



# Creating an Expectation of Service Hearing: Civic Education and Service in Schools

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## **Commission:**

- The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck, Chairman
- The Honorable Mark Gearan, Vice Chair for National and Public Service
- The Honorable Debra Wada, Vice Chair for Military Service
- Mr. Edward Allard, Commissioner
- Mr. Steve Barney, Commissioner
- The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson, Commissioner
- The Honorable Avril Haines, Commissioner
- Ms. Jeanette James, Commissioner
- Mr. Alan Khazei, Commissioner
- Mr. Tom Kilgannon, Commissioner
- Ms. Shawn Skelly, Commissioner

## **Panelists:**

- Mr. Derek Black, Professor of Law, University of South Carolina School of Law
- Ms. Annie Hsiao, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Discretionary Grants and Support Services in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education
- Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Circle), Tufts University
- Ms. Ananya Singh, Youth Advisory Council Mentor, National Youth Leadership Council
- Mr. Alhassan Susso, 2019 New York State Teacher of the Year, International Community High School



## OPENING STATEMENTS

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Well good morning, and welcome to the 13th hearing of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service. Today, the Commission meets to ponder an important question: How can we as a country create an expectation of service in America, and where better or what better place to hold such a hearing than at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library? I do believe it's kind of the grandfather of the national service movement with the Civilian Conservation Corps, and we'd like to thank the management and the staff of the library for their hospitality.

In 2016, the Commission was created amid a debate over whether the selective service registration requirement should be extended to include women after military combat roles were opened to women in 2015. The late Senator John McCain and Senator Jack Reed, seeing an opportunity to promote service over self, championed the expansion of the Commission's mandate to include an evaluation of service in America across all service lines, not just the military. They tasked us with fostering a greater ethos of service among Americans, particularly youth. Now, we know young Americans have an interest in service given their appetite to volunteer. Over 28 percent of millennials report volunteering in 2017, performing roughly 1.5 billion hours of community service.

One of the first steps the Commission took shortly after our creation was to define service. For the purposes of our work, service is defined as a personal commitment of time, energy, and talent to a mission that contributes to the public good by protecting a nation and its citizens, strengthening communities or promoting the general welfare. With that, we circled back to the question of how to get more Americans engaged and inspired to serve. Today, we are here to explore in greater depth how to create an expectation of service in America by expanding and enhancing civic education across the country and including service as school curriculum.



Now civic education was not an issue that we as a Commission sought to examine. But as we traveled around the country during our first year talking with everyday Americans and experts alike about how to create a culture of service, time and time again people recommended we look at the decline of civic education in the K-12 classroom. Like service, the term “civic education” has countless definitions. The Commission views civic education as more than a collection of facts about U.S. history and government but rather education that seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to understand their civic roles and responsibilities and, should they choose, address personal, community, and national issues.

Our research has shown that by and large, students across the country are not receiving a strong, foundational civic education. Although 44 states and the District of Columbia require students to pass a civics or U.S. Government course as a condition of graduation, the length of these courses, their curricula, and their instructional standards vary greatly among schools, cities, and states. Civic knowledge is critical for our democracy, but too few Americans receive high-quality civic education in the United States.

Studies show that a robust civic education improves civic health in many ways: by increasing voter participation, reducing dropout rates, and encouraging constructive community engagement. Students who receive effective civic education are four times more likely to volunteer and participate in their communities. To create an expectation and a culture of service in the United States, it is vital to incorporate meaningful civic instruction and service-learning opportunities into the educational experience at all levels.

So, our distinguished panelists this morning will address arguments about the impact a strong civic education can have on future generations, and how enhancing a service and social service in school curriculum starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school and beyond can have lasting effects. I hope they will address this as directly as possible in their oral statements and in their responses to Commissioner questions.



So, let me welcome our panelists. We have with us Mr. Derek Black, Professor of Law at the University of South Carolina School of Law; Ms. Annie Hsiao, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Discretionary Grants and Support Services in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the U.S. Department of Education -- that's quite a title; Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Circle) at Tufts University; Ms. Ananya Singh, Youth Advisory Council Mentor, National Youth Leadership Council -- who, by the way, is missing her last day of school to be here with us, so thank you; and Mr. Alhassan Susso, 2019 New York State Teacher of the Year, teaching at International Community High School in the Bronx, New York.

Before we begin, let me explain how we will conduct this morning's hearing. The Commissioners have all received your written testimony, and it will be entered into the official record. We ask that you highlight the summary of your testimony in the allotted 5 minutes. Before you, you will see our timing system. When the light turns yellow, you have approximately 1-minute remaining, and when it turns red your time has expired. After all testimony is completed, we will move into questions from the Commissioners. Each Commissioner will be given the same 5 minutes to ask a question and receive a response. Depending on time, we'll proceed with one and possibly two rounds of questions. Upon completion of Commissioner questions, we will provide an opportunity for members of the public who are in attendance to offer comments either on the specific topic addressed today or more generally on the Commission's overarching mandate. These comments will be limited to 2 minutes. The light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds remaining and red when time has expired.

We are now ready to begin with our panelists' testimony, so I'd like to begin with Professor Black. Professor, you are recognized for 5 minutes.



## Mr. Derek Black

Thank you for having me and the opportunity to present testimony orally and in writing. I just want to highlight a few points from my written testimony -- I don't want to summarize or be redundant -- and then add one new one at the end. And some of them, I guess, are sort of redundant of your opening statement, so I guess we were thinking alike in that. Hopefully it's a good thing rather than a bad thing.

But we are not just experiencing service crisis. We have citizenship crisis it seems to me at this point, in terms of what the average high school student and the average adult knows, or rather doesn't know, in terms of the most basic facts about our democratic system. That's putting aside the question of even knowing anything or understanding how that system works or the purpose behind it.

Second, getting that knowledge alone would be insufficient to cure the civics problem. Citizenship ultimately requires an ability to engage those concepts; to apply them to the issues of the day and ultimately make intelligent judgements, and this includes, obviously, jury service, voting, and the public dialogue that shapes our discussions and our political responses to them. This is quite a tall order for anyone to take on, but this is certainly the one that our nation's founders in the late 1700s, and then again following the Civil War intended for us.

Thus, this means that civics education must be both knowledge and skill based, and that means a substantive program, which means that the design and measurement of that program becomes quite complex if it's both knowledge and skill based. It can't easily be measured by multiple choice questions that I myself also administer. So, I'm not here to critique them, but they do, obviously, have their limits.

However, this idea that it needed to be knowledge-and-skills-based and broad-based then moves into the problems of what a program might look like. Those issues must ultimately be accounted for and serve as points of caution in regard to any conditions that a federal program



might put on the receipt of federal funds. And unfortunately, at least over the last 20 years, Congress has been well-meaning, but has a pretty poor track record in terms of education funding and the conditions and the schools' ability to actually comply with them. I don't think that schools are intentionally not complying. There are probably inappropriate measurements set in Washington D.C. and too high of expectations that too often have set up our schools for failure. Just by one measure, 80 percent of our schools in the nation were set to be labeled as failing or some form of corrective action in 2011 and No Child Left Behind. That's not a good thing.

Finally, the federal program regardless of the conditions must be careful in terms of how it distributes those funds, otherwise it runs the risk of reinforcing geographic inequality that being between rural and cities, and also fiscal inequality between poor and wealthy neighborhoods. So ultimately, the devil will be in the detail if what we are trying to do or what you and Congress are trying to do is create broad-based access for those places most in need.

Finally, and this, I guess, is the additional point, this Commission is obviously not tasked with solving all the nation's civic ills. But fortunately, it seems to me that the programs it is considering at least overlap with and are broad enough to begin to think about those broader ills. Unfortunately, I fear, however, the challenge is both so large and part of such larger cultural challenges that they cannot easily be fixed, maybe not even in our lifetime. I don't offer this to dampen your spirits, but simply to urge you to be bold in what you consider to do. It seems to me that going small on this idea is, I hadn't planned to say it, but probably a waste of all of our time. So, I do encourage you to be bold, because, ultimately, I think what you've taken on is core to the health of our democracy, both in our lifetimes and those that follow us.

Thank you.

**The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.



Ms. Hsiao.

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Thank you. Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for inviting us to join this important conversation on civic education and service in our schools. Just to briefly summarize my remarks, which I'll be referring to throughout, I'd just like to quote our founders who understood the importance of this issue to the sustaining of our young nation. So, John Adams said, "You will ever remember that all the end of study is to make you a good man and a useful citizen." George Washington also said that, "A primary object should be the education of our youth in the science of government. In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important, and what duty more pressing than communicating it to those who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the country?"

At the U.S. Department of Education, we also value and see the importance of civic education. And our Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, in 2017 also said the same. She said that, "Civic education is not just an elective. It is essential for the health of our democracy. That means we must address the current and alarming lack of basic knowledge about our system of government." She also continues to say that education is necessary to equip citizens with the basic knowledge of our history, our institutions of government, and our political processes. Without that basic knowledge, there is little hope that the students of today will be engaged citizens of tomorrow.

But, unfortunately, like my colleague already mentioned, the statistics are quite challenging. In 2018, the Annenberg Constitution Based Survey found that just 32 percent of Americans were able to name all 3 branches of government. The NAEP exam of 8th graders show that only 23 percent were actually proficient on the NAEP exam for civics. According to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, only 17 percent of college students knew the source of the phrase, "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people."



The Department of Education has historically supported civic education and primarily through their grant programs. So, from 2001 to 2010, we provided about one billion dollars to local school districts all across the country for every state. What this did, through the Teaching American History Program, it gave investments to school districts to work with government scholars and professors from universities and nonprofits all across the country to provide content rich, professional development for K-12 teachers. Organizations, like the National Archives, Library of Congress, National Counsel for History Education, worked in tandem through these grants. They brought teachers for summer seminars, as well as throughout the year course training. In terms of impact, some evaluators have seen that the Teaching American History trained teachers were able to use more primary source documents and provide more rigor to the study of American history and civics. Case studies have also shown that some students that have been taught by these Teaching American History grant recipients were able to go into advanced placement government and civics courses by greater numbers.

One highlight of the program is George Mason University. That grant recipient was actually able to create a National Clearinghouse on history education, sourcing about a thousand different projects from the TAH program to provide for public dissemination and consumption; lessons, resources, and research that they were able to do. And again, that's one thousand projects on this National Clearinghouse.

Under the newly authorized Every Student Succeeds Act, there are now two grant programs focused on American history and civics, one of which is the National Academy's Program, which focuses on Presidential Academies and provides 2 to 6-week seminars for teachers to be able to participate. The other is another academy focused on high school students; for them to learn about the Congressional branch as well, in same sort of format of 2 to 6-week intensive academies. The other program is the National Activities Program, and that is similar to its predecessor, the Teaching American History Programs, which provides professional development to teachers all across the country.



One of the grantees I'd like to highlight there is the Center for Civics Education, which is providing workshops and actually immersing teachers by providing them opportunities to visit NPS sites, like Gettysburg and Fort McHenry, so that they can actually go out to the places where the historical events actually happened. The center is actually developing a series of eight webinars, as well as videos online too, to provide sort of virtual education for those who aren't physically able to be there in person.

So, another highlight is the Gilder Lehrman Institute, which was a recipient of the National Activities Program. That program has provided PD for about 250 teachers in 3 school districts in California, 2 rural and 1 urban, to reach those who are hard to reach in those urban settings and rural settings. And so that one also will be able to provide some sources online, so that, again, those resources can be made more widely available. So, the Department has done some significant work in supporting teachers with the training and tools that they need to engage students more effectively in the study of American history, geography, and civics.

On a personal note, I'm a daughter of immigrants who both came to America, because they saw America as a place where values like equality, freedom, and democracy mattered. My mother and her family came to this country from Laos, escaping from communism. Some of them risked their very lives to come here, because they knew that America stood for freedom, democracy, and equality. She instilled in me a love of and respect for this country by giving me at a very young age books on George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. She was, in effect, my first American history and civics teacher. So, I am so thankful for the countless other teachers who have been able to inspire that commitment to both local and national service.

In closing, I just wanted to share a story that I thought of in preparation for this hearing. When I worked at the National Diet for the Humanities. I actually went on an onsite visit with the first lady, Laura Bush, to Edna Karr High School in Louisiana sometime after Hurricane Katrina hit. She said, "America is defined by its trials as much as by its triumphs." She pointed to the Dorothea Lange haunting "Migrant Mother" photo. The nameless migrant mother, you could see on her face that she was creased with stress and worry. She was nameless, but she also



humanized the Great Depression, the economic downturn that caused one in four Americans to be unemployed. She pointed out how many of the boys and girls that grew up during this time went on to play a major role in World War II and have been called the Greatest Generation, because of their great sacrifices. The suffering of those young people that those young people went through defined them and the character of the nation. Rather than becoming cynical or self-protective after suffering enormous loss, the Greatest Generation decided to answer the call to serve instead. The students in that classroom that day were survivors of great loss as well and were still in the midst of recovering from Hurricane Katrina. And they said they could relate to how that generation must have felt. But more than that, you saw in their eyes and on their faces the comfort that came from knowing that someone else had been there before them and had not only survived but went on to do great things in service to others.

So, when we study American history and civics, we not only learn about the heroic endurance of individuals, but about our ideals. The United States has always been more than a mere address or geographic location. It is, in its essence, an idea. And our nation has never been united by common ties of blood or race or religion, but by our devotion to these shared ideas first set forth by our founders and now carried forth by us.

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Dr. Kawashima, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. I'd like to thank the Commission and the excellent staff for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Circle and Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University. We



represent an expertise in civic education, and we have been focusing on this topic for nearly two decades. And I'm really lucky to be here, so thank you.

My colleagues and I really applaud the Commissioners' important work to undertake the comprehensive review of all forms of military, national, and public service in the United States. Like you, we believe that providing meaningful and impactful civic learning experience for all students is essential. Failing to do so has dire consequences not only to those individuals' prospects in life, but also do our society at large. When only privileged are equipped to voice their views and leverage their rights to make change, we end up with a lopsided system where those who already have wealth and power are only going to have an impact. Our republic was designed to be self-governed by all people, not just some people. And I believe providing comprehensive civic learning opportunities to all students is one of the most important steps that we can take to achieve that founding vision.

K-12 civic education is an essential pathway to active citizenship, and approaches like civic learning are important tools to help young people develop a sense of civic responsibility, identity, commitment to their community, as well as a love of learning. And to that end, we have three recommendations and ideas that come from our research.

First, we must start introducing civic education in elementary school, and that means curriculum and democratic engagement experiences. We find that the starting civic education through American government and civics classes in high school is important, but simply insufficient. By the time young people reach those lessons, there's simply too large of a gap to fill by those couple of classes that students can take. In order to address that gap, we must start with young, as young as kindergarten age, who are encountering their first site of democracy, by learning with others and starting with a citizen's life in learning in the classroom with others under the same rules, same expectations, and shared learning. And in that setting, they're learning to be responsible members of the community and learning to care about others and serve others, while also learning to be an academic learner.



Second, modern standards requiring or encouraging comprehensive civic education improve practice. However, unfunded and underfunded mandates won't move the needle. In 2012, Circle convened a prominent Commission on new civic education and voting, which found that teachers must have four things in order to teach high-quality civics in their classrooms in their school. First, they need resources such as time, funding to purchase curriculum, and a budget to do field work.

Second, they also need adequate training in best practices of engaged learning, including service learning but also things like controversial issues discussion. Our experience has shown that the presentation preparation must go beyond merely having a textbook or PowerPoint presentation. Teachers are most successful when they're able to experience the pedagogy they're trying to learn, such as having a discussion about the current topics or participating simulation or doing service-learning pedagogies together. While this type of training does require more resources and time, it's worth it according to our experience directly working with some states that are implementing those strategies and doing research. Teachers also need a strong school community connection, especially when they're trying to do service-learning activities, and importantly, they need protection from backlash when they try to teach about some of our difficult issues, whether it's about our history of the United States or about a community.

Third, service learning in particular can have a significant and positive impact, but we need to really follow the best practices of service learning, and we must restore the funding that was really supporting both research and practice of service learning. In our review of research and our own research, we find that the high-impact civic education pedagogies, like I said earlier, service-learning resources also apply. One of the things that was really important to the service-learning community was the Learn and Serve America Act, which really provided a rich array of research, as well as building of capacity in our districts all over the country to do service learning. The funding was unfortunately eliminated in 2011. Teaching about American History was also another great program that's no longer available to these districts. I urge you to consider restoring these federal funding mechanisms so that these districts and the teachers that are really



trying to do the great work and important work of preparing all young people for active citizenship have adequate resources and training.

In closing, we are at a time when our civic health is badly bruised. The prospects of knitting together our fraying democracy may well rest on the next generation. As you develop your final recommendation, we hope you will keep in mind that embedding civics in the curriculum empowers students with agency in their own communities and it prepares them with many skills that are valuable in civic life but also in workforce, such as: teambuilding, collaboration, critical thinking, public speaking, and communication. We need to return educating young people for democracy to our schools and support our educators in their efforts to do this work in a way that reaches all students in all communities.

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Ms. Singh, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

First, I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to be here and share my perspective as a young person. I know I may not have the same kind of qualifications and years and years of experience as the other esteemed panelists, but I think I have a unique perspective that shares; that gets to the heart of what we're trying to do, which is empowering my generation.

I got involved with NYLC through my teacher, my eighth-grade teacher, who taught me about service learning. In this class, I was challenged to learn about what issues were directly impacting my community, and we designed projects that addressed those issues and were able to really create an impact. I really dove into service learning that year, and I also dove into civics



outside of my classroom through my passion for environmentalism. I realized that that was an issue. In particular, the issue of climate change; that was an issue that really affected me personally, and that I had a deep passion for. So, I turned to civics as a way to address those issues and to make them relevant in today's world and to learn how I could most effectively have an impact.

I was asked by my teachers, by my supporters, by the people in these organizations, "What is your voice? What do you have to say to the world? What are you passionate about?" But so many students are not even asked. So many students are not given a youth voice in their education, are not empowered to share their thoughts and their experiences and their perspectives on the issues that are going on around us. And I think that is a crucial part of what effective civic education is about, which is about listening to youth voices and elevating the issues that are relevant to young people today and giving them the resources to create real impacts.

With the National Youth Leadership Council, we have been leaders in the field of service learning for many years. NYLC relied heavily on the funding from Learn and Serve America to grow to the height of the organization, where they were able to empower youth through developing capacity in schools, supporting districts, and advancing the research that has been done on what makes service-learning high quality. I'm sure the connection is quite clear about the connection between civic education and service learning. Service learning allows students to be active participants in their education and to create real impacts in their communities at the same time as receiving these essential skills and knowledge.

NYLC developed the K-12 practices for high-quality service learning, which include meaningful service, intentional link to curriculum, reflection, diversity among participants, youth voice, mutually beneficial partnerships, ongoing progress monitoring, and appropriate duration and intensity to meet community needs and outcomes. They developed these K-12 standards for high-quality service learning by going through an intensive process of developing all the research, convening leaders in the field, and having it reviewed by panels of students and educators across the country. They've developed these best practices, as well as resources that



allow educators to design and assess projects to be more effective. But NYLC was only able to implement these high-quality service-learning standards and help support educators in the field to implement these things and create really effective programming that impacts people like me by having proper funding that allows them to do that. And it also is incredibly important to make sure that our educators are supported, and they have the capacity to implement things successfully.

If service learning is not done correctly, it can actually have a negative impact on students in the classroom. It can create negative impacts in the community by having youth assume the needs of a community, rather than address the real needs of the community, and there are several other consequences that could come of not having properly implemented service learning. But if we are able to create really impactful programs, like NYLC has done in the past, it's a pride to affect every student in every classroom.

Civic education and service learning are tools that can be incorporated into public education, which allow not only students who have the ability to work on projects and engage in issues that they're passionate about outside of the classroom, but to impact students at every level and not just students who may have other access to resources. And I would like to stress the importance one last time about having youth voice involved in the process every step of the way. There's no better way of being empowered and learning about the systems that impact our world than being directly in the process and being asked about what you have to offer and why you want to change the world.

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Mr. Susso, you're recognized for 5 minutes.



## Mr. Alhassan Susso

Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the Commission for having me here and thank you for this meaningful work that you are doing. Because there's nothing more worthy in a country than service.

I'm going to start by looking at education at a broader level. Martin Luther King said that education is twofold: number one is to develop the mind; and number two is to develop character. And that's what civic education also entails. Civic education, I will add, is also twofold. Number one is to be knowledgeable about the issues, but at the same time, to take action once you have gained the knowledge. So, in thinking about taking action, according to the Annenberg Institute, one-fourth of United States citizens cannot identify one of the five freedoms of the First Amendment, and I believe that these five freedoms are at the core of what this country is about. And only 20 percent of our fellow citizens can actually name all the 3 branches of government.

On the other hand, the Woodrow Wilson Institute did a study in which they gave citizens the test that immigrants take before becoming citizens. Out of 40,000 people who took this test, the majority of the citizens actually failed the test across the 49 states. Only Vermont was able to have the majority of their citizens actually pass the citizenship test. Kudos to Vermont, because that's where I went to school.

Now when I think about this, I reminds me of what it means to be in a democratic society. When my students and I read Washington's Farewell Address, it always brings up an interesting question: What if Washington served a third term or a fourth term? The trajectory of our entire country could have been different. When we think about young democracies around the world and the challenges they are facing today, sometimes we overlook the fact that what we have today, I would argue, happened by chance. And it is therefore incumbent upon us to no longer take it for granted, because we are at a crossroads in this country. And it is important



more than ever for our citizens to become more informed about the process and the systems that are in place, so that we can become participating members of our democratic process.

How do we do this? Well, we face two challenges first. As the Chairman mentioned, 44 states do provide civic education. But New York, for example; students don't receive civic education until twelfth grade. Well, that is only 1 year before graduation. Most of them are 18 years old by then. They are about to vote and be part of this process. What if we start in elementary school? By the time they get to middle school, or even high school, the trajectory could be very, very different.

Now in thinking about this, I believe that we face two challenges in civic education. Number one, we don't have a national standard that, basically, states and schools could actually follow. Therefore, every district approach this differently. Secondly, our textbooks are not uniform. Now I'm not saying that everything has to be the same, but certain things are important in order for every citizen across the country to understand. Number one is that this is a country not founded on common culture, not founded on ethnicity, not founded on religious war. We were founded on a collection of values. Those are things that every citizen needs to understand in order for it to work the way that it's supposed to.

How can we go about ensuring that educators are properly supporting their students in the classroom? Well, I believe a few things need to be in place. First, number one, we need to create a federal institution or a federal program, which basically supports civic education across the country. Now there are private organizations that are doing this, such as iCivics and Gilder Lehrman. They do an excellent job, but I believe that a government program would take one step further in mandating some of these critical issues that are affecting us in the classrooms today. Second, I believe that we need to provide a federal grant because I do a lot of civic education programs with my students in the community, but we do face a lot of challenges.

You know, some of our most successful projects have been private grants that I have received in order to do those projects; for example, doing the teen pregnancy project in the



Bronx, which was extremely crucial. Because, you know, when we do service, many times, as some of my colleagues have mentioned here, it sometimes it becomes meaningless, because it just becomes a project rather than being attached to the curriculum that is being taught. So, when my students discovered an epidemic of teen pregnancy in the Bronx, they decided to do something about it. And what they did was they partnered with organization called Sauti Yetu, and by doing so, we were able to conduct forums across the city. And by doing so, we were able to create nine-part educational video series, and now that video series has been used by over 350 families across the Bronx.

So now because of that, a lot of my students, after graduating that year, went on to work in nonprofit organizations, because they were able to develop the sense of service. And I was reminded a couple of days ago when I had a dinner with one of my colleagues, who is traveling abroad to teach for a year in Prague, and she reminded me that when we were teaching together 6 years ago, her most vivid memory was when we went out into the community to do the Dream Act Project. I remember that day one of my students saying, “But I can’t go out there. I might get arrested.” This student had come from a country in which when you go out to protest -- not even protest, by the way -- but you go out to inform people and it might go against the government, well at the very least, you’ll be arrested. You might even end up getting killed. But by being out there with her, she’s able to understand that we don’t live in that society. We live in a community in which every citizen has a right to express their opinion. But how do we do that is something that needs to be taught. And once it is taught, we need to encourage our citizens to take action.

And I believe, finally, in establishing a national awards program in order to be able to identify crucial and meaningful projects across the country. Now this is not only for recognition, but what this program does is it builds a network of teachers across the country. And those teachers could collaborate and create standards and objectives, as well as curriculum that could be a model for the entire country. I’m only saying that, because, as the New York State Teacher of the Year working with teachers from all over the country, we were able to establish issues and fight for things that affects not only New Yorkers, but also teachers all across the country. I



believe that if we are able to do this, we will hopefully begin the process of moving us forward into a much brighter future, so that our democracy will be preserved for generations to come.

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you. Great.

Well, thank you all for your thoughtful, written testimony and your insightful comments here this morning. We'll now begin the first round of Commissioner questions, and I'll put myself on the clock for 5 minutes.

Mr. Hsiao, you stated Secretary DeVos's feelings and commitment toward civic education. You referenced the Teaching American History Program, which kind of was unfunded and went away in 2010, and then commented on the two programs that were authorized by the ESEA act. Are those two programs funded?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

They are.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Can you say to what level, and how are those two programs being implemented?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Sure. So, per year, since 2016, it's about \$5 million dollars per year. But as you know, under ESEA, the new sort of framework was to block grant to states under Title IV, A. And so, supporting American history and civics is an allowable use of funds under Title IV, A.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

So, the programs themselves are not directly appropriated. It's an allowable use for money that a school district would otherwise be receiving.

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

That's right. The wisdom of Congress was to decide to move toward that direction.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

So, I guess that raises the question do you know how many schools, or actually, your school districts are utilizing that money for civic education vice other critical needs within the schools?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

I don't know at that level, because it is block granted to states. So, then the states are able to disperse funds to the local districts. But we can certainly try to assess that data.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

So, I guess that's one of the underlying issues we always tend to wrestle with. The federal government is reluctant to dictate curricula to the states, as education is under the states' domain. However, as Professor Black talked about, we use a series of carrots and sticks, usually unsuccessfully, in trying to entice school districts to do certain things with the promise of money, whether it was NCLB, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top funds, you know, certain programs which don't always result in the gains that we would hope to achieve.



So, I would ask, with Secretary DeVos's stated commitment to civic education, what programs or activities has the Department undertaken under her leadership of this administration to try to raise the awareness and encourage civic education across the nation?

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Certainly. So, we have tried to pursue creating more public awareness, talking about the issue. Even her remarks at that event was her desire to actually speak to this issue, because it is sort of the power of the bully pulpit to be able to raise public awareness about these ideas and the importance of such things. Under the authorization of ESEA, however, there was a movement to block grant these funds, so that states can determine and define for themselves what they would like to prioritize based on their local needs.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

So, do you see, not unlike Race to the Top, but do you see any utility in a standardized or recommended model curriculum that would then be associated with specific grant dollars to school districts nationwide?

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Sure, so we have actually tried to disseminate information about best practices, highlighting the work of our grantees; so even through the National Clearinghouse on history education and through all of the online resources that are available that, like I said, a thousand projects that have been made available there. And so, we certainly want to broaden the awareness of the resources already out there in the field and that are accessible.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

It would seem that even though there is this stated support of increased civic education curriculum across the country that we come up against this issue, and I've seen it in my own local school district, where there's only so many school hours in the day. And there seems to be a greater emphasis placed on STEM education, whether that's right, wrong, or indifferent. But as everybody's being prepared to be college or career ready from science, technology, engineering, and math curricula, other programs are being crowded out.

So what do you believe is the role of the federal government in trying to strike the appropriate balance in making sure that all of these critical programs, whether it be STEM or arts programs or vocational programs or civic education programs, have an opportunity to be had by all students?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Absolutely. So, as you know, again, going back to our authorization, we have not been authorized to sort of mandate or require things for this purpose. However, we have been trying to make efforts to broaden awareness, provide technical assistance to states to help them know what allowable uses of funds are. And even through these two programs now authorized under ESEA, we have been trying to reach out to the field and help them understand the best practices out there and provide them technical assistance more directly.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

And just so I'm clear, so the block grants that are permissible uses, how much is appropriated towards those block grants?



## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

You know, I don't want to estimate off the top of my head, but I can get back to you on that.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

All right. Because you said that the Teaching American History Program was basically a billion dollars over 10 years, right?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

That's right.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

So about hundred million dollars a year, and I think that where we're at now is a much smaller number that could potentially be used. So, thank you. My time has expired.

Vice Chair Gearan.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Well first, thank you all very much. What an inspiring panel, and I thank you all so much for your written and oral testimony.

Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg let me begin with you, if I might, as such an admirer of Circle, to get your perspective on the question of citizenship and civic education.

Professor Black started us out talking about the, "citizenship crisis," I think you said we have, and you referenced this sort of lopsided system that we have.



So, it's my understanding that since 2015, 17 states have put together testing for students based upon citizen -- a so-called citizenship test, and 8 of them require a minimum level to graduate. Is that an approach that you would commend to states or to this Commission to think about? Is that the best entry point, given all the great work of Circle and your research?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you for the question. I would personally disagree that that is the best approach. I do think there are ways in which the citizenship test can be an introduction to conversation about citizenship education. However, if we use that as an exit point to civic education by requiring it as a high school graduation requirement, we may be actually telling many states implicitly that you do not have to do anything before that point. That all we have to prepare students for is simply knowing some important, but rote facts about the founding of the United States and what the roles of citizens are.

What I believe about civic education, it's much more than learning about the facts and understanding the systems. It's also about trying out living in a democratic society. As I was talking about kindergarten as a site of democracy, I truly believe that the young people need to experience what it's like to have a voice and responsibility before they start to understand and be able to use the systems that's given to them as their rights and actually make change that's good for their community and for the wellbeing of all.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Thank you for that.

And, Mr. Susso, can we get you into this as well, as the New York State Teacher of the Year? How do you hear those advances of this requirement of states for this citizenship test? Is that a method that you would recommend as the New York State Teacher of the Year?



## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Yes, with one caveat. Once we mandate these standardized tests, because there's so much negative connotation around standardized testing, I fear it might lead to people not approaching this in an as meaningful way as it deserves to be. So, in that sense, I would incentivize it instead of actually mandating it. Now in New York, we have a variety of approaches in terms of requirements for graduation. So, we have your Regents, which, you know, is a standardized test across the state. But we also do have project-based learning. So, by giving schools choices in terms of how to go about implementing it I believe would be far better than making it one size fits all.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

And from a student point of view, Ms. Singh?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I think standardized testing is definitely something that receives a lot of resistance, and I feel like people, if that is the only requirement for civic education, they will only prepare for a test. So, I would echo what they just said.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

All right. Thank you very much.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Vice Chair Wada.



## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you very much and thank you for being here this morning.

I just want to continue with Ms. Singh from your perspective as a youth. We've heard from other panelists how important civics education is to this democracy and the future of it, and you are a representative of the future. So what would you share with us in terms of how can we best engage with youth in America to make sure that they understand the importance of civics, and how can we create sort of this groundswell that youth in America recognize that they're being, in some cases, some would say denied the education that they so richly deserve?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I would say the most effective way to do this is to get to the heart of what students care about and address civic education by making it very personally relevant to the issues that are of concern to our generation. In my case, it would be if I was supported to do things that I'm doing around the issues of climate change that are so relevant to our generation, or the issue of gun control. That was a topic that came up in all my classes last year. And it was something that people were hungry to hear about. They were hungry to learn about, like, what can we do to impact the situation?

So, if civic education was brought in to meet those needs and to reach us where we are on the issues that we're already passionate about, I think students will be very receptive. Yes.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

All right, thank you.

Mr. Black, quick question. From a legal perspective, I'm wondering. Obviously, education funding across this country is not equal. We have school districts that are, in some cases, lacking the resources they need just for a basic, minimum education across this country. Is



there anything legally, and I think you had said in your written testimony that in terms of civic education, where this is sort of the key to our democracy that there should be sort of a minimum expectation that the national government should require of states in this particular case, where we normally don't require state and local governments to do things for education?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Well, when I suggest being bold, I don't suggest trying out new legal theories. I mean, it is my first conviction that our Constitution does give Congress the authority in this area. Not to control all of education, but some basis. That said that has yet to be recognized. And therefore, for Congress to act, a court has to sanction it. Those actions seem to be dangerous.

On the other hand, when we're talking about money, Congress can do anything that it wants. Just by example, someone was arguing about a federal amendment for the right to education a decade ago, and I was giving testimony there. And this one person was all fired up about an amendment, and you would have thought it would have been on board with that. So that's fine, but there is not a single thing that an amendment protecting education can achieve that Congress can't do tomorrow if they just wanted to spend money on it.

So ultimately, I would worry too much about legal limits of the Constitution if Congress is willing to spend their money. Congress can achieve whatever it wants. It's up to the states whether they take that money or not.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you.

Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, quick question building off of Mr. Black's thoughts. The provided money; one of the concerns about the federal government providing funds sometimes is the implementation of those funds and the perception that sometimes funds are not implemented



in an effective way. Through your sort of study of this, are there ways that we can minimize some of those concerns that you would share with us?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Absolutely. Thank you for that question.

I think when there is sufficient resources to really try to monitor the progress of that work is, as Ms. Singh was stating, both in terms of implementation and outcome, the students can demonstrate ideally through how they can actually participate in democracy. Those are particularly good measures. So, if you can also look at just how the pedagogy is implemented. For example, in the state of Florida we have both standardized testing that's more rigorous than the citizenship test, but also a survey of students that can really ask students, "What are you experiencing in the classroom?" Do you feel like you have a voice? Did you engage in this type of pedagogy? And that gives districts and teachers in the state some good ideas about what is really going on according to the people that are actually receiving the education, and we can use measures like voting and volunteering participation later in life to look at the long-term outcomes as well.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Barney.

## **Mr. Steve Barney**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of our expert panelists.



Professor Black, earlier some of my colleagues were talking about using the established citizenship test as perhaps a teaching vehicle for civics education, as well as to perhaps assess the states' performance in meeting certain types of goals. Back in 2018, a group of students in Rhode Island actually filed suit, because they believed that they had not been adequately prepared by the state to function productively as civic participants. They hadn't been given the necessary skills, if you will.

So, as we try to think about how the federal government could affect quality civics education across the country, do we look at things like this Rhode Island lawsuit as being an indicator of things that are not being done particularly well? Are there particular measures of effectiveness that we could use when we think about the value of civics education to help continue strong federal funding for such programs?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

As others said, I would be quite reluctant to try to measure effectiveness through a test. As I said earlier on, those reflect inequalities as much as they do knowledge, teaching the test, all of those problems. I think I would echo what Dr. Ginsberg was referencing earlier in terms of looking at long-term outcomes. I think we could try to see whether they are producing the ultimate outcome, which is a better citizenship outcome. But I think it's very difficult to ultimately just reduce it to a test, and so I would not. And there's a baseline, and I think we all put caveats. There's a baseline knowledge that we all have or should have, but, you know, keying conditions to that almost creates a race to the bottom as opposed to a race to the top. At the same time, if you make them really hard in terms of content and standards, everyone is sort of going to be practicing the test. And so, I would be skeptical of moving in that direction.

## **Mr. Steve Barney**

Thank you.



Ms. Hsiao, when we think about how the Department of Education administers grants for educational funding of things, is it even helpful on the subject, like this idea of civics education, to think in terms of metrics or performance metrics as a meaningful way to determine whether federal funds are being well spent by the states?

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

So, we currently actually do ask grantees to report annually on sort of metrics in terms of what kind of outcomes they've seen, both qualitatively and quantitatively. And so, we do gather that data from grantees, which is how I was able to see that students from the TAH Program have been able to actually enroll in advanced placement government civics courses in greater numbers. So, we do ask for that data from them.

### **Mr. Steve Barney**

Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thanks.

Mr. Allard.

### **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the panelists, and we're delighted to have you here. As I was listening to the conversations, I was thinking there are presidential candidates that are most fortunate that Ms. Singh is not running for office this year. I have great confidence in the future with such dedicated young people. Thank you, Ms. Singh.



Dr. Kawashima, the reports that you have generated, from those could you share with us what evidence you have that suggests a correlation between civic education and/or service learning and interest in military, national, and public service?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Sure. I think the evidence related to service learning generally points to a few things. One is the development of solid civic identity, meaning that young people might enter into the life of service as a personal choice or into choice in career, such as nonprofit. Unfortunately, I have not seen evidence that the service learning can directly link to entry into military service, as of yet. And I also would mention that this is not just that it's not existent but, actually, the research has not been done actively in-service learning for about the last 10 years or so because of the funding cut. So, you've probably noticed that my review literature really abruptly ends around 2008, and that's related to that.

There have been more advances in related pedagogies, like action civics where, like Ms. Singh was referring, sometimes students choose an issue that they care about, and they can act on those issues by looking at the issue, researching it, and reflecting on impact. Those kinds of studies are starting to track some of the longitudinal outcomes, such as are the students that were previously in this curriculum voting, and are they potentially going into, for example, municipal government; running for offices, things like that. And more research really has to be done to really understand what it is those curriculum and practices are able to change, not just in terms of knowledge, but mindset. And collectively for the community, when all students are able to learn equally, how is it addressing our imbalance of power; for example, representation in municipal government or state legislative body. And those are the kinds of outcomes that we need to see that takes, you know, 5, 10 years from implementation, but I think from what I said about all students in all communities, I mean that seriously. And in order to look at the outcomes of that goal, we need to look at representation as well as outputs, such as how many teachers have been trained? It's important, but it's not sufficient.



## Mr. Edward Allard

Thank you, and have you also identified any barriers for entry into public service?

## Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg

Of course. There are many ways in which young people, especially coming from marginalized community, immigrant community, and low-income communities have faced; various, traditionally. It starts with just living with conditions that do not embody the principles of democratic engagement. If, for example, you're living in a low-income neighborhood, you may be facing many ways in which the principles of democracy are not lived. You may be denied services for no good reason. Your potholes may not be filled. You may be treated unfairly in your own school, because of your racial backgrounds, your income background, or class. And that sort of idea starting very early, students and young people start to learn what it means to live in a democracy and how that can apply differently to different people of different background. And by that time students reach high school age, for example, young people already learned a lot from their experience of civic life as a private citizen of different backgrounds.

And this is why I say starting American government class in high school, and history, is often too late. By that time, we really have created mental barriers, as well as a skill and knowledge barrier that students from those backgrounds haven't been able to be socialized into. Nobody in their family may have voted. Nobody in the family may have been able to volunteer their time, because of their economic conditions. So, there are many barriers, and it doesn't end. Of course, there's many ways in which young people from different communities, marginalized communities face barriers to voting. And whether they can volunteer their time at no compensation is another issue.



## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you very much, Doctor. It's hard to achieve self-actualization when you're trying to survive.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

## **The Honorable Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Dr. Davidson.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Thank you. Thanks to everybody for coming to today's fantastic panel. It's a topic that's near and dear to my heart as an educator myself.

I want to start with Mr. Black. Thank you for your testimony. Something that you said stuck out to me. You said we were in crisis, and that we should be bold as a Commission. Can you give us some indicators of what you mean when you say that we're in crisis?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Well, I don't want to reiterate what others have said, but obviously just with basic knowledge that students have, and adults have is low. Voting turnout is low. Some of them may have been handed bread at the food line, at the voting line, but in New York, it was not unusual to have 85 to 90 percent voter turnout in the late 1800s. Of course, women and African Americans were not necessarily voting, but at least of the eligible voters there was an enormous turnout. So, we have seen a period in which people do come out to vote, and now we have one in which they do not.



But part of what I was also alluding to in that is a lack of ability to interact with the issues of the day in a responsible way. There's a tremendous literature on critical media studies. Without getting into the politics, because all politicians are accused of false narrative and false information and that just seems to be a part of public banter, the studies of children's ability to sort of sort between intentionally created fake news and real news are very disturbing. And I suspect that adults would do no better, but we don't test them. And so, when we move beyond the basics of what the constitution says or what the constitution requires, a democracy requires, and ask them to engage with the issues of the day, they need a set of skills to be able to do that; to sort information. And even if there were not unreliable sources out there, there are so many sources out there. And that sort of basic ability to synthesize information and respond to it is something that is critical. I suspect, although I'd be interested to hear from Ms. Singh and the other professors, because I assume that their students actually are engaging with these issues at a deeper level and understanding it. But, you know, the average student, the average classroom, maybe even the average teacher sort of struggles with that. So, we have that additional barrier for society.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

And in your mind, the link between civic education and potentially turning this crisis around is? How would you draw that line?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Yes. Maybe I can respond to your question and some of the others at the same time. Ultimately, when we try to get to this question of how we create a federal program, we talk about tests. Ultimately, the word that I've heard a lot of folks talk about is experience and exposure. That, ultimately, children simply aren't getting experiences. You don't test experiences. You ask did you go to the FDR Library today. Did you guys have a debate today? So that ultimately, I think that one way to think about this issue is what are the experiences that we are going to buy



for our children, right? What are the debates and times that we're going to carve out during the day to allow our children to have this? Ultimately, whether our children at the end of that conversation think democracy's a good idea or a bad idea or they like, you know, President X or President Y is beside the point. What is important is that they had the experience of thinking through that issue, and that is an experience that takes adults to kind of keep them on track along the way and give them some tools to deal with those conversations.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Thank you.

Mr. Susso, sort of picking up that thread, what are some of the best ways to sort of evaluate the degree to which some of the goals that Mr. Black is articulating were actually successful with the students, besides just like, you know he didn't say it this way, but did you just have a good time at the FDR Library? Or, you know, how did that affect you, and what did you learn?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

You know, brain research has shown that students learn best when they are emotionally attached to the issues that they are evaluating. So, it's one thing and fortunate that I've gotten the opportunity to bring my students to FDR through the grant that they offered me. They're actually coming here this Saturday, and graduating seniors, we always come here once a year. Because, you know, when we spend like a couple of weeks studying FDR's tenure, it's one thing to read in the documents, and then it's another thing to be in the environment. When we are here, we do document activity in which they have a guided practice. So, it's not necessarily we're going to FDR, and we had a good time at the FDR. But that we are here continuing what we studied in the classroom.

And that's what I mean by when schools have grants to be able to expose students and to echo what Mr. Black said, you know, experience and exposure are critical in terms of students



having a sense of better understanding of what they are learning. And one more thing is that when students are emotionally attached, they become interested.

And then the question is what are we doing in the classroom to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all students? Because what my students might be interested in could be very different from what Ms. Singh might be interested in.

I partnered with this organization called Center for Open Pedagogy. And what they do is they come to my classroom for a couple of weeks, and their entire focus is civic engagement within the community. You know, I teach in District 7, which is labeled as the poorest congressional district in the United States. So, most of my students come into school with food stamp cards. They're so proud of it. But because there are some immigrants, they don't even know the concept or the background behind food stamps. So, what I did with this organization that year was we did a project on food stamps, and my kids could not believe learning what the food stamp problem was all about. But it didn't only end in the classroom. They were able to take their findings and to go back into the community to educate their parents. And there's of course a big tension between parents and kids, because one of my students who graduated last week, that was the week that she went out to get a job. Because she did not want to continue the perpetual cycle of intergenerational poverty. But it was a huge tension between her and her mom, because the mom felt that if she got a job, they're going to lose their food stamps. But she said that's not the life I wanted to live. So, it is important then when we think about what civic education is, it has to be relevant to the community that you are teaching in, and you have to find what your kids are interested in and tie that with the larger civic education.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Thank you.

I yield my time.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Ms. James.

## **Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our panel for sharing your time with us today and your testimony and your ideas.

I'd like to continue a little bit with the discussion of quality service-learning projects. I'd like to start with Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg. So, you talked about service learning needs to be high quality in order for it to be effective. And, Ms. Singh, you mentioned that as well. So, my question is what are the criteria for high quality service-learning experiences, projects? Who should set that criteria? Ms. Singh testified that the NYLC, I think, made 12 recommendations for successful or high-quality service learning. Who should set that, and should it be standard across the country? Should it be based on the project that is being considered? For both of you, I'd like to have your thoughts on that.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Sure, I can start. I think there are ways in which the standards can be set, so that it meets both the rigor and flexibility standard, so to say. So, Ms. Singh said or found it in the research findings that targeted what made impactful service learning, and I fully agree with those recommendations. However, I think those recommendations also have to be supported by the buy-in from the community of professionals and educators and organizations that support that.

So oftentimes, figuring out how to come to consensus on which part of the standards can be common core, so to say, of the standards, and which part can be optional or dependent upon the context of the setting in which service learning is implemented may be one approach to do



that. Whenever there's just a set of recommendations put out from, for example, an organization like our own, like Circle, we don't expect that to be effective.

We have to come up with these standards and agree to abide by that as a community, as practice of civic engagement, as well.

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

So, the standards that I was referring to were developed by NYLC 10 years ago. So, they have not been updated since, and they were developed through a whole process of going through different panels where educators, students, administrators, researchers were all brought together to develop them and test them and create the language together. So, I think if we were to create a new set of standards, it would definitely have to reflect more recent research. I think that is a huge gap that there hasn't been much work done on service learning. So, I think, definitely, do more research, and then, like, doing another process of implementing panels or some other process to connect to students and teachers across the community.

## **Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you.

Dr. Black, continuing on my colleague, Dr. Davidson's discussion with you, I'm going to ask the last part of her comment and the last part of your testimony, which encouraged us to be bold. Give us a bold recommendation. What's yours, if you were asked? Well, I'm going to ask you. One big bold recommendation; what is it?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Well I've thrown that on you, not on me.

I mean, our schools across this nation are underfunded. If you look at Bruce Baker's work, you know, the gap between basic adequacy and what a lot of schools have, it's tremendous



in the lower spending districts. I suspect some of the schools we've talked about struggle with nutrition and teacher turnover, all of these things, and to add a set of requirements that ignores that, I think, is not going to go far.

So, part of being bold, it seems to me, is for Congress to fully fund whatever the substantive programs the experts behind me say work. Not to say, "I'll give you a nickel on the dollar," or, "I'll give you fifty cents on the dollar." I mean, suburban, wealthy school districts will take that and run with it. Our poor and rural communities will not see that.

The other theme I think that would be bold is to fully invest in the staff necessary to implement such a program. I have been a peer reviewer for the Department of Education on grant programs that came in. One of the most distressing things I saw was needy districts that had a need, but didn't know how to articulate it, didn't know how to create a sophisticated grant. And then wealthy districts, large districts, I won't name them, with lots of central administration that just know how to write a grant, and when you sit down and look where you get points on a grant and get one, sophistication will get you 75 percent of the way there. I mean, you know, this is true in much of life. I'd say that the basics get you there.

And so how do we respond to that? We have good staff in the Department of Education that can help districts formulate programs consistent with best practices. That can help them rewrite their grant if necessary; the State Departments of Education do the same. And I also used to be a staff intern at the Department of Education, and I know the Magnet School Program, for instance, which is underfunded as well in my opinion. But there are some wonderful folks in all the departments that deal with Magnet School Programs. And when less sophisticated districts submit an application, they get feedback, and that application doesn't become final until there's been some back and forth.

So ultimately, it is fully funding programs and investing not just in the school district, but in the staff, central staff at the state and federal level that can help them create great programs. Then, finally, to make the leap of faith; what we have seen from our teachers and from our



students is that all the requirements from the state Departments of Education and all the requirements from the Federal Department of Education produce a number of unintended consequences; the opposite of what we wanted when we started out on day one. So the leap of faith, I think, is to trust the professionals, to trust the wonderful staff the Department Education can hire, to trust the wonderful support staff the state departments can hire, and ultimately to trust our universities who trained civics teachers and the teachers themselves that they're just as interested in seeing our democracy succeed as any of you are. And they don't need us beating them over the head. They just need us to support them.

### **Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. Haines.

### **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Thank you very much, all of you, for coming today and giving us your time and thoughtfulness on this.

Just following on Mr. Black's comments, Dr. Kawashima, I was wondering. You talk about the partnership that Circle engaged in with Florida, Illinois, and Massachusetts in implementing those service skills, and I guess one question for you is just, first of all, do you agree with Dr. Black's comments about the importance of federal funding in this area, and can you talk about whether or not in the context of those states, you saw federal funding having an impact or it could have made a difference, and if so, how? Because I think one of the challenges



is federal funding may be the right answer, but how do we design it in a way that's going to be most effective to address the kinds of challenges that we're seeing right now?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you.

In both of those cases, which started in 2012 in Florida's case, in Illinois, 2016, neither of those states received federal funding that I know of. They relied upon state funding in Florida. In the case of Illinois, there was no state budget at the time of the passage of the law. So, they relied on the community of philanthropy and even private companies to implement those

laws. What was important in both of those states was really building a community of leaders that the district level, and sometimes at those Blue Ribbon Schools, of civic engagement, in Illinois's case, to create a community that continues to learn together and have a sense of solidarity and commitment to making sure that all students are learning. And that really enabled, at a relatively low cost in both cases, creation of a lot of resources that were consistent with the state's unique framework and standards, as well as the law, and provided opportunities for districts to really increase the capacity to teach civics at all grade levels. And in some cases, in Illinois, they're starting to cross disciplines. They're really taking advantage of things like inquiry-based learning and service learning as something that can be incorporated in middle school.

So, without very large funding, both of those places are very successful in ensuring that there was a buy-in from the community, and frankly that is the most important thing that we've seen. It's that they feel that the teachers feel they have a stake, and students feel that they have something that's meaningful to do in their civics classroom. So simply creating the law and implementing top down, regardless of federal funding or not, will likely not be successful. Those two states that were successful really started with the grassroots; asking different stakeholders, "What do you think would do something good for the civics in our state?" And what was really, in a way, consistent with the state's culture; Florida really tests a lot of students consistently, so



they went with that. Illinois does not, so it does not have standardized testing. But it built a really creative accountability system, like incorporating how students and teachers can be in the classroom together in active pedagogy using a framework called the Danielson Framework, if you're familiar with that, instead of standards in teaching civics.

So they created different ways to still maintain the monitoring and accountability without lots of funding, but they did both need some basic funding; not in tens of millions, but a few million dollars for making sure that there were a large number of teachers who got in-person professional development, often multiple days.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

So, you think federal funding is important, but it doesn't have to be huge is sort of what you're saying, and it needs to be targeted and support the issues?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Yes, but both of those things that had this generous funding that was in the \$1 to \$3-million range, both of them don't have a sustainable way of doing that. So, I think federal funding can create that foundation and in a potentially much less and ongoing basis. But they will always need to train new teachers. There is high turnover in civics teachers in all states that I know of, because it can be a difficult subject to teach both content-wise but emotionally too. Many teachers are dealing with difficult conversations about race and inequality and politics in our country, and they get burned out. So, we'll always have new teachers that need training.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Yes, it sounds like more than the roughly \$5 million that's available in discretionary grants.



## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Oh, absolutely, yes.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Certainly, it's a challenge based on the conversation.

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Kilgannon.

## **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank y'all for being here. And our thanks to the institute for hosting us here. This is great conversation, and, Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, I'd like to continue with you, please.

In your testimony, you talk about the civic education, and in one paragraph, you mention both civic participation and political engagement and the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. I'd like to explore that with you. We have civic education. We've got service learning. We've got political activism. What are the dividing lines between each? What are the bright lines? And the question is in the context of youth who are still in school under the care and tutelage of adults who we think are to impart knowledge, not necessarily use them to advocate for a political or a policy outcome. So, what are the dividing lines between those three things?



## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you for that. I think it is important that schools impart students with critical knowledge, both concrete and abstract, at the rigorous level so that students are fully ready to take actions. However, I don't generally draw a line in when young people become a citizen or a leader. I think there are 10-year-old citizens who are fully involved in activism that are fully ready, and I don't necessarily think all 18-year olds are suddenly ready to be active citizens either. So, I don't necessarily think age or exactly whether they're enrolled in a school or not defines if somebody can be a political activist or become a civic leader, Ms. Singh being a good example being a high school student now.

So, I'm not sure if I have a good answer for you. I do think that the schools and teachers must commit to making sure the students develop an understanding of multiple perspectives from a rigorous and factual standard, so that the teachers are never just talking about one perspective or even unintentionally indoctrinating students. But many research studies show that the controversial issue discussion, even about the politics, does not usually turn students into one side of the debate or the other. What it simply is often doing is making sure the students understand where they're coming politically and ideologically, and that gets them to be maybe committed more to the cause that they believe in. But usually it does not turn students from, say, a democrat to a republican or vice versa. Research is pretty clear on that.

## **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

So, if somebody, a 10-year old or a 15-year old, they're showing signs that they're politically engaged, should that political engagement be guided by teachers or by parents?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

I often think of civic development of young people as a multi-stakeholder endeavor. It involves media, community organizations, parents, neighborhood, as well as school, because



students are only spending about one-third of their day in this school, and oftentimes just maybe one hour or less of that time in civics class. There are things that civics teachers can do within their classroom to instill students with attitudes, skills, and knowledge, but the rest of the job has to be carried by the community of other adults and even peers who are making sure that students have a voice and they feel that they're prepared and have the skills to make positive change.

Now what's important in civic education is that I think students have enough skills and knowledge and awareness of the options as a citizen to take what they feel is right. So, some students may end up taking political activism as a way of making their voice heard and contributing to the community. Others might go into a life of service, and they may never engage in political engagement in that concrete way. And I think as a society, we have to give different options to students who feel passionate about different issues and different causes.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

My time is almost up, so I'll follow up next round.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Mr. Khazei.

### **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Thank you all for joining us and for your dedication to educating our country's young people. I want to start my saying, Ms. Singh, you are definitely clearly qualified to be on this panel. You are a great example that young people aren't the future leaders; they can be leaders



today, if they're empowered and given voice. So, it's great to have you with us among all these great people. So, my question is for you and for Mr. Susso and for Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg.

Across the country, high school students are graduating from high school. They have just finished what is commonly referred to as "senior spring," meaning that often if they are going to college and they got accepted, they'd look at the last semester to sort of party and celebrate. If they're going to work, then they've been thinking about, "How do I get a job?" So, one of the things that we've been looking at as a Commission, as a way to take advantage of the service-learning movement, action civics, what you've done with NYLC, is should we encourage schools across the country to think about having a semester of service? It would be service learning, not just doing service projects, but really learning. It could be senior spring. It could be at some other time.

And so, the question I have for you, starting with you, Ms. Singh, is what do you think about that idea? Is that a good idea? Could it work? What would be good to make it work, or is it a bad idea? What would it do to students? You know, one of the challenges as well, if you want to take AP courses, you might want to use that time for an AP course. But as a thought in terms of extending this opportunity to high school students across the country, what do you think a sort of semester of service learning?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I really like the idea. I know that at my school, students complete, like, a capstone project during that time of year, but it isn't necessarily tied to service. It's really just a project, a time to do whatever you're personally interested in. And I think if you're able to attach that to service learning, I think that could be a very powerful experience. I also think having something set like that, a semester service -- this would be a federal semester of service. Would it be across the board?



**Mr. Alan Khazei**

It would be local schools that decide how to do it.

**Ms. Ananya Singh**

Okay, yes. But I think something powerful about service learning is it would have that opportunity for people across their backgrounds. So, like at my school, in my area, we have the resources to do projects like that, but it could be a good way to implement and create opportunities in schools who may not have the resources.

**Mr. Alan Khazei**

So, there would have to be resources tied to it is what you're saying?

**Ms. Ananya Singh**

Yes.

**Mr. Alan Khazei**

Not just for more advantaged districts, for lower-income districts.

**Ms. Ananya Singh**

Exactly.

**Mr. Alan Khazei**

Mr. Susso, what do you think?



## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Yes, I'll follow up on that. As someone who teaches twelfth grade, I'm well aware of the challenge of spring semester. But for my colleague and me, what we have done is that we created this concept called a 30-day challenge for our seniors. So, 30 days before graduation, they have to create a project in which they are basically impacting their community. And this is usually tied to whatever it is that they have learned throughout the year.

So, the example I gave earlier about the food stamp example; service learning is only meaningful when it's attached to the curriculum. So, it just did not happen out of the vacuum. That was part of the unit called, "Should Government Have a Role in Regulating Income and Equality?" So, students exploring and tackling those difficult issues about what the role of government should have led us to this discussion about what possible responsibilities are also in that process. So, by doing so, when students create their 30-day challenge, their projects vary; anywhere from, you know, combating bullying to homelessness to volunteering at animal shelters. These are things that they are passionate about. So therefore, the last month of school, instead of just being senioritis, they feel that they are doing something meaningful and they're also leaving a legacy behind. And that is a way to keep students engaged throughout the year.

## **Mr. Alan Khazei**

So, you're essentially doing a variation of what we've been talking about already. And what has the impact of that 30-day challenge been in terms of culture of the school, what the students learn, how they finish school?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

It has become a culture in which students look forward to it. Some projects are about mentoring the younger grades. So, they're going to ninth and tenth and eleventh graders talking to them about the importance of being active members of the school community. That is



something that exposes the other grades to what this project is about. So, when students are coming into twelfth grade, they already are aware of it and are actually asking for it.

And the other thing that I do in my classroom, which is my last unit along with the 30-day challenge, is globalization, which basically goes along with identifying a global issue that students work on tackling. Now the goal for this, my colleague and I, we know that they will not be able to solve these problems within 30 days. But at least it gives them a starting point, and hopefully, as they move on, these are issues that they already started building on, and hopefully they can continue to work on as they progress in their education and life journey.

## **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I see that my time is up, but could I give up some of my time for the next round so we can hear from Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg on this question?

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Sure.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you, and I'll be brief. Tufts University actually had one plus for a gap year, which allowed students to spend one year before they actually commenced at Tufts University to experience a year in service. And what we know from the preliminary research we have so far is, like the veterans that come to Tufts University too, those who experience these intense experiences with service really come in with much better readiness to experience college.



They're more mature. They have experienced real life and how to solve problems and how to seek resources and leverage resources. I think those are some of the assets that we really need to help develop for all students. And having seen how the gap year can do benefits to our students, I highly recommend a semester of service for high school students as well.

### **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Thank you.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. Skelly.

### **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you all for being here with us.

Mr. Susso, it was mentioned, as Teacher of the Year -- and as a New Yorker by birth; the New York wing of the Commission, I think we're all seated right here.

### **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Excellent.

### **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you so much for being with us.

It was mentioned that your position as a Teacher of the Year takes you out, has you making connections with teachers across the state. So, in that experience, what's your appreciation as to how unique the challenge can be for more disadvantaged, or school districts



with less resources than others? And how would any federal program from on high, or even a state-wide program for that matter could be funded by the federal dollars, try to level the experience for students in less-resourced districts when it comes to getting them civics learning and service learning?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Thank you. That is a very important question and having the opportunity to travel the state this year, my biggest appreciation is the ability to see education from a 360 angle; 360-degree angle. And whether it's in the South Bronx, or whether it is in a rural district or suburban district, what I have learned is that we all have similar challenges. Now the question becomes; for me, the big takeaway is the idea of having practitioners at the table. That's why I am extremely grateful to be here, because that is something that I've heard all across the state. The idea of having practitioners at the table when these policies are being made that their voices are being heard, because they are the ones who are actually going to implement whatever it is that the proposal is going to come out to be.

And to come back to a question that was asked earlier about how do we make service-learning meaningful, well one of the ways to do it is to have practitioners actually develop the standards. Because then the other teachers will be far more receptive if they are aware that these are things that my colleagues actually have developed. And in terms of funding, that is a huge challenge almost anywhere I have been. I remember at my school 2 years ago; we were funded at 80 percent. And that led to a huge burden for me and my colleagues, because a lot of our afterschool programs were not able to take place. And I run the student government at my school and that year I had to do it as a volunteer program because I wasn't getting paid for that. But a lot of my colleagues did not have that luxury, so therefore they had to go out to get part-time jobs in the evening instead of spending afterschool time with their kids to be able to support them in whatever it is that they need. And I always have this trouble whenever I hear this word "achievement gap," because I believe it's a false notion. It is not an achievement gap. It's an



opportunity gap. If we are able to fund schools equitably, I think that we will be able to close that achievement gap at a far faster rate than we are able to at this point.

## **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you.

Professor Black, this is where I'd like to transition to you. I'm very much taken by your point, and I'm going to wear it out in the months to come, about what experiences are we going to buy for our children. I think that's a brilliant encapsulation of what we're talking about. What's the legal wherewithal to be made -- talking about Congress being able to do a lot of things just through its power of the purse? So how can we address the opportunity gap that Mr. Susso has described and stay legal in terms regarding this?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

As long as Congress isn't simply adding mandates onto the existing funding stream or just making up new mandates and claiming the Fourteenth Amendment power to do so, I don't see that there are any legal constraints. I mean, there's obviously a curriculum provision that dictates that the Department of Education shall not dictate or get involved in curriculum. But all they got to do is say except for this program. I'm not saying that's a good or a bad idea, but when it comes to funding, it's a contract. Whatever the parties will agree to is fine. The only limits that I would see would be Congress, and this goes back to the *Sebelius* Affordable Healthcare Act case would be congress taking existing funding streams and adding new conditions to them that weren't there originally. So, if one began to tinker with the elementary and secondary education act, you know, there could be issues with that as a multiyear program. But, again, I don't really see limitations.

One thing that I didn't speak to, which I think could be a good motivator that doesn't cost anything; so, in ESEA it is up to states' enormous flexibility as to how they determine what a



good school or a bad school is. Test scores have to be part of that, but there's also other indicators. School climate can be part of it. Discipline can be part of it. I mean, you could simply insert as just one starting point for free that the percentage of students who participate in some sort of service learning by high school or by the eighth grade, whatever; Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg will tell us, that could be a factor that counts towards a good school. That would then incentivize school districts across the state to provide more of that with their own money. They wouldn't be obligated to, but they would have the option to. That would also mean the states would need to revise their ESEA plans, but that's sort of the low hanging fruit. How far that would go, I don't know.

## **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thanks.

So that concludes round one. If you guys are still doing okay, we'll move into round two. I'll put myself on the clock again for 5 minutes.

So, we heard during the first round about the importance of perhaps a standardized core curriculum but allowing for local flexibility to address the issues and the needs of the students. Recommendations on what that basic core curriculum might look like; so, is it the NYLC criteria? Is it the Sandra Day O'Connor Act, which incorporates civics education into the English language arts program? Thoughts on what that core curriculum, what the basic would look like; and I'll start and go quickly down the line.

Professor Black?



## **Mr. Derek Black**

I'm not sure I'm confident to answer that. I would just echo, and I think it's consistent with what Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg was saying. She talked about local buy-in, and I said go bold and trust. I mean, ultimately that trust is that the local community can come up with something for itself that works. Beyond that, I think it's beyond my expertise.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. Hsiao?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

So, something that I can draw from my prior experience coming to the Department is I was in the private philanthropic sector. And one of the things we did is we set pretty broad parameters and let the field generate their own ideas and innovations in terms of addressing specific needs from the community that they see. We then matched that with the needs that we heard from market research of what exactly they would be addressing in terms of gaps. And so, I think that's probably a better kind of design, method, or way of going about it to be really field generated and field driven, so that we're really not duplicative or overlapping with any other programs that already exist and are already doing good work and have good case studies then to leverage.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg?



## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. And, again, I'm not fully prepared to answer this question either, but I do think there are ways in which we must make sure that students from all communities understand how to use the systems. And that does begin with understanding and knowing about the system; our three branches, and not just sort of knowing the vocabulary, which can of course, start in ELA courses in elementary school, but really how to use that. So that means that we have to really push toward experiencing and practicing those skills, whether it's through simulation, like mock trial, or through service learning. I think we do really have to go to that level, instead of just stopping at these are the things the students must know. So that's one thing I would add.

The other thing that's in experimentation stage, but I think we should also push since we're being bold here, I think is to really think about the opportunities to integrate civic learning in other disciplines. I don't think service learning is a responsibility of social studies alone. It's for the community, but as well as STEM's job to really think about, as an Engineer, why shouldn't you need civics skills to listen to the community, understand the needs, and implement solutions that actually work for them. So, I do think every professional, every discipline needs to be teaching civic components and principles. So, knowledge is one thing, but also the attitudes and principles and ethos of service to others too.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Ms. Singh?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I know that in New Jersey, we don't have any civics standards outside of our social studies and history standards; so, making sure that civic standards are outside of any one



discipline. And then also, you can have general guidelines that have been developed through nonprofits in the field, like NYLC's, but also create allowing the resources for communities to generate their own standards. Because, oftentimes, communities might not have the resources to take the time to develop a set of standards that works for them, but if you are able to resource that, I think you can create some really great standards.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Great.

Mr. Susso?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Yes, I believe we could do both; by both I mean federal and state. However, I think it would be useful to identify outstanding practitioners of civic education across the country and assemble them in order to devise those standards. And by doing so, not only would it be more receptive in the classroom by other teachers, but we're able to see how civic is being taught across the country and at the state level too. You know, in New York we have what is called a Master Teacher Program, in which we got outstanding teachers across the state, and they work on specific curriculums or specific issues. So, having those kinds of groups would be essential in creating new standards.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Great. Thank you.

Vice Chair Gearan.



## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me build on your question. This has been such a rich conversation, civic education, the benefits for service and for citizenship. I would like to go through the panel as well and ask you where you think voter registration fits into that; the question of to what end we place this civic education import. Is it for the service component of it? Is it so that we know the freedoms? All the deficits have been observed, but where would you place the priority in civic education for voter registration?

Mr. Black?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

I think it's obvious, it goes without speaking that it's very important that that happen. I think what's more important is to instill, going back to Mr. Susso's point, the character of the students and the values; that the students want to do that. I mean, I feel like I'm becoming the sort of no standards, no mandate guy today, which is very unlikely since I'm a law professor. But on this particular issue, I think it is about character. I think it is about experience, and we hope as best we can that our students register and vote. Australia mandates voting; forget the registration. I was listening to a Freakonomics podcast last night. As the economist pointed out, why in the world would you want someone to vote who didn't want to vote; who didn't follow the issues? I think it's ultimately about building the character and trusting and hoping that it works out, because we are a democracy.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Yes. Just to clarify, it's not a requirement. But where in civic education would you place the importance of voter participation?



## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

So, I think it is important to be able to teach about democratic processes, institutions, civic responsibility as well. In terms of dictating what that looks like, whether that's the outcome of voter registration I'm just not quite sure, because I think from our perspective, you know, we really want communities to decide for themselves what the needs are in that community. It might be that voter registration is the need from that community's standpoint, but it might be another. It might be a service-oriented project for a semester that someone just brought up. So, we don't want to prescribe what the end or the antidote is or the silver bullet.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Do you encourage it?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

I think we would provide best practices and disseminate that information, if there's a community that has found that to be effective and helpful as well.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

I would highly encourage it, if not require it in some cases. The reason why I say that, and, again, being mindful that not all students are eligible to vote, even as an 18-year old, because of their citizen status. But that said, election is one of the key entry points for democratic engagement for many young adults. That is a reality. Not all young adults get the opportunity to serve in the community as one tier or participating in a city council meeting or a demonstration before they're 18. And I would really like that to be more of a rite of passage for all Americans, and for those who are not eligible to vote, still find ways to support others who are trying to get educated about how to vote, where to register, and how to register.



One of the researches that we did this past year found that many young people actually are the first-generation voters in their family. Their families came from different countries. Maybe they weren't voters. For different reasons, they've never been to a voting place. So, practice is like actually bringing voting machines to school just to actually let students see what the polling place looks like so that it's not this intimidating, first-time experience that can turn them off. Because sometimes they stand in line for 2 hours before they can vote too. We want to welcome new voters, and high school is a great place to do that for the first time.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Thank you.

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I don't know if I have the qualifications to talk about this, but I think it would be a great sign if civic education inspired more young people to understand the value of voting. Yes, so it could be a good measure.

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

I would also place a high emphasis on this in civic education, because like Dr. Kei said, it's the foundation of our democracy. A couple of years ago, the past two years, I have been actually, running student voter registration at my school, and it's so baffling to me going through the process. My students have no idea how to register to vote. But we were able to, you know, fill out the form, guide them to where person is, the location, and we found that those kids would have never gone out to vote.

So, I think it is important, you know, at least to have the conversation in the building about voting and what it means, our duties, our responsibilities. Because, you know, like it's already been mentioned, for a number of our students, they will be first-time voters in their



families. So, if they have no model of how to do it, very likely they will just continue that cycle and that is not a way a healthy democracy can function.

## **The Honorable Mark Gearan**

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. Wada.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Before I start, Professor Black raised his hand.

## **Mr. Derek Black**

I was going to briefly say as I was fumbling to understand your question, I do think, again, on this experience point that there is an enormous experience to be had, whether it means young people themselves registering or registering others or actually just seeing the process occur. You know, I'm a law professor. I've taught Con law for a decade. One of the most meaningful experiences I think that I've had in the last decade, and I think students would have as well is to simply be at the voting district; to see democracy happen. Watch what you want to on the news; I was amazed at how transparent the process was. Poll workers would let me come in and watch them pull the ballots, let me look at them, and I said, "Geez, I remember Florida," but that's not what it looks like here; to let the child see that.

And second of all, for our senior citizens and our disabled individuals who need to vote at the curbside service, also it's a tremendous both democratic and service experience to say, "You



know what? I can help somebody else vote today, even though I've already cast my vote," or if young people can't. And I think seeing democracy happen up close and being supportive of it in that way is a tremendous experience for both children and adults to have.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you again. You all have a perspective, and I'm going to build on Vice Chair Gearan's question a little bit in a different way. The Center for Strategic and International Studies recently did a report and pointed to civics education as a critical need by which the United States can protect its democratic processes from outside interference. So, could you share with me, Panelists, how you think civics education could be leveraged to build national resiliency within our citizens, and also to protect our national security ultimately?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

I think this goes back to the conversation that I was having with Commissioner Davidson earlier which is ultimately I think critical media studies is part of this, and critical media studies helping children evaluate facts from opinion, good sources and bad sources. All those sorts of things naturally can occur within a civic curriculum, but they are also part of teaching individuals how to protect themselves. Now will that protect the ballot box itself. No. But does it help citizens to not be misinformed? Yes. And so, I think incorporating those critical media studies, skills, curricula, and best practices, which, to be quite honest, are evolving; we haven't found the sort of secret sauce there, but I think it can help protect the overall electoral process.



## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Thank you. I appreciate the question, and it reminds me of something my boss used to say at the National Diet for the Humanities. He said, “You cannot defend what you cannot define.” So, you need to know who you are as a nation and the values that you represent before you can defend them in terms of national security. I think that Ronald Regan also said that as well, and he chose in his last farewell address, to address informative patriotism, saying that if you don’t know the historical memory of a nation, then the spirit of that nation will also erode as a result. So, I do think it is critical for us to understand our history, our civic processes, our democratic processes as well. And even this conversation I find very interesting, because what we’re discussing here is federalism and sort of the role between the federal government and states, right? And so I do think it’s fascinating that we are able to actually have this conversation, and quite ironic, about civic literacy as well, and that we’re able to have different viewpoints about how involved the federal government could be; what kind of role it could play on this issue and what kind of role the states and local communities can play. And it’s, you know, of our perspective that usually driving decisions down to the local level where there’s a lot of knowledge and a lot of motivation and expertise is a wise way to go about that to guard against -- as a check of accountability of the different interests that could evolve when it’s concentrated; when special interests are concentrated at a large scale.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you.

Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg?



## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. I agree with all that's been said. And just, not to duplicate, I would add one more point, which is that I think, you know, our ability as a nation to protect our security, whether it's information or otherwise, starts with our ability to take responsibility for a community and to the nation. And we have to start with the values that really target how we think that what's happening around us is worth paying attention to. And if something is happening that is not just or something is not regular or as it should be, then we should have forum in which we can talk to fellow citizens about what is happening; so that we can start with keeping, for example, our municipal government and our leaders accountable. And I believe, really, that trickles up to our national and federal government and to international government. So this is why I emphasize the importance of building the civic muscle early on, so that there are habits of speaking to other people about what's happening in the community, and that's something that we do as a matter of habits rather than something special we do once a year.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Thank you.

Ms. Singh?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I think helping young people understand the context of their experiences and helping them understand that they can have an impact on our nation as a whole, I guess; I don't know if that makes any sense.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

That's good.



Mr. Susso?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Yes, it has been mentioned before here. Civic education is twofold: knowledge and skill. So, the idea of ensuring that our students understand the foundation of the country, especially the Bill of Rights, especially the first five components of the First Amendment, I think that goes a long way in helping to solidify our democracy. But, number two, to restate what Mr. Black said, the idea of media literacy; facts versus fiction, reliable sources, all of those are part of civic education. So, if we're able to help our students become critical thinkers of the issues, it'll go a long way in preserving our democracy. Because they really don't know truth from fiction.

## **The Honorable Debra Wada**

Okay. Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Barney.

## **Mr. Steve Barney**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was pleased, but really not surprised, in Ms. Singh's testimony to hear how a terrific eighth grade teacher was able to instill in her a sense both of through service learning and civics education the desire to be able to take her voice and pursue things of interest to her. My question to you, Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, and to you, Mr. Susso, is this:

High quality civics education is going to certainly require high quality and prepared teachers. In your view, are teachers who are currently performing and teaching other types of subjects well-positioned to transition into teaching civics or incorporating civics into other areas,



or are there any particular best practices that you can point us to as it relates to making sure we have terrific teachers that are teaching civics?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

With regards to best practice, I would suggest interdisciplinary projects, because then that brings both teachers into the process of civics. A couple of years ago, I did this project with one of my math colleagues. They were working on measuring the wheelchair ramps in New York City, and whether they were ADA compliant or not. And what we found was that a lot of those wheelchair ramps were not ADA compliant. So then when I found out about that, I said, oh, okay, this is a good issue to bring up. So, we were able to do a campaign at the school and wrote letters to the city explaining the mathematical concepts that we were applying and our findings. But also, taking the next step with this, you know, like we mentioned earlier and not to repeat myself, but once you gain the knowledge, you have to take action. That's what civic education is about. So, we wrote letters to the city. We didn't hear back, but at least we feel that we did our part. And that is one way of inviting all the teachers into supporting civic education.

## **Mr. Steve Barney**

Thank you.

Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Yes, I agree that an interdisciplinary approach to teaching is a fantastic opportunity and rich learning generally. I also think that there are some common threads that are actually in the standards, like in inquiry-based learning, for example. That's a long-standing science tradition that teachers that science teachers are very equipped to do. Civic education is actually coming to that as a field. We really have to teach students to ask essential questions, and then use primary



source and other perspectives and facts to answer these complex questions. So, we're doing that a lot. So, there's a lot of common threads.

One of the things that we've noticed and through research in Illinois and Florida is that we also have to really support teachers in becoming a different kind of teacher when we start to incorporate civic education into their classroom, regardless of their discipline. That is to start to listen to student voice and actually let students lead the way. And that's one of the most difficult barriers for many teachers, because essentially, they're giving up some of their powers and trusting young people to be able to make really great decisions. And once they're able to see that, regardless of their experience and subject areas, they're extremely pleased, because students are engaged, and you can see that in their eyes.

So that barrier often requires that training and emotional support and peer support and team teaching so that they can process these issues that they're facing, not just from technical aspect, but also for managing the classroom, managing themselves, and also often dealing with students who are having feelings during conversation about real issues that are happening.

## **Mr. Steven Barney**

Thank you.

And that's a great transition to my question to you, Ms. Singh. In your written testimony, you stated, and you're speaking for young people in the voice of young people, "I feel that we are as a generation more inclined towards tackling issues from their root causes, rather than volunteering time in a traditional sense." Can you give us a sense of how well-prepared you feel, and your fellow students, to be able to work to identify certain root causes and to be able to put that into action for an effective service-learning experience?



## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I think for myself; the more impactful experiences have been outside of the classroom. And the things that have prepared me to do that have been working with nonprofit organizations to think about things through the lens of what an organization can bring to a community. And that has been more impactful in helping me identify the root causes to the impacts that I witness in my community. I think that students are inclined to naturally think in terms of that. We're naturally curious people. We want to learn more about what we're seeing on a local level and why this is happening. I think the role that civic education could play is to understand how to effectively analyze what's going around, and how you can connect that to the context of your community. I think that is a huge area where we need more skills, and we need to invest in those skills. I feel like, personally, I've just discovered that through, like, my own experiences, but I think it could be really helpful to have that as part of curriculum and part of education.

## **Mr. Steve Barney**

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Allard.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier in the testimonies today, we learned that the department of education about 10 years ago provided practically \$1 billion dollars in terms of civics education. Since then, that figure has diminished to, probably, as we estimate, around a hundred million. Is that pretty accurate?



## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

About \$5 million we were appropriated by Congress; about \$5 million dollars.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you.

The questions I would have of the entire panel is what recommendations would you have that we provide as a Commission to encourage congress and perhaps the Department of Education to re-shift some funds, I think, probably went to programs such as STEM? I don't want to detract from STEM. STEM is very important, but what recommendations would the panel have that we provide to the President and Congress to increase funding for civics education?

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Well that of course is a political question, and no one wants their program cut. So, anything you talk about shifting means that there are going to be Congress persons who are against it. Even when I was trying to advocate on behalf of changing the funding for the ESEA formula that would benefit poorer and low-income communities, the Congressmen from the very poor, low-income community that I was helping out said that he was immediately afraid that if I changed that, he was going to get less of the money. So, I think that ultimately you should target the amount that you think is necessary to be able to implement the program, and Congress will have to deal with the politics of where it shifts it from. I'm not a politician, but I certainly can't game that out in advance.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you very much.



## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

So, it may be helpful to actually incorporate and include the state perspective there, to be able to talk about, you know, how Title IV, A funds are actually used and spent on civic education. Because that is an allowable use of funds. And like I said, we were appropriated by Congress that amount of \$5 million dollars under the authorization of the new law. So we are, in effect, just implementing the law and, you know, going by what it says in the statute.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. I am also not fully prepared to answer this question either. But as I said, I think there are opportunities to create metrics of program effectiveness that encourages, for example, interdisciplinary teaching across STEM and civic learning together or to encourage in a social studies grant to making sure the students are going out in the community according to the high-impact practices. I also wonder about the extent to which we can actually change our mindset about how much we can actually spend on civic education. And I think the reality with allowable fund formula, I don't know much about that, but it sounds like the states have a choice on how they spend the funds. And the reality is that any district that is able to actually use it for civics are the districts that are not needing to address their pressing challenges in ELA, math, and science subjects. So, it really does create inequality that this kind of formula is not intending to do, but my personal view, knowing what I know, is that it actually is harmful to create that formula and let it go that way. Because it just kind of lets districts do what they can afford, and that's what created the inequalities we're seeing today.



## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you, Doctor.

Ms. Singh?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I'm not sure how qualified I am to answer this, but perhaps getting students and teachers to share their personal narratives about how impactful this funding can be to themselves and their communities.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Okay, thank you.

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

I think data does help in making an argument. So, I think, you know, we have to provide a lot of data in terms of our citizenry, understanding of our system and our functions of government. So, I think that data in combination with identifying best practices across the country and the brain science behind emotional connection with learning; and a lot of those emotional connections usually do take place outside of the classroom. And the way to get those outside classroom experiences is to be able to provide funds to be able to fund those programs. So, I think if you are able to combine all of those together, hopefully that could, you know, be a convincing argument in terms of getting funding, more funding for civic education.

## **Mr. Edward Allard**

Thank you, Mr. Susso, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Dr. Davidson.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Yes, so I'd like to pivot a little bit to higher education and how you see the role of higher education in civics education and how we can promote that. We talked a little bit about teacher preparation, and I'm wondering what your views are, especially I'm looking at Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, in terms of preparation; whether we're in the right area or whether it needs to be updated and also, just in general, what we could do to promote that from a federal level or a state level.

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. I think higher education has created really innovative practices that are starting to spread. So, for example it might be, you know, dialogue projects where students are getting together and really tackling some issues based on facts, but also really making sure there's diverse perspective in the room. Some of the speaker's programs, including our own at Tufts University, really makes sure that there are multiple parties, known parties on perspectives and positioning coming into the room. So, the students are exposed to that.

But beyond that, I think there is more to be done in how the students experience their student life in relation to administration and how they feel that they actually have a voice and influence in the way that college is operating and how it's governed. It is a controversial issue, because students can often push many, many things that are usually not possible within a couple years, maybe not even 10 years, but I think there is a lot to be said about how the administration and leadership respond to students' views and opinions, even if it cannot happen. So, what I would not recommend is just shutting down those conversations when it becomes controversial,



but still having productive but difficult dialogue about what is possible. What are some of the contributions that students can make; what can universities do, so that their democratic principle is lived within the university campus?

There are many universities that are also doing a great job in promoting voting and registration in a nonpartisan manner. Jumbo Vote at Tufts University is an example, but there are actually hundreds of campuses that are using a metric that's created at Tisch College from a project called NSLVE, which can calculate the turnout of the student body at each university campus. That is a really great tool, speaking of having the data, to understand where each campus is and how to improve at least that one metric. And that really, again, voting is one aspect of civic and democratic engagement, but it is really one important measure. So, I think universities are starting to use that, and I think it's a really great move.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Mr. Susso, would you like to address that question as well?

## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Sure. So, I think in terms of higher education, the best measure of teacher effectiveness in the classroom is how strong of a relationship do they have with their students. So I think if we're able to empower our teachers in developing the skills of a relationship-based approach to teaching, once they're in the classroom then, once they're able to build those foundations of relationships, then they are able to effectively to engage their students and helping them to develop what has been mentioned before; the critical component of student voice. So that's what I want to add to that.



## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Go ahead, Mr. Black.

## **Mr. Derek Black**

I was just going to add that, you know, my remarks before I came. I'm glad you brought up the university. I think the university has an enormous and important potential role to play here, and is uniquely situated, because it is spread across the nation. And this is just one example. The University of South Carolina, the South Carolina Bar Association, the South Carolina Supreme Court each year put on a full day of sort of free professional development for history and civics teachers, and we go through a pretty rigorous curriculum. You know, I only touch 20 or 25 high school civic teachers a year, but we have tremendous knowledge. We have probably more law professors than we need with enough time on their hands that if we sort of incentivize those types of sort of support services, we're ultimately providing high-quality university professional development relatively cheap, because these folks already have day jobs at the university.

## **The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson**

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. James.

## **Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



I'd like to continue the discussion about the preparation of teachers for teaching civics and civic learning. And this is for Mr. Susso. You talked about the need for well-prepared teachers, and particularly when we're talking about the idea of teaching civics, pulling the thread of civics learning through other subjects that may not tie directly to your typical civics-type topics; aside from funding, because you did mention funding, are there other factors that are barriers to teachers being able to participate in additional teacher education or perhaps professional development opportunities for the preparation, the continued preparation of teachers to be able to teach civics, particularly if they are teaching in a STEM-type environment? What are your thoughts on that?

### **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

In terms of professional development for teachers, teachers usually find it meaningful when it is personalized. And by and large, professional development is usually like one size fits all, and if I'm spending 8 hours at a professional development, I want to ensure that whatever I'm gaining from that session, I'm able to bring it back into my classroom and let it be applicable. So, I think then in the process of personalizing professional development that will go a long way in helping more teachers in furthering their practice of civic education. So, creating opportunities whereby teachers are able, because professional development is not necessarily about an expert coming in and talking about civic education. It's about teachers sitting together and discussing what is affecting their community and how they could collaborate in solving the issues within their community. Because that is what at the core civic education is about; community solution-oriented issues.

### **Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you.

We've heard from some experts that recommend that the armed forces vocational aptitude battery or the ASVAB could provide students with career guidance and might inspire



some students to serve in military, national, or public service. I'd appreciate your thoughts on whether providing the opportunity for, or even requiring students to take the ASVAB would be a recommendation that you would support or not. If I could start with Mr. Black.

### **Mr. Derek Black**

I lack the expertise to respond to the question.

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Yes, I don't know if I can speak to that.

### **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

So, from the little I know about the ASVAB, it is a pretty well validated instrument. Is that correct in terms of internal consistency and validity to sort of a future career or orientation of assessing a career? Is that the right knowledge of that?

[The Commissioners indicated an affirmative response.]

### **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. If that is the case, there have been cases, for example at Stanford University, where students are actually given not so much what the future's going to look like, but what are you kind of interested in based on what you've been doing in terms of civic pathways. And I often do think sometimes it is helpful to think pretty early in your life, as a citizen, what do you already like and what are kinds of activities and subject areas of study that can really enrich that initial passion; what spark of interest? So, in that sense, I think I support that.



I think one thing we don't want to appear is that, you know, the students believe that they are all somehow expected to go into military service. I think we have to change the image of that instrument, knowing that it is a good instrument. But I see some real benefit to that.

Thank you.

**Ms. Jeanette James**

Thank you.

Ms. Singh? Mr. Susso?

**Mr. Alhassan Susso**

I don't know anything about the ASVAB, so I'm not sure I can answer that.

**Ms. Jeanette James**

Ms. Singh?

**Ms. Ananya Singh**

Yes, I'm not really familiar.

**Ms. Jeanette James**

Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Thank you.

Ms. Haines.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

I'd like to ask the panel about the social-emotional learning and the importance that you see in that to civics education. I know, Dr. Kawashima, you wrote in your report, I think, on this issue that you saw it as a critical aspect of a high-quality civics education. Can you start us off by just explaining what it is and why you think it's so important, and then I'll start with Mr. Susso after that, please?

## **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Thank you. So social-emotional learning really contains different types of competencies that are related to how students can learn to manage themselves and others in an environment in which they're in. I think that's the simplest way to define that in some ways, but it has skills like empathy, communicating with others, taking perspectives, as well as managing their emotions and behaviors.

Now why that's effective and important for civic learning has to do with not just individual students' skill, but the climate in which students can learn with each other. So as you all know, student's come in with many, many challenges, as well as assets from outside of the classroom when they're learning in civics class, and in a polarized political and social climate today, what tends to happen in those civics classrooms is that the students will actually have a really personal reaction to what we really need to talk about, whether it's American history or immigration for example. Depending on where the school is located, this can be a really hot



issue. And what teachers must try to manage is still making sure the students can stay emotionally and cognitively and behaviorally engaged in the learning.

And to do that, we have to start teaching students how to express their emotions, manage that, and also understand how others are feeling and support the students that are feeling vulnerable in the classroom; but also for teachers to really differentiate from attacking people from attacking the ideas or criticizing ideas from an academic perspective. And it does take a really complex management of different things and emotions and, you know, little things that are happening in the classroom, right? So, whenever we talk about teaching teachers how to do these actively engaged pedagogies, whether it's controversial issue discussion or actual civics, we have to really acknowledge at least that the students aren't just learning content. Students are experiencing content. And that's oftentimes something that they didn't get to learn in their pre-service training.

So again, I think there are things that we can add to the pre-service training, but also as a field, we're really starting to also understand the social position of the students from which they come from. So, when we talk about democratic engagement, we have to acknowledge that it's not an option in the same way that it is for some of us. Many teachers that teach in public school, for example, often come from a completely different background than the majority of the students are often students of color, and a majority of our teachers are women; a white person. So that really makes it really difficult to start to manage that classroom discussion. So, for that reason, I think we need to build that climate as well as skills.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Thank you.

Mr. Susso?



## **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

Yes, thank you. So, this is something that's near and dear to my heart, because this has been my message to the teachers all across the state; this one message that you cannot build a building on a shaky ground. I think about Muslims, and I think about social-emotional learning. It is very hard to self-actualize if your basic needs are not met. In that process then, in any classroom, whether it's a math or science or civic classroom, the foundation has to be the development of social and emotional capabilities of our students.

So, I remember when I first became a teacher, I definitely did not comprehend the importance of this issue, and I remember that during that time period in my school, only 31 percent of our students graduated from high school. And out of that, only 28 percent of them were going to college, and 50 percent were dropping out within a year. So, what that means is we were just continuing a cycle of graduating kids who would just end up working at minimum-wage jobs. So, I developed this social-emotional program at my school, but I did it as a before-school program, which everybody thought was nuts. Because kids don't come to school on time, what makes you think they're going to come an hour early? Well, long story short, they did. And for the past 5 years, it became a very successful program. It helped to take our school from 31 percent to 81.2 percent graduation last year.

And as a result of that, we took the program and expanded it as a school-wide scope and sequent 4 years, in which we are helping students to develop socially and emotionally since 9th grade all the way to 12th grade. Because we have found that that is the only way that they could succeed, because if their social life is in place, they are going to make life tend to follow as well.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

That's a wonderful story.



Ms. Singh, have you experienced any of this at your school, and either way do you have a comment on this?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I have not experienced this at my school. However, in the work that I've done with NYLC, I've seen schools that have implemented social and emotional learning, and I've seen that they're tied so closely together. And having strong social-emotional learning programs creates stronger service-learning outcomes and vice versa.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Very interesting; thank you.

Ms. Hsiao?

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

So, as you know, the President actually convened the Federal Commission on School Safety shortly after the Parkland shootings happened. And so, the Secretary of Education was a chair at that Commission, with the Attorney General, with the Secretary of HHS, as well as DHS. So, it was a very holistic approach, and actually, social-emotional learning is something we addressed in that report. It was produced, you know, shortly after; within a year of the Commission convening. And there were three grant programs I'd like to highlight that have to do with social-emotional learning. One is out of HHS, Project Aware. One is a mental health demonstration grant at the Department of Education, and the third is a school climate transformation grant. And the emphasis there is really character education, conflict resolution, interpersonal and skill development, which I think that's a very wise insight; to see the intersection of civic education and literacy as well as social-emotional learning, and something that we're thinking about too through our grant programs. And those are the three I want to highlight for us.



## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Thank you.

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Yes, it's the social-emotional learning, or the quality of or lack thereof, directly relates to school discipline as others have alluded to. And on that score, the Supreme Court in 1974 in *Goss versus Lopez* pointed out something that ought to be obvious but often escapes us, which is school discipline, should it come to a student or come to a peer, is ultimately the first experience that a child has with the power of force of the state. And so, it is ultimately the first gate through which the student learns how democracy either works fairly or doesn't work fairly. And so, it is not so far disconnected as we might think when we say how that relates to discipline and discipline is ultimately that first civic good or bad experience that many of our children have.

## **The Honorable Avril Haines**

Thank you.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Kilgannon.

## **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Thank you.

Ms. Singh and Mr. Susso, I wanted to have a conversation with the two of you about some related topics. Mr. Susso, when we traveled around the country, we visited some schools. And one of the schools we went into, I went around and looked into the classrooms, and in none of the classrooms was the American flag displayed.



In New York schools, is the flag displayed? Is the Pledge of Allegiance said or required? And I ask that for this reason: I'm trying to understand the nexus between civics education and the sense of patriotism or a sense of appreciation of the government or the country that outlays that civics education. This same school we visited, and we asked the students about service and doing service projects. There's a strong passion for doing service at the local level, and they saw themselves connected to their community. But when we asked about doing national service projects or service in the military, there was significant less interest or passion for doing so. And so first off is, is the flag displayed? What is their experience with the pledge?

### **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

I'm not sure about that, but my assumption would be it's by district. Because I remember when I was in high school, the flag was displayed, and we did read the pledge every morning. And at my daughter's school right now they do read the pledge every morning. But in my school district, we don't. So, I'm assuming that's going to be district by district across the state.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Ms. Singh, in your schools, how does that work?

### **Ms. Ananya Singh**

We have a flag displayed in every classroom. We say the pledge every morning.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

And how do students react to that? Do they do it without any concern or protest?



## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

Yes, we've actually had some interesting conversations, especially this year, where a few students have been able to sit out of it. And it's kind of sparked a discussion, because I have history first thing in the morning. So, when that happened at the beginning of the year, some of the students decided that they didn't want to say the pledge. And we had a conversation about how that is a part of your First Amendment Rights to express yourself however you want. I think in general; people are generally very accepting and very patriotic at our school. I don't know if that relates to the question.

## **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Let me ask you a related question, and in this question, I'm referring to Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg's testimony. She cited some polling data, and she said the polling data was showing that young people were expressing cynicism and concern about the state of democracy, and specifically, one statistic was that a majority of young people surveyed, 57 percent, said they are losing faith in American democracy.

Do you find that in your experience with your friends and your peers, and if so, what contributes to that?

## **Ms. Ananya Singh**

There's definitely a level of disengagement and cynicism, because some of the issues that we see that are important to us don't get reflected in the actions that we see being taken around us. And a lot of times, also some students, we don't see ourselves reflected in the government. Government and the leaders that we've elected are often way older and they skew, you know, old, white, and men, which is not necessarily the population who they're representing. So, a lot



of people don't necessarily see themselves in the government. And they don't see their needs reflected and their experiences being talked about.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

So, when you say, "needs," what do you mean by that; issues or concerns or?

### **Ms. Ananya Singh**

Yes. Our generation is very passionate and fired up about things like gun control and abortion rights and women's rights to healthcare and climate change and these kinds of issues. And these kinds of issues are often viewed as very controversial and not taken as seriously as we would like them to; and mental health and things like that that are really on the forefront of what we're experiencing.

### **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

When we think about the generations prior, I'm thinking 1960 specifically here, there was a huge fidelity to institutions. And I think today, it's more individualistic than actually communal. So, in that sense then, that idea of patriotism is not necessarily like an institution to a flag or to a pledge, but that I am able to service in my community based on the sets of beliefs that I have. But this is why civic education is crucial in helping our students to understand the complexities of the society. Because there is no simple, as yet to be, solutions. I'm sure if there were, they would have been in place a long time ago.

I remember with my students, when we discussed this issue of security versus freedom, a unit that we do in the fall, we look at governmental reactions during times of crisis; from World War I to 9/11. And by the time we get to 9/11, my students almost have this sense of: oh, my goodness, the government always has an alternative motive in dealing with these issues, which is that they use this crisis in order to propel their agenda. However, when they do their final project, which, you know, the scenario I create for them is there is a terrorist attack in New York, and



then now you have to create a rule that balances the security of the country without infringing upon the rights of the student; of the citizens. And I set it up as the same way that Congress and the Executive Branch would work, and for the last 7 years of doing this, there was not a single time that these kids were able to agree on what to do. And through that process at the end of that unit, they tend to have a little bit of a deeper appreciation of what our leaders go through, because they know that everybody comes at this from their worldview and from their understanding. And that is how we could think about civic education; the complexities of dealing with these issues to help our students not necessarily to have fidelity or loyalty to the institutions, but at least appreciate the efforts that are being made.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Okay, and I'm sorry Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Singh, what he just said; what students walk away with; you mentioned all the controversial issues. Do you and your peers walk away with an appreciation that these are controversial and they're complex and that those in the government are struggling with them?

### **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I think the way that I've learned; I have never had formal civic education. And in our history class, our teachers usually tend to really not get into anything contemporary. When any issue becomes contemporary, they shut it down. So, we don't really get to have those kinds of discussions that much or that in depth.

### **Mr. Tom Kilgannon**

Okay. Yes.

Thank you, both and thanks for the indulgence of the Chair.



## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Mr. Khazei.

## **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Thank you.

I want to go back to what Professor Black said, at the end of your testimony, about people and listening to you all and just seeing your great example of having been exposed to service learning and having your voice empowered. Mr. Susso, clearly what you're doing with your students is very impactful. And, Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, your research at Tufts Circle shows the value of this, and yet, you know, where we are: \$5 million dollars versus the whole country, 3 states have passed laws without a lot of funding, and all the statistics cited about how people can't name the 3 branches.

So, I just, in conclusion, would love to hear if you were us, what is one really big, bold thing you would recommend that we could pass on to Congress to sort of close this huge gap between, clearly, what is a gigantic need to re-instill civics and service learning, action civics and where we are. And anybody who would like to start, pretend you're a Commissioner.

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

I want to lean into what Mr. Susso said earlier about, sort of, the individual versus the community perspective. I think that's a really key insight as well. And one of the things we have done at the department is started a reading group on the book, *Our Kids*, by Bob Putnam, and sort of the evolution of a community that used to refer to kids as, "our kids," versus, "my kids," now, right? And so I think there is a mindset shift that could happen in terms of having a communal kind of outlook on things, so that we don't just assume that based on what a person



looks like or their age that they may not actually agree with us simply because of their gender, age, or what they look like.

And so, I think there is a mindset shift that could happen there that can come up in civics education and literacy learning as well. So, I just wanted to lean into that comment, because I think that's a valuable one.

## **Mr. Derek Black**

Well I would offer minor bold and then crazy bold. I think minor bold is one standard that I would feel comfortable, again, is sort of measuring exposure. So, when we talk about sort of the limited number of hours and the limited number of experiences, those are quantifiable. Students are either getting them or not getting them, and I think that you can set, or Congress can set robust goals for those things to move up over time. I mean, it's one thing to say every child needs to be, you know, reading that grade level by the time they graduate. That's not going to happen. But creating these experiences that seems like something we can make consistent progress on and set some bold targets for how much exposure we want.

The other big bold, and I think it's echoed or at least I see it in my colleagues' comments is that this civics conversation goes beyond civics education. We've talked about interdisciplinary. We've talked about service learning and critical learning. And ultimately what we are having a conversation about this morning is actually an entirely different type of education than the one that's delivered in the United States of America today, right? And you could propose a program that simply says let's add something to a poorly constructed building, or Congress really ought to think about its federal role in education itself, all right? Should Congress be worrying about STEM? Is that the role of the federal government? Or is the federal government's role actually to make sure that we have citizens; the most basic role, to make sure that citizens can participate in democracy? That's problem solving. That's experience. That's civics. I mean, that's bold. They didn't ask you to rethink ESEA, but ultimately what you are



doing is thinking about a problem that runs counter to the elementary and secondary education; that fundamental premises.

### **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Why, in your expertise as a law professor and an expert in education, is that a proper role for the federal government to say; developing active citizen participants in our democracy? Is that a federal role?

### **Mr. Derek Black**

Well I do think that it comes pretty close when you start thinking about civics. It is Congress's express power and duty to raise and support the Army. It is Congress's express duty under Section Five of the Fifteenth Amendment to ensure that citizens get a fair chance to vote. We have a voting rights act that has a lot to do with literacy and access to the ballot. So Congress does have these sorts of other things that touch very closely on education. The right to free speech, which is a critical dialogue that my colleagues were talking about that is a vested right of the First Amendment. It is Congress's responsibility to protect the right of free speech. And so, if Congress believes that protecting free speech means that we need to learn how to have civic dialogue in K-12, yes, I do believe Congress can do that, and it has an entirely appropriate role in education in all those respects. Whether it has it in math or not, I mean, we could have a reason to debate about that, I suppose.

### **Mr. Alan Khazei**

Thank you. I see my time's up, so.

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Ms. Skelly.



## **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank my colleague, Mr. Khazei, and the professor for walking right into the question I've been spending an hour up here trying to compose. All right, here we go.

Professor, you started off urging boldness. We've talked about that here through the course of the afternoon, and it's been mentioned. Since we were formed, we've been urged to go big in every conceivable way you could think of by folks from all different points of the compass with stake in our incredibly broad mandate. And, Professor, you mentioned having listened to a podcast. Presently I'm listening to a podcast called "13 Minutes to the Moon," on the anniversary of the moon landing and all of the effort that it took to get to the point where Apollo I decided to actually head to the surface of the moon and how extreme and substantial an effort that was just to get to that point; to be able to then survive it, because it was not without some peril when it happened. I'm kind of a pragmatist by nature, and am like, yes, let's go big. But there's the realities of how you get there.

So, Ms. Hsiao, as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Discretionary Grants, if somehow we waived a magic wand and got a billion dollars over 10 years, and a \$100 million plus dollars a year into a grant program that got to the states and did some of the things that we've been talking about here today; could the Department of Education hack that? Does the Department of Education have the wherewithal to do these anymore? Because it's been my impression that there's not a body of practice in the Department of Education for big programs over the last decade.

## **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

Thank you for the question. So, I know the \$5 million dollars is the number that everyone's remembered. I'd like to also say that the Title IV, A funds is actually over a billion dollars. And so, again, the states have local flexibility to kind of determine for themselves how to



spend those funds, and American history and civics is an allowable use of that \$1 billion dollars dispersed by formula to states. So, in regard to your question, we do have highly qualified staff at the department, and prior, you know, years 2001 to 2010, they were administering the Teaching American History Grant, which was appropriated on average a hundred million dollars per year.

### **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

I know you'd be loath to probably make commitments on behalf of the department, but you don't think an order of magnitude increase, perhaps, would be something that would be an issue for the department to execute?

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

That would be something I would have to assess and get back to you.

### **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thanks.

Professor, your thoughts on having gone big and putting it on the plate of the federal government to facilitate and push down and out?

### **Mr. Derek Black**

Well, I guess I would point to one example as this sort of historical example, which was in 1963. Less than 1 percent of African American children in the South were attending schools with white peers, and that was a full 9 years after the announcement of *Brown versus the Board of Education*, declaring segregation to be unconstitutional. In 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, created something out of nothing, and directed that money to southern school districts. And the reason they did it was partly the war on poverty,



which President Johnson was quite concerned with. But the other side was, “Let’s just give the states some money, and if we do that, we can tell them we’ll take it away if they don’t start desegregating their schools.” Did they learn math any better with ESEA in 1965, ’66? No. But within about a decade, we saw about 30 or 40 percent of African American children immediately moving into school in tandem with white children. So, ultimately, when Congress invests the money with a clear goal in mind, they can hire the people to administer it, and they can move mountains.

I mean, think of the entrenchment of school segregation in 1964, and to see the South move that fast; that quickly. Because Congress put the money there and tied it to Title VI was really one of the biggest accomplishments in history. You can say the same thing about Title IX in terms of women’s athletics and women’s education. Again, sort of enormous different outcomes, because Congress put the money there and had a clear, relatively simple objective. Desegregate is not politically simple, but desegregate schools, create more access for women. And it happened.

## **Ms. Shawn Skelly**

Thank you. I’ve always had the impression that a challenge of this nature is akin to turning the Titanic. Once you spin the wheel, you have to hold it there for quite a long time and never let off to achieve that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

I will conclude the second round of questioning with a quick lightning round that should require just a one-word response. I would ask that: we’ve heard that high school is too late. So



realizing that we have finite resources and a finite amount of time, at what age/grade would you recommend that this type of education start?

### **Mr. Derek Black**

I would defer to my colleagues.

### **Ms. Annie Hsiao**

I defer too.

### **Dr. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Kindergarten.

### **Ms. Ananya Singh**

I'll echo that and say kindergarten.

### **Mr. Alhassan Susso**

I'm leaning more towards fifth grade.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

### **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Fifth grade; okay, I appreciate that.

So, we will now move into the time for public comment. Professor Black, Ms. Hsiao, Dr. Kawashima-Ginsberg, Ms. Singh, Mr. Susso, thank you very much for being here today. We greatly appreciate your time. Thank you for providing the valuable information to the



Commission. [Applause.] So, we'll dismiss the panelists. You're welcome to sit in the front row if you'd like to stay. We'll begin the public comment portion.

The Commission is committed to transparency and openness with the public. In keeping with these principles, the Commission intends to provide the public with an opportunity to deliver public comments during our hearings. As a reminder, in order to provide the greatest opportunity for as many participants to offer comment, public comment is limited to a 2-minute period per person.

As noted on our website, signup for public comment took place between the opening of the registration and the start of this hearing. When you signed up, you received a numbered ticket. To ensure fairness, tickets were randomly drawn. We will call out the ticket numbers as they were drawn and ask you to please come and line up in front of the microphone that's in the center aisle. We only had 3 people sign up, so I'm going to ask all 3 to come up: 93, 94, and 92 in that order.

I will also say that if you have any additional written comments that you would like to submit for the record, please provide them to staff at the registration desk. I ask that you please introduce yourself to the Commission with your name and affiliation before starting your comment, and you are recognized, sir, for 2 minutes.

## **Ticket Number #93**

Hello; good morning. My name is Bill Galvin. I'm the counseling coordinator at the Center on Conscience and War. This has been a really interesting morning. It's certainly got me thinking about how I learned about civic engagement. And I think throughout education, from elementary through grad school, along the way there were contributions, and I think that's important.



But we're talking here, really, about values formation that inculcate a sense of civic responsibility. And that certainly does happen in the school, but it happens in other places as well. For me, Boy Scouts was a part of it, but my church was a really important part of that also. And in going to the larger picture of what this Commission charged with about, you know, public service, most churches have a service kind of program. The organization I work for, we have benefited from the Mennonite volunteer programs and the Brethren Volunteer programs. Throughout most of our history, we've had one of those volunteers working with us for almost 80 years now. I'm active in the Presbyterian Church, and we have something called Young Adult Volunteers. And I got to tell you, I have met a bunch of those folks. They are awesome. Their volunteer experiences have changed them, and they have gotten totally engaged in the community and in the world through their service programs. So, one of the things I wanted to say is whatever programs you propose cannot undermine these voluntary service programs that happen through churches.

And the other thing I wanted to address specifically; the question was raised about ASVAB earlier. The ASVAB was developed as a military recruiting tool. I mean, it does have, you know, other uses it could be put to, but it was about military recruiting. And the notion of requiring students to take a test that's designed for military recruiting, I think you're going to run into problems with Mennonite parents, and I actually think that there was a court case challenging a mandate. I think Memphis schools required it many years ago and students challenged it and I think maybe won. But that was a long time ago. I just wanted to bring that to your attention.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Great, thank you.

Hi, there. I ask you to please introduce yourself and then proceed to comments.



## Ticket Number #94

Will do. My name is Jennifer Collin. I am a managing partner of Song Masters, which is an organization that is spearheading an initiative called the American Road, which is the collective vision of over 70 organizations in civil society education and media that is trying to harness the power, ubiquity of media for young people to help launch lesson plans that infuse civics education in American social history, social studies, media literacy, and English language arts, and then connect these lesson plans to direct civic engagement by young people. So, obviously, the work of the Commission and specifically at this meeting was of great interest, as was the testimony of the panelists. And I thank you for the opportunity to add my comments.

I first wanted to bring the Commission's attention to an HHS study that was done in 2018, if you're not already familiar with it. All of us who care about civics education believe that an ethos of service and learning has a value in and of itself in strengthening democracy and creating what, I guess, in all passions represents character education, which comes from believing and serving something larger than yourself. This study also showed that civic engagement by young adolescents was the single most important predictor of long-term economic and educational attainment levels, mental health, and positive health values. And I bring this up, because, you know, when the world of legislative authorizations with such things as H.R. 849, which is calling for \$30 million dollars in incremental funding in civics meet the world of appropriations with the concern of opening ESEA limits the ability to add funding, I hope kind of a wider view and perspective on the impact of civics education can be brought to bear.

Obviously from the work that we're doing on the American Road, these issues that have been talked about today have really been distilled into some of the key areas we've mentioned. One is how do you provide a national impact and make it available to be customized and adapted by local educators and LEAs and SEA? The other is how do you do this without overburdening the educators, and to do it in a way that involves student-centered activities that really engage



them and reduce the obstacles to volunteer opportunities. But we've found that there really is a need for a national infrastructure that doesn't dictate a curriculum, but rather it gives interdisciplinary tools, educational tools and resources that local teachers can use in customizing their own plans. There is already a technique that most teachers have been trained in and are familiar with, which is curriculum mapping that does just that. It gives them the resources, limits their preparation time, and enables them to integrate them into the core curricula that they're teaching anyway.

My time is very limited, but one of the things I also wanted to bring up was the importance of lowering the barriers for young people to engage in volunteering and civic activity, and the barriers come from two things. One is the inability to access these activities, and also, especially in the secondary school age, where self-esteem plummets -- we know this by studies -- that we actually weave it into the school lesson plans, so that this is a natural outcome for them. We don't have to create an infrastructure for it. This already exists. Organizations like Points of Light that have a Generation-On Program. They're doing wonderful work, so all we really need to do is to hook that into a secure system, a digital system I believe is the answer, to the lesson plans that we're creating through these resources that we're offering.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Great. Thank you very much for those comments.

Welcome, sir. Please identify yourself and then proceed with your comment.

## **Ticket Number #92**

Good Morning. My name is Cole Kleitch. I have a little creative workshop in education called Walking Civics. I've been fascinated to listen to the discussion today, and I think it most Americans were more aware of what you're working; where the direction the Commission's work has gone, there'd be a line out the door and people outside trying to get in. I worked for years as a classroom teacher. I taught at West Side in Newark. But I was also part of the federal



program Ms. Hsiao mentioned, the Center for Civic Education from 2000 to 2010, and during that time I was detailed for about 4 years to work on a curriculum with the Government of Senegal and Senegalese officials. And as a nation, right around '02, '03, '04, you can imagine it was an interesting time to be there on occasion for training, and then in Nigeria as well.

What I found was, and again, a fascinating discussion, but I think if I might indulge, can I ask the Commissioner a question; a Commissioner?

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

We don't normally take questions.

### **Ticket Number #92**

Well, I'll put it this way. Of the members of the Commission, who's had military service? Do you remember who your drill instructor was?

[Several Commissioners indicated an affirmative response.]

Yes. Okay, so what I was going to say is the approach I have found that in terms of education is as Ms. Singh has said. These young people are simply waiting to be asked. Their service is pre-dispositioned. They're ready to do that. Now I think you would agree knowledge and skills did not get you through basic. There was a motivational, inspirational component that is hard to define, but you know when it's there. And it's a very, very difficult balance to achieve without being abused. It has to be a motivation to succeed, so that when you leave basic, you're 10 feet taller than you were when you walked in; so that you not only have the competence, you have the confidence to act.

So, to stay within my 2 minutes, I will say this. I also got appointed to serve in the Habit Committee for the State of New Jersey. In that capacity, I was able to execute a role throughout



the state where 16 and 17-year olds were trained as poll workers and served as poll workers. Almost 15 states now allow this. So, you could be 16, or in Missouri, 15 and be trained to be work at the election everyone's talking about. I've also found that the federal -- and if you're looking for a big idea, have a Title VI. Way back in '02, '03, we were supposed to have created a foundation that did nothing but get secondary students the exposure as poll workers, to train them to be the competent 18-year-old voters by becoming a 16-year-old poll worker. Well, that didn't happen. We can't get enough agreement on anything, let alone creating a foundation to do that.

So, what I did is this. The idea of having young people involved is good, but there's an inspirational component we have to include. So, what I generated was an idea whereby last -- I've done this for 4 years. This isn't recent. But we did it really big last year up in the tiny little town called Hilin Minnesota. We trained 20 high school students next to military veterans. They trained side by side. It looked like this [displays promotional board for the Commissioners]. Now I can tell you if you've ever been to election training, there are very few

smiles. You're waiting for the 2 hours to be over with. So, I'm, in effect, I'm painting a white fence. Election officials have to train people to work either way. There's funding to do this. But what we did is we brought two populations that, when you put them in the room, create an entirely different experience; an inspirational experience. The students are sitting next to somebody who's walked the walk and served their country. The veterans are sitting next to somebody who doesn't know what that means yet, but yet want to do that.

Well, I got really lucky. The Election's Assistance Commission decided that this program won an award, it was called a Clearie Award, in 2018. We got awarded in 2019. I'll read to you what they said, because like I said, I've got a printed report.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Sir, your time is way overdue. So, if you want to summarize, we'll be happy to take the summary.



## **Ticket Number #92**

Sorry.

Students and veterans are waiting to be asked. If you want them to have a job next year and you do it in an utterly nonpartisan, civic way, think about if we need a ready reserve of people next year because the blinky light machines have a problem, who better? Let's get these folks a job.

## **The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck**

Alright, thank you very much.

So, the time for our public comment has come to an end. I want to, again, thank our panelists for providing their testimony today and all of those in the audience who took time to attend today's proceedings. It's only with your help and input the Commission will achieve its vision, which is every American inspired and eager to serve. There being no further business before the Commission, this hearing is adjourned.

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