



The report concludes with an assertion and an appeal. Citizenship in the American tradition, the report insists, is more than a status conferred. It has always aspired to the much higher level of personal participation, and is a continuing affirmation of the role of the *self* in self-government. But citizenship in the American tradition also carries with it the expectation that we will both enlarge its boundaries and pass it on to our children. We appeal to all Americans, therefore, to broaden our concept of public education to embrace civic learning and engagement.

To order the full report, *Restoring the Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools* (56 pp.), please send \$5 per copy (includes shipping/handling) to AYPF, 1836 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036, or call 202-775-9731. Online version of the report will be available at our website, [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org).

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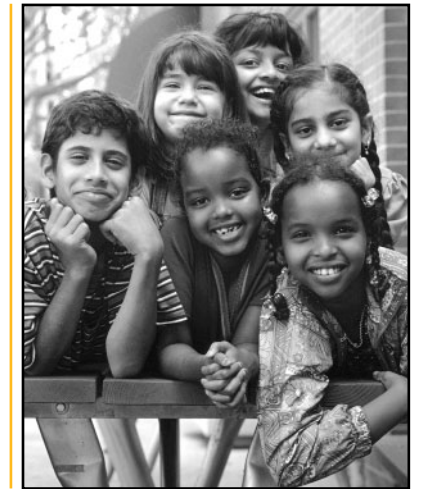
AND



# Executive

## S U M M A R Y

Although the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) refocused a generation-long emphasis on the importance of “core” subjects such as math and reading in our schools, this renewed concern with academics has a blind spot. The opening section of this report, “What Is The Problem?” points to a disturbing imbalance in the mission of public education. It notes that the recent preoccupation of the nation with reshaping academics and raising academic performance has all but overpowered a task of equally vital importance—educating our young people to become engaged members of their communities as *citizens*. The “Telling Evidence” offered by the report points to an undercurrent of apathy eroding civic participation among the young, beginning with voting patterns and extending to a tale of disturbing disengagement from civic and political institutions. A number of assessments, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the International Education Assessment Civic Education Study, and surveys conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) bear out the conclusion that levels of civic learning—and more importantly civic engagement—in the areas vital to the exercise of citizenship are disappointing.



### Restoring the Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools



Reports from many quarters lend credence to such concerns. Since the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, the amount of time teachers spend on social studies, geography, civics, and other related subjects has decreased at the elementary level, while time spent on reading, mathematics, and science has increased. Additionally, time allocated to foreign languages, art, and music has decreased at both elementary and secondary levels.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true among schools with high minority populations. How, the report asks, can schools reverse this pattern, and provide students with an education that will allow them to become well-rounded both academically and civically?

***An Action Agenda.*** Under a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), partnering with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), undertook the task of developing an action agenda to assist legislators, other education policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and citizens to identify ways to help students become both academically proficient and civically engaged. The report offers that agenda in the form of seven propositions. Taken together, they form the skeleton of a step-by-step argument that provides a different perspective and the specific, concrete steps we need to take if we are to educate students who are both academically proficient *and* civically engaged. The propositions around which the report's action plan is fundamentally organized, therefore, are these:

***Proposition 1:*** The business of public education in America is, and should be, to teach young people how to take charge of their own learning and to become responsible, informed, and engaged citizens.

***Proposition 2:*** We must sharpen the mission of our schools to make sure it includes the knowledge, dispositions, virtues, and skills of responsible citizenship.

***Proposition 3:*** Civic knowledge—learning how the community works—and civic engagement—the practice of becoming effective in that process—must become integral to a broadened “core” of learning.

***Proposition 4:*** Civic education, which includes the methodologies of service-learning and character education, has demonstrated success in improving student engagement in school and community life, bolstering academic performance, and reducing negative behaviors.

***Proposition 5:*** Realign education reform efforts to support opportunities of integrated curricula.

***Proposition 6:*** An action plan is required to accomplish the mission outlined in this report. The plan should provide a clear path for educators to link academic subjects with service-learning and character education, or other strategies, in support of greater civic knowledge and engagement experiences for students. The plan should include these elements:

- Expectations for both program and student performance regarding civic education and civic engagement are clearly connected to state or district standards and assessment;
- Supportive education policy at the national, state and local levels that provides a framework for balancing academic performance and civic engagement is enacted;
- A system-wide accountability plan, including meaningful assessments of both student outcomes and opportunities to learn, is implemented;
- Planning and funding for professional development for educators is secured and supports mastery among students of the knowledge and skills required for civic engagement;
- Funding is secured by districts and/or schools to hire a coordinator to facilitate collaboration between the school and the community.
- Active awareness and sensitivity to the role of school culture in academic performance is maintained;
- Commitment to a programmatic approach that focuses on students, their needs, and the needs of the students' community is made; and
- Communication and public relations efforts to inform all stakeholders are maintained.

***Proposition 7:*** Success in all these approaches should be grounded in a collaborative effort that links community resources—schools, families, higher education, community organizations, philanthropic organizations, local government, and the business and nonprofit sectors—in support of student success in civic learning and civic engagement. The main argument of the report is followed by brief descriptions of several programs that have successfully brought together academic learning and civic engagement, followed by a summary of research on school-community partnerships as particularly promising programmatic approaches to launching an action plan like the one offered here.

