

AGENDA ITEM

54-111 MAY 10 13

DATE: April 30, 2013

TO: Members, Board Committee on Operations
Members, Board of Trustees

FROM: Joseph Dunn, Executive Director/CEO

SUBJECT: Support Position for Civics Learning Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This agenda item seeks approval to support three legislative measures promoting civics learning and engagement among the state's approximately 6.2 million K-12 students and 2.3 million civil service employees. (California Department of Education; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)

On February 28, 2013, Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, joined by special guest Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, addressed over 200 lawmakers, government officials, business and labor leaders, representatives of the State Bar and other justice partners, teachers and students regarding securing the future of California.

The Civics Learning Summit was the result of the Chief Justice and a Committee of civic leaders, including the State Bar, examining the successes and barriers to increasing civic engagement and literacy in the state. The Summit also featured a "Call to Action," where the Bar presented Members of the Legislature who agreed to author legislation.

Senator Leland Yee introduced SB 619 requiring the State Department of Education to develop and make available online a state employee civics orientation on federal and state government, and supervisors of newly hired, promoted, or reclassified employees to certify annually that the employee has completed the civics orientation.

Senator Marty Block introduced SB 696 requiring the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to report to the Legislature, and recommend to the State Board of Education for adoption, a project-based assessment (rather than a paper-and-pencil based exam) measuring civics learning objectives.

Assembly Member Joan Buchanan introduced AB 137 requiring the Instructional Quality Commission, an advisory board to the State Board of Education, whenever revising the history-social science framework, to receive input from civics learning experts and consider how civics content should go beyond content knowledge to include the

application of that content to develop competencies and skills needed for civic engagement.

American leaders have recognized that one of the most important purposes of educating the nation's residents and citizens is to protect and strengthen democracy. Informed students, residents and citizens are a safeguard against tyranny and dictatorship and vital to a functioning democracy.

BACKGROUND

SB 619 (Yee): State employees: training: civics orientation. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, who is elected by voters, leads the State Department of Education (SDE) and together, they are responsible for administering K-12 public education programs.

The California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) has responsibility for all issues related to state civil service employee salaries and benefits, job classifications, civil rights, training, exams, recruiting, and retaining. Existing law requires CalHR to devise plans for and cooperate with appointing powers and other supervising officials in the conduct of employee training programs so that the quality of services rendered by persons in the state civil service may be continually improved. (Government Code §19995) Existing law also authorizes CalHR to prescribe regulations and conditions for the purpose of meeting the needs of the state service for continuing employee educational development, the upgrading of employee skills, and improving productivity and quality service.

Approximately 22.2 million individuals in the United States work for the state and federal government. With only a third of Americans able to name the three branches of government, there is no better group to understand and defend the rights and obligations afforded by our Constitution than civil service employees.

SB 619 requires the SDE to develop and make available online a state employee civics orientation on federal and state government by January 1, 2015, that would provide a basic understanding of the responsibilities and operation of the three branches of government and the importance of civic engagement and include practical examples. The orientation would be updated as necessary. The development of the orientation would be funded through private funding. The bill also requires the appointing power or supervising official for an employee hired, promoted, or reclassified after July 1, 2015, using existing processes and resources, to certify annually to the CalHR that the employee has completed the civics orientation.

SB 619 would make California a leader in civics learning and guarantee that employees working for government would be better informed of the functions of government, empowering them to participate in, strengthen and protect our democracy.

SB 696 (Block): Project-based assessment: civics. Current law requires the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to report to the Legislature and recommend to the State Board of Education for adoption, by October 1, 2013, a method for increasing the emphasis on student mastery of standards in science and social science through the system of public school accountability (currently the Academic Performance Index (API) or by other means. (Education Code §52052.9) The API is currently heavily weighted towards assessments in English language arts and mathematics.

The requirements of state assessments and the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) largely ignore civics learning in favor of concentrating on reading and math. In a 2006 study by the Center for Education Policy, of 299 representative school districts in all fifty states, 71% of the surveyed districts reported they have reduced instructional time in at least one other subject to make more time for reading and math.

The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics report found less than 30 percent of fourth, eighth and 12th grade students were proficient in civics. NAEP also documented declines in the overall civic knowledge of high school seniors between 2006 and 2010.

SB 696 seeks to build upon the current law by ensuring that K-12 students have acquired a grounding and appreciation for the processes of state, local, and national government so that they can fully engage as residents and citizens. The bill would require the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, by July 1, 2015, to report to the Legislature and recommend to the State Board for adoption, a project-based assessment to measure, through the school accountability system, the following civics learning objectives:

- a) An understanding of the relevance of public policy.
- b) The structure of the federal, state, and local governments.
- c) Both the California and United States Constitutions.
- d) Requires the project-based assessment to use an approach that engages K-12 students in learning essential knowledge and skills through a student-influenced inquiry process structured around complex questions and carefully designed projects and tasks.

AB 137 (Buchanan): Pupil education: civics. California K-12 student curriculum is based on content standards. The curriculum frameworks are guidelines for implementing the standards that are developed by the Instructional Quality Commission and approved by the State Board of Education. The history-social science standards were developed in 1998 and the history-social Science framework was last revised in 2005. A review and update of this framework was underway and nearly complete when the state suspended the process on July 28, 2009 due to fiscal constraints.

In recent years, civics learning has been increasingly pushed aside in schools, particularly with the recent attention around the development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement

National Task Force reported that, “Despite all of the energy being devoted to the development of Common Core Standards by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the standards released in 2010 do not address the content knowledge students need for democratic citizenship or global participation.” In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Education released a report titled *Blueprint for Reform – The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, which called for “a complete education” that includes not only literacy, mathematics, science, and technology but also history, civics, foreign languages, the arts, and other subjects.

Today, what remains in the history-social science curriculum is a course on American government that spends minimal time on how individuals can – and why they should – increase their civic participation. This is despite results from a recent April 2013 survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), which reported that sixty-one percent of public school parents say including civics in their local school curriculum is very important. [Latinos (64%) and blacks (60%) were more likely than whites (49%) and Asians (42%) to say this.]

AB 137 amends the requirement that American government and civics be included in the framework of all history-social science courses and encourages the application of this content to promote civics learning and engagement. The bill also requires that any time these frameworks are amended, to receive input from civics learning experts for the purpose of integrating civics learning content, concepts, and skills at all appropriate grade levels.

Finally, AB 137 requires the Instructional Quality Commission to consider that the civics learning content, concepts, and skills to be taught include, but not be limited to, a basic understanding of the responsibilities and operation of the three branches of state and federal government, the importance of civics engagement, and the competencies needed to become effective and responsible residents and citizens in the 21st century.

DISCUSSION

One can debate the importance of knowing the name of the U.S. or State Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, but there is little doubt that understanding concepts and principles of the Constitution such as checks and balances and the importance of an independent judiciary does make a difference.

The state and country suffer from a severe deficiency in civics knowledge. Reasons for concern are reflected in repeated surveys, including the Annenberg Public Policy Center surveys elicited from national samples of the U.S. population in the past decade. Among the findings are:

- Only one-third of Americans could name all three branches of government; one-third could not name any.

- Just over a third thought that it was the intention of the Founding Fathers to have each branch hold a lot of power, but the president has the final say.
- Just under half of Americans (47%) knew that a 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court carries the same legal weight as 9-0 ruling.
- Almost a third mistakenly believed that a U.S. Supreme Court ruling could be appealed.
- When the Supreme Court divides 5-4, roughly one in four (23%) believed the decision was referred to Congress for resolution; 16% thought it needed to be sent back to the lower courts.

While the intent of any civics learning is to provide students with an understanding of our national and state governments, civics learning goes far beyond an academic understanding of democracy. The ultimate goal of a civics learning program must be to encourage individuals to actively engage in the practice of democracy.

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement reported in 2012 that the United States ranked 139th out of 172 democracies in voter participation. In January 2013, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement released a survey that showed a clear relationship between respondents' high school civics learning experiences and their knowledge of campaign issues and political participation in the 2012 presidential election.

Civics learning and engagement among the state's K-12 students and civil service employees is critical in ensuring the principles of democracy continue. Support for this proposal would further the goal of strengthening and protecting our democracy and be consistent with the State Bar's statutory authority to aid in all matters pertaining to the improvement of the administration of justice. (Business and Professions Code §6031(a))

FISCAL / PERSONNEL IMPACT:

Any costs for implementing the legislative measures will be covered by private funds and / or state general funds.

RULE AMENDMENTS:

None.

BOARD BOOK IMPACT:

None.

RECOMMENDATION

This agenda item recommends approval of support for legislation that would promote civics learning and engagement among the state's K-12 students and civil service employees.

PROPOSED BOARD COMMITTEE RESOLUTION:

Should the Board Committee on Operations agree with the above recommendation, the following resolution would be appropriate:

RESOLVED, that the Board Committee on Operations recommends that the Board approve support of the proposed legislation to promote civics learning and engagement among the state's K-12 students and civil services employees.

PROPOSED BOARD OF TRUSTEES RESOLUTION:

Should the Board of Trustees concur with the Board Committee on Operations recommendation, the following resolution would be in order:

RESOLVED, that upon the recommendation of the Board Committee on Operations, the Board of Trustees hereby approves support of the proposed legislation to promote civics learning and engagement among the state's K-12 students and civil service employees