law requires the Regents to “ensure that the course of instruction in grades kindergarten through twelve includes a component on civility, citizenship and character education. Such component shall instruct students on the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observation of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experiences in, and contributions to, the community.”
- The New York State Learning Standards expect students to be able to “use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the United States and other nations; the United States Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.”

The Board believes that a core purpose of public education is to prepare students to be active and engaged citizens in a democratic and global society.

The Board recognizes that schools are not the only venues for civic education. Parents and families must share in helping young people learn about and understand civic values and principles and develop civic knowledge, skills, and habits.

The Board also recognizes that schools are uniquely situated for particular aspects of civic learning in several ways:

- Public schools are the only institutions with the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every young person in the country; and they are the most systematically and directly responsible for imparting citizen norms.

- Public schools are best equipped to address the cognitive aspects of good citizenship—civic and political knowledge and related skills such as critical thinking and deliberation.
- Public schools are communities in which young people learn to interact, argue, and work together with others, important conditions for future citizenship.

The Board understands that high-quality civic learning includes more than classroom instruction; it also includes a range of dynamic learning opportunities, engaging discussions and activities such as simulations that put a real life perspective on what is learned in class.

The Board also understands that, when properly implemented, not only does high-quality civic education improve civic knowledge and political engagement, it also can reduce the civic achievement gap or promote civic equality; help create a positive school climate; and lower dropout rates.

A High-Quality Civic Education Program

The Board directs the Superintendent of Schools to develop a high-quality civic education program for grades K-12.

Said program will:

- Conform to state education law and be aligned with state academic standards and curriculum frameworks.
- Achieve the following:
 - Students who have the knowledge and understanding of and are able to think critically about American history and democracy.
 - Students who are empowered to: critically examine the positive and negative aspects of our civic and democratic values (including those principles enumerated in New York’s education law), explore the different meanings of these values across history and cultures, and make a conscious choice to commit to these values.
 - Students with the skills to have meaningful, inclusive and respectful dialogues about difficult political and social issues and who are willing to work collaboratively to address them.
 - Students who are engaged on civic issues and have the skills and willingness to participate in politics and in the community.
- Identify specific courses within the K-12 curriculum in which civic education and government will be explicitly and systematically taught and encourage the integration of civic education into other subjects as appropriate.
- In addition to classroom instruction, incorporate several of the following learning opportunities and activities:

- Discussion of current local, national and international issues and events, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.
 - 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.
 - Extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities.
 - Student participation in student government and school governance.
 - Simulations of democratic processes and procedures.
- Be implemented in an environment characterized by respect for human dignity, trust, hope, joy and the belief that each of us can learn; and in a climate that is conducive to helping each person reach his or her full potential.
 - Take into account the work of the District’s original Civic Values Policy Committee and subsequent research, as summarized here. The proposal for creation of the policy and the efforts of the original committee were based on the work of Dr. R. Freeman Butts (1980). Dr. Butts is the former President of Teachers College at Columbia University. Dr. Butts (in agreement with John Dewey) proposed that the basic purpose of public education is to prepare students to be responsible citizens in a democratic society.

Subsequently, the 22 values specified in the original policy have been reformatted within the Polarities of Democracy model (Benet, 2006, 2013). The model was developed by Dr. Bill Benet, who first proposed that the district adopt the policy and served as a member of the original committee. The framework used for the model is based on the polarity management concepts developed by Dr. Barry Johnson (1996). In the Polarities of Democracy model each polarity element has both positive and negative aspects, and successful management of the polarities requires maximizing the positive aspects while minimizing the negative aspects.

The Polarities of Democracy model incorporates all 22 of the committee’s original values as either explicit elements of the polarity pairs or implicit commitments, behaviors, or attitudes necessary for the effective management of the specified pairs within the model. The original values that are implicit within the Polarities of Democracy model are included below under specific pairs of the model, with some of the original values found under more than one of the polarity pairs.

The Polarities of Democracy Model

Freedom – Authority

Patriotism, Giving Your Best Effort, Responsibility for One’s Self, Respect for Self, Imagination, Personal Empowerment

Justice – Due Process

Respect for the Rule of Law, Patriotism, Honesty, Imagination, Inquiry

Diversity – Equality

Respect for Others, Kindness and Caring, Cooperation, Patriotism, Respect for Self, Inquiry, Personal Empowerment

Human Rights – Communal Obligations

Respect for Others, Patriotism, Responsibility for One’s Self, Inquiry, Personal Empowerment

Participation – Representation

Respect for Others, Kindness and Caring, Cooperation, Reasoned Discourse, Advocacy, Patriotism, Giving Your Best Effort, Responsibility for One’s Self, Respect for Self, Honesty, Inquiry, Personal Empowerment

Policy Implementation and Evaluation

Guidelines

The Superintendent will develop regulations for the implementation of this policy. The regulations will reflect the objectives of the civic education program. The regulations will develop standards to evaluate the success of the program and this policy. The District will provide adequate resources, including appropriate professional development, for the successful implementation of the program.

Accountability

The Superintendent will develop and implement an accountability system for the civic education program, with measurable goals and benchmarks for schools, staff and student.

Evaluation

To ensure that said program is implemented with fidelity, annually in July, the Superintendent shall provide to the Board of Education a consolidated Building-level and District-level evaluation on the effectiveness of the civics education program and of the implementation of this policy. Such evaluation will include a review of the resources used to implement the program.

The Superintendent will meet with District-level and Building-level staff to review the evaluation’s findings and to recommend changes needed to the program, or its implementation, to improve student civic knowledge and engagement.

The evaluation report will be made available to district staff, families and students.

The report will be included as part of the Superintendent's accountability system.

Note: Prior policies, Policy Manual, Values Policy (November 7, 1991), revised; Policy Manual, Values Education Policy (August 20, 1998), revised. Adopted July 24, 2014 pursuant to Resolution No. 2014-15: 80

References and Resources

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