

Restoring the Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement

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.

From: *Restoring the Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement in Public Schools*, Bruce O. Boston, American Youth Policy Forum & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Washington DC, 2005, 1-887031-89-8.